

All of the Apple is Me:  
Process Work & Acting  
An Exploration & Practical Guide

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*If I compare myself to a large, meaty, round apple, I discover that my inner and outer cliché image of myself is only a wedge of it – possibly the wedge with the rosy cheek on the skin. But I have to become aware of myself as the total apple – the firm inner flesh as well as the brown rotten spot, the stem, the seeds, the core. All of the apple is me.*

- Uta Hagen, Respect for Acting



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- Portland, Oregon, July 2009

## Introduction

*“When a performance is good, the world stops. Even as the house lights dim, we enter that transitional, numinous state where the present “everyday” world recedes, and we discover a world much more real than real life.”*

- Arlene Audergon, Diplomate, founder and teacher of Process Acting, from the Journal of Process Oriented Psychology

There is nothing to me like watching an actor in a film or on stage who is so utterly believable that you forget they are acting, you forget you are watching a performance, you are merely captivated and moved as if you were given a sneak peak into someone’s real life, up close and personal, raw and real.

I also know that there is nothing like the moment while acting when somehow, magically, miraculously, the words start flowing out between you and the other actor with such scintillation, with such a vibrant feeling of being alive in that very perfect moment that you want it to last forever. It is what some people might call bliss or a moment of enlightenment or the very spark of life.

In the fall of 2006, I began wondering what I else I might want in my life, what would make my life feel more whole and satisfying. I was already in a fulfilling long-term relationship and I was finally enrolled and in the midst of graduate school after many years of waiting for the right moment to continue my education; things were going

relatively well for me. But I wanted more to my current and future life especially in the area of creativity. I love art, mostly visual and textile arts – photography, painting, knitting, weaving, sewing – but had dabbled here and there in my childhood in the field of acting and had a secret dream of seeing myself in a theater, on stage, lights blaring on my face, before a captive audience – a star!

The fantasy reminds me of the dance recital I was in at the age of about eight years old. My grandparents made a special visit to New Hampshire to see me in the recital, a culmination of a year's worth of training and practice. They brought me a bouquet of pink sweetheart roses in a yellow smiley-faced mug and all day long, they refused to call me by my given name, but instead called me "Star" or spelled it out "S-t-a-r!"

Mostly I considered my "being on stage" fantasy just that – a fantasy, not a reality. Nothing I should actually pursue. Sure, it made me glow when I thought of it, but I had no sense that I had the guts or the motivation to do anything at all about it. Life, however, had something different in mind for me. Within about one week of having this fantasy recur, I received a flyer in the mail from the Portland Center Stage Greenhouse School of Theater. It advertised a new acting school for adults, especially for adults who had little or no prior acting experience. The price was well within reason and the description was perfect for what I wanted and needed. I was delighted, but only secretly at first. In fact, it was the very kind of thing that I could easily have dismissed entirely, never to utter a word out loud about it. But instead, something gave me just enough of an urge to mention it to my partner, David. In fact, my birthday was coming up soon and it could be the perfect birthday present I thought. The night I brought it up, David could

tell it was somehow important dreaming for me and was immediately on board with full support and interest. He insisted that I fill out the form, write the check immediately that night, and mail it out the next day, so that I wouldn't miss the opportunity. That was over two years ago, and five acting classes later, I am on my way to my dream of being on stage, in those blaring lights, in front of a captive audience. I also like to think that I am already living that dream now as the process by which I live my life according to who I am as an actor: exploring my acting impulses, expanding my sense of identity, and discovering how acting informs my larger life.

In the fall of 2007, as I looked at the brochure for the next series of classes at Portland Center Stage, I saw a class taught by Devon Allen titled, Focus on Acting: Process Work for the Beginning Actor I. I couldn't believe it! What is the likelihood that I would stumble upon a class on acting and process work? I knew it wasn't the kind of Process Work that I was learning at the Process Work Institute, but nonetheless, the synchronicity was amazing to me. I instantly began dreaming of how to weave together Process Work and acting, and the seeds for this final project were sown.

I began wondering about the difference between the use of the term "Process Work" in the context of psychology and "process work" in the acting world. I wondered about the methods that actors use to get into character, and how Process Work methods might assist in this process. I became interested in exploring how to use Process Work techniques and theory to compliment my own acting experiences and challenges. The culmination of these and other questions is the basis for this project.

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## ***Scope and Purpose***

This paper has a three-pronged scope: 1) self-exploration (the bulk of the paper), 2) informal comparative study (briefly referred to in various parts throughout the paper), and 3) practical guide (primarily found in the exercises and resources in the appendix at the end of the paper). In terms of my self-exploration, the purpose for this project is to discuss and explore how various Process Work ideas, methods, and techniques have assisted me in two main ways: first, in my craft as an actor to “get into” or inhabit a character, develop the character, prepare backstage, and perform in a believable and convincing way for the audience. I am interested in how Process Work methods such as edge work, essence work, and the use of second and third attention, can help me with my work as an actor; second, in terms of how Process Work ideas, methods, and techniques can assist me in my own personal development as an ever-changing, growing, and transforming human being whose identity as an actor is critical to who she is.

In terms of an informal comparative study, I will, throughout the paper, compare Process Work methods to traditional preparation and development methods currently employed in the acting field that are also known as “process work,” but are unrelated to Process Work as it is known by practitioners in the psychological field.

As a bridge between Process Work and acting, I will discuss ways I feel the spirit and methods of acting can contribute to the life of the Process Worker as a regular person in the world.

Finally, in terms of a practical guide, I offer several exercises of my own design, developed in conjunction with my memories of exercises in classes with Arny Mindell

and others, to Process Work students who are interested in acting. I have also included a list of Portland area resources for the beginning actor to get you started if you happen to be one.

### ***Contribution to Process Work***

Although many students of Process Work have employed Process Work methods and theory into their creative performances and endeavors, prior to very recent times, only Arlene Audergon has focused specifically on the intersection between acting and Process Work.<sup>1</sup> Arlene facilitates actors (and other kinds of artists) using Process Work methods and theory to help them pick up double signals, unfold them, and integrate them into their performance. She also works with actor's edges, and studies how marginalized dream figures are central to the message and field of the play. This project differs from and expands upon Arlene's work in a variety of ways. First, Arlene's written work on this subject, available to the public, is an article in the Journal of Process Oriented Psychology (1994-1995). Other written explanations can be found on the Audergon's website [www.processworkaudergon.com](http://www.processworkaudergon.com). This is the first major paper written on Process Work and acting.

In addition, rather than coming from the perspective of a "director" or facilitator, I come from the perspective of the actor herself. My research is based on innerwork; I explore and unfold my own experiences from the inside, rather than guiding actors from

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<sup>1</sup> Within my cohort in the MAPW/Diploma program, Jenn Cohen is also discussing process-oriented techniques for acting in the field of circus performance for homeless youth. Matt Stella is integrating process-oriented techniques with movement work in his directing of a performance called "The Dreamfigure's Ball."

the outside. The result is a paper that is based in experience and meant to assist others in discovering and unfolding theirs.

Over the course of my project, I organically became interested in how acting can contribute to Process Work, and how the intersection of Process Work and acting affects my own personal development and path in the world. Again, these are my own reflections; they are not based on the viewpoint of a facilitator or teacher.

I do, however, incorporate a small educational component in the project. I include exercises geared specifically towards using Process Work techniques for actors and character development. I have also added educational comments and suggestions throughout the paper, meant to be used by the individual actor in her training.

Lastly, after the publication of Arlene's journal article in 1995, Arny introduced the theory and methods of essence work, vector walking, and other techniques associated with earth-based psychology. I explore the use of essence work in one chapter of that title. I also include exercises in essence work, vector walking, and finding an earth spot, all in service of character development. In these ways, I am expanding on previous work in this area. One of my wider hopes of focusing in this area is to promote greater awareness and appreciation for the many diverse, creative applications of Process Work, outside of the world of therapy and conflict work.

Since I am not a professional or seasoned actor, I do not attempt to address needs or experiences at this level of acting. However, I hope that actors of many levels may find the techniques I employ to be useful in their own exploration of acting since these methods offer a unique approach to art of acting.

## ***Process Work Terms and Definitions***

Throughout this paper I define and explain many Process Work terms for the purpose of adding to and clarifying my perspective and point for the reader. In general though, the paper is written with the expectation that the reader understands many Process Work terms and has a general knowledge of Process Work theory and techniques.

## ***Limitations***

Since my project is experiential and intended for those who are already very familiar with the concepts of Process Work, it does not speak to actors outside of the Process Work educational community. Possible future extensions of my project include:

- Process Work methods (and acting methods) that focus more specifically in the areas of movement, voice, or speech for the actor.
- Process Work methods and theory compared to those of other schools of acting such as improvisation, psychodrama, or theater of the oppressed.
- Process Work methods, as applied to acting, written and intended for the general acting community.
- A theatrical performance based on Process Work acting preparation methods.

## ***Approach***

I took my first acting class in the fall of 2006, and then began a three-class series from the fall of 2007 through the spring of 2008 at Portland Center Stage in Portland, Oregon. I combined classroom discussions and learning, practice and scene study, and outside reading of acting texts to gain an intellectual as well as experiential understanding of current methods of accessing a character for a theatrical performance in a play. This process is known as “process work” in the acting field.

At the same time, and outside of the acting classroom, I explored using my own inner work and personal work in the therapeutic context, studying how various Process Work techniques affect and contribute to my character development as well as my performance preparation. Finally, I explored how these techniques contribute to my own personal growth as an actor and person.

### ***Organization of this Paper***

I begin by giving brief summaries of the major formative acting teachers and schools of thought in the traditional modern history of theater. These masters include Constantin Stanislavski, Lee Strasberg, Stella Adler, Sanford Meisner, Uta Hagen, Michael Chekhov, and Antonin Artaud. I also speak briefly on the other branches of less traditional schools of acting including improvisation: Theater of the Oppressed and Playback Theatre. Finally, I talk about Jacob Moreno's Psychodrama and Arlene Audergon's Process Acting as two examples of the intersection between acting and psychology.

The lineage of Stanislavski, Adler, and most recently Hagen are the main basis for my own instruction in acting and therefore are what I use to compare "acting techniques" to Process Work techniques. Certainly, one would discover subtle or not-so-subtle variations if they were to compare some of these other schools to Process Work since their methods and theory are quite different.

In "Actor Preparation," I go through the steps that many actors in the acting world use to research and develop characters, to give the reader a sense of the process of character development.

Next, I discuss the concept of identity for a person and for an actor as this is the central concept that excites me about the overlap between acting and psychology. Following the chapter “Identity” is the chapter titled “Edgework” where I explore identity further in terms of edges, giving examples of how some actors have crossed edges in their preparation and how Process Work attempts to address this issue. In “Double Signals, Amplification, and Flirts,” I speak about how to use one’s second attention to find double signals and one’s third attention to find flirts. In both, I explain how to employ amplification to make characters more whole and interesting to the audience.

After this, in the chapter “Essence Work,” I use an example of my own from my first acting class to show how essence work can be used to get deeper into a character.

Stage fright is a challenge for many actors. In the chapter “Stage Fright: A Word About Nerves,” I talk about my own personal journey through stage fright, the various advice that was given to me, and my eventual innerwork at the essence level that helped me process my strong experiences.

Throughout my project, I learned how acting contributes to Process Work, self-exploration, and personal growth. In the chapters titled “Life vs. Acting: Having a Metaposition,” “Playing the Part in Life,” and “Long-term Edges,” I use a personal story and dream to illustrate my point as well as discuss possible applications of acting in the areas of meta-position, understanding and applying the wisdom of roles to everyday life, and working with long-term edges.

Finally, in the section titled “My Path,” I focus on three areas: “Fame and Zeitgeist,” “The Creative Spirit,” and “Love.” In all of these, I explore my own path

through acting, creativity, and self-love. I explore my dreams of becoming an actor and how these dreams shed light on who I am in this life.

Two appendices can be found after the Works Cited. “Appendix A: The Acting Exercises” includes six different acting exercises to give readers a chance to try many different Process Work techniques in their own character exploration, primarily for the purpose of going over edges in identity when attempting to “pick up” secondary aspects of a character that would otherwise be difficult to integrate.

“Appendix B: Portland Area Resources for Actors” gives local beginning actors a summary view of various local theaters, acting schools, helpful websites, magazines, and Process Work books and manuscripts to assist them in further exploring their interest in acting.

### ***Citation Style***

Throughout this paper I use the MLA citation style developed by the Modern Language Association of America. MLA style is commonly used by graduate students, scholars, and professional writers for writing and research in the humanities, languages, literary criticism, media and cultural studies.

### ***Word Usage***

In the United States, the spelling of “theater” is as such, ending in “er.” However, in Europe and other parts of the world, it is spelled “theatre” ending in “re.” Both are correct. When I speak in my own words, I will spell it in the American style, but will keep the European spelling in quotes of people or in names of books if it is used.

I also have opted to use the pronoun “she” to mean either a woman or a man in all generic examples, to offset the centuries of using the pronoun “he.” On the other hand, I have chosen to use the word “actor” to refer to both males and females in the acting profession. I personally prefer to be called an actor as my internal sense feels this title connotes the kind of respect I wish to be given in my pursuit of a life of acting. Sadly, I feel the term “actress” implies less significance for some. This conversation is really the beginning of an important group process where illumination and education around outer and inner sexism is an essential component of the dialogue. In the meantime, my current process supports the adoption of the word “actor” as a gender neutral term for us all to claim.



## **Act I: Acting Techniques for the Actor**



## **A Brief Overview of Theories of Acting**

This chapter is meant to give a brief overview of several of the major theories of acting and their founders. I define and categorize these master teachers in two main veins of acting theory and methodology: traditional and improvisational. Following this, I briefly discuss two ways that acting has come together with psychotherapy.

For my purposes, I will define “traditional theater” to mean: a form of theater in which actors memorize and rehearse lines from a play, and with the assistance of a director, perform the play where all words are dictated in advance by the playwright’s script, and most movements and expressions are pre-planned, crafted, and refined over time. I will define “improvisational theater” to mean: a form of theater in which the actors invent or create words, relationships, and movements in the moment or “on the spot” in response to outer stimuli, intuition, and technical skill, to perform spontaneously in front of an audience. Improv actors often, but not always, use audience suggestions to guide the performance as they create dialogue, setting, and plot (“Improvisational Theatre”).

This list of both traditional and improvisational acting teachers and theorists is certainly not exhaustive, and the list of major contributors may vary significantly

depending on who you ask. My list is simply meant as a brief background to introduce you to the theories and methods of acting that I have been taught, rooted in Stanislavski's work, and continuing on down through Stella Adler and Uta Hagen, with some teachings from Lee Strasberg. I have also received minimal training in the Meisner technique. I intend to give you a sense of where my training is coming from to highlight my point of view as an actor.

I have also included the remaining people listed in the traditional theater section, Michael Chekhov and Antonin Artaud, because I feel this paper would be incomplete without their mention in terms of relevance to Stanislavski and his lineage.

In the second section, Improvisation Theater, I focus briefly on two major names in the history of improvisation: Augusto Boal's Theater of the Oppressed and Jonathan Fox's and Jo Salas' Playback Theatre. Although my own training is almost exclusively in more traditional forms of theater, I feel obliged as a Process Worker to mention these schools of acting for several reasons. First, there are members of the Process Work community that have interest and experience in these other forms of theater. In addition, I see a connection between the work of Process Workers who use second attention to follow flirts or momentary signals, and this type of improvisation. It is inherent in our work and theory. Lastly, as an advocate of deep democracy, I wish to include not only the more "traditional" or mainstream styles of acting, but also the more alternative and radical forms that may be more on the margin of the acting world.

Towards the conclusion of the work, I briefly summarize Jacob Moreno's Psychodrama, which is part of the field of drama therapy. This is arguably the most well-known example of how drama or acting can be integrated into the counseling of

individuals in the clinical setting. Finally, I focus on the work of Arlene Audergon, the founder of 'Process Acting,' the first known Process-oriented approach to acting. She is as a facilitator and director working in London, New York, and Los Angeles. In my work as an actor, I incorporate aspects not only from traditional acting techniques and those of Audergon; I also integrate a background philosophy, loosely related to Psychodrama, to use the world of acting to explore and develop my internal psychological world.

Now let me begin by discussing some of the major theorists of traditional theater.

### ***Traditional Theater***

**Constantin Stanislavski (1863 – 1938)** was a Russian actor and theater director whose ideas and techniques made a powerful and lasting contribution to modern European and American traditional acting. His work has remained at the core of mainstream western performance training for much of the last century ("Constantin Stanislavski").

Stanislavski yearned for a theater that emotionally touched and moved audience members deep inside and gave them an experience of intimacy and familiarity with the scenes and the characters in the play in such a way that observers felt personally connected. He said, "You feel that those people whom you saw on the stage last night have become near and dear to you. You want to share their sorrows and their joys. In them you see a part of your own soul. They have become your friends" (Cole and Strasberg 20). He wrote several books detailing his teaching and techniques helping actors have this kind of personal impact on the audience. His ideas and techniques were referred to as the "System," and later called the "Method" by Lee Strasberg.

Stanislavski begins by saying that the actor must always have a purpose for doing anything on stage (37). 'Purpose' could also be interchanged with 'objective.' There must be a clear and chosen objective such as "washing dishes." The actor cannot merely be on stage, make a movement, or speak a line without a logical and coherent reason for doing so (Stanislavski 49). This purpose or objective must be put to use with an action or a non-action depending on whether the actor needs to speak and move (action) or sit still and experience an intense internal state (inaction). In addition, the actor must never create an action directly out of a feeling. For example, to act from the feeling of being jealous or angry, on its own, would create an artificial performance. Likewise, the actor should not copy others or use conventional gestures without really living them. All of these kinds of prescribed expressions and movements make for an inauthentic performance (Stanislavski 43). Lee Strasberg wrote of Stanislavski's teaching, "The works created are never copies or imitations of one another but are original creative achievements. That is the purpose of Stanislavski's idea. It teaches not how to play this or that part but how to create organically" (Cole and Strasberg 16).

Actions can be broken down into tiny units. Using the example above – "washing dishes" – one must pick up a dish, wash it, rinse it, place it in the drying rack, and then dry one's hands. Each unit of action serves the overarching purpose of "washing dishes" (Stanislavski 124).

Next, the actor must constantly develop and use her imagination in every moment she is on stage. She must know as the character who she is, why she is there, what she wants, where she came from and where she's going. She must be able to answer the question, "Is it cold outside?" by using her imagination to take her back

outside in the scene, notice whether or not her coat was bundled up, if her shoulders were shrugged, if her shoes were stepping on snow or rain puddles, etc. Then she can live her way to the answer (Stanislavski 78).

An actor on stage must also use her imagination to hear a clock tick when it isn't actually audible, to see something out the window that doesn't exist, feel the sense of familiarity when she sits on the couch in the living room that is supposed to have been hers for the past thirty years. These all require the actor to have a vivid imagination as well as regular training of her concentration and attention in every moment (Stanislavski 104).

A quote from Stanislavski in his book My Life in Art, demonstrates his emphasis on the need for the actor to be completely concentrated and focused on the entire world of his character as the way of bringing the audience in to this other reality:

I understood that the more the actor wishes to amuse his audience, the more the audience will sit in comfort waiting to be amused...but as soon as the actor stops being concerned with his audience, the latter begins to watch the actor. It is especially so when the actor is occupied in something serious and interesting....The concentration of the creating actor calls out the concentration of the spectator and in this manner forces him to enter into what is passing on the stage, exciting his attention, his imagination, his thinking processes and his emotion. ..The entire physical and spiritual nature of the actor must be concentrated on what is going on in the soul of the person he plays....With this in mind, I began the systematic development of my attention with the help of exercises I invented for that purpose. (Cole and Chinoy 494)

A key part of Stanislavski's teaching is about 'emotion memory' (Stanislavski 182). Emotion memories are all the feelings you have when you experience something for the very first time. Remember the first time you saw fireworks and the fear, excitement, and awe that ran through you. Recall your first kiss and the feelings you had – was it self-consciousness, apprehension, eagerness, passion, shyness, delight? The

actor must excavate and develop her emotion memory as if it were a bank she could withdraw funds from whenever she needed them. Just as a person can use her visual memory to recall a childhood vacation spot or a deceased relative, one can also use her emotion memory to recall feelings she had at that vacation spot or at the funeral. Sometimes a thought, a familiar object, or a suggestion can bring forth these feelings; sometimes they are stronger, sometimes weaker, but, Stanislavski argues, they do exist deep inside (182). The “how” in actually doing all of these things requires endless hours of regular practice by the actor if she wants to create a truthful and real performance and experience for the audience.

Finally, Stanislavski advises the actor to always be herself. In An Actor Prepares, he quotes the Director Tortsov during a class, “Never lose yourself on stage. Always act in your own person, as an artist. You can never get away from yourself. The moment you lose yourself on the stage marks the departure from truly living your part and the beginning of exaggerated false acting” (192).

**Lee Strasberg (1901-1982)** is considered by many to be the best-known acting teacher in America and is credited with transforming Stanislavski’s system of acting into what is now known as “Method” acting in the United States.

Strasberg began studying acting in 1923 at the American Laboratory Theatre under the teaching of Richard Boleslavski. Boleslavski was a direct student of Stanislavski back in Moscow. Nearly a decade later, Strasberg co-founded the Group Theatre in 1931 in New York. He concentrated his teachings on emotional recall and on the actor’s use of his own personal circumstances rather than on Stanislavski’s “given circumstances” (Cole and Chinoy 622). I define ‘given circumstances’ in the next chapter

to be both the details of the plot, the location, the time, the season – the more factual pieces of information - as well as the “story” that the actor creates about what is happening for the character in that scene.

Strasberg eventually left the Group Theatre in 1937 and went out on his own directing and teaching. By 1949, he was teaching at the famed Actors Studio and his “Method” had a huge following of a great many well-known actors of the 20<sup>th</sup> century including: Marlon Brando, Paul Newman, James Dean, Anne Bancroft, Marilyn Monroe, Dustin Hoffman, and Al Pacino (“Lee Strasberg”).

Strasberg explained his "Method" through his class lectures and writings:

The two areas of discovery that were of primary importance in my work...were improvisation and 'affective memory,'... the process of contacting one's memories of emotions in order to channel them into a role... It is finally by using these techniques that the actor can express the appropriate emotions demanded of the character. (Butler 43)

Although this initially sounds the same as Stanislavski, Strasberg's “affective memory” had a different emphasis. Stanislavski taught actors to experience live, authentic feelings that come from previous life experiences whereas Strasberg emphasized controlled, remembered emotions, not live ones. Strasberg states:

The basic idea of affective memory is not emotional recall but that the actor's emotion on the stage should never be really real. It always should be only *remembered* emotion. An emotion that happens right now spontaneously is out of control – you don't know what's going to happen from it, and the actor can't always maintain and repeat it. Remembered emotion is something that the actor can create and repeat: without that the thing is hectic. (Hodge 136)

For Strasberg, affective memory is the basic element of the actor's reality (Hodge 136). The affective memory exercises are meant to draw out the emotions from the past that are ingrained in one's mind and body. However, the feelings that arise from an

emotional memory are not likely to be the same each time and duplicating emotions is not the point. In fact, Strasberg felt, “the significance lies in the fact that the actor becomes emotionally available, prepared to respond instantly and expressively with feelings and passions” (Hodge 136).

The sense of emphasis on consciously controlled or remembered emotion lends itself to the job the actor has, which involves expressing oneself under fictitious circumstances in a way that looks like real life, only magnified. I like this quote from Strasberg, as he expands on this idea:

The human being who acts is the human being who lives. That is a terrifying circumstance. Essentially the actor acts a fiction, a dream; in life the stimuli to which we respond are always real. The actor must constantly respond to stimuli that are imaginary. And yet this must happen not only just as it happens in life, but actually more fully and more expressively. Although the actor can do things in life quite easily, when he has to do the same thing on the stage under fictitious conditions he has difficulty because he is not equipped as a human being merely to playact at imitating life. He must somehow believe. (Barranger 209)

**Stella Adler (1901-1992)**, the actor and teacher whose fame was cemented by the success of her students Marlon Brando, Warren Beatty, and Robert De Niro, as well as the only teacher from the Group Theatre to have studied Acting Technique with Stanislavski himself, also broke with Strasberg and developed yet another form of acting. Her technique is founded in the idea that actors must not use memories from their own pasts to conjure up emotion, but rather use the given circumstances. Stella Adler's technique relies on the carrying through of tasks, wants, needs, and objectives (“Method Acting”).

The fundamental difference between Strasberg and Adler is in how each approaches the problem of accessing emotion. Strasberg felt that the actor’s central

task was the re-creation of experienced emotions. Adler, like Stanislavski, felt that the actor's imagination must show the way (Kissel 265). The actor's imagination is meant to lead her into the mind of her character; actions, then, are the means for making this happen. As she often preached, "We are what we do, not what we say ("Method Acting"). Adler said:

You have to get beyond your own precious inner experiences now. I want you to be able to see and share what you see with an audience, not just get wrapped up in yourself. Strasberg is dead. The actor cannot afford to look only to his own life for all his acting choices and feelings. (Adler 65)

Her emphasis on doing rather than feeling resulted in exercises training the actor to really look at things. She gave endless examples of actions, behaviors, and things the actor could study. The goal of countless exercises in "looking" is that the actor gains personal experience in knowing all the specific details that make something unique and alive so that this same actor can bring life to an otherwise "dead" scene using her now vivid imagination.

One example of such a scene is "having dinner." This action is not an abstract idea to Adler. The actor must use her imagination to fill out the details of that scene as no one else will give that information to her. She must determine the kind of knife and fork on the table – are they plastic, silver, or stainless? Then she must notice what kind of fabric that the tablecloth would be made from – is it lacey or rough, is it a picnic tablecloth or is there no tablecloth there at all? Is the lighting for the dinner candlesticks, a lamp, or a chandelier overhead? (Adler 65) All of these details are part of the given circumstances and if you change these, then the entire mood of the scene would be different and thus the actor would feel and behave differently.

**Sanford Meisner (1905-1997)** taught acting for sixty-five years. Jim Jarrett, a Meisner coach writes:

During that time he was constantly evolving his Meisner Technique. But the foundation to his approach came early on and never wavered - people are horrible listeners and that's just in normal, everyday life. Now, take these same people, put them on stage in front of an audience or in front of a camera on a movie set and their listening becomes almost non-existent because they are so nervous and insecure they couldn't possibly listen.

Based on this very real fact, Sanford Meisner concluded before anything believable, connected, authentic and organic could ever happen between two actors, they must be present. For them to be present they must get over their fears and get out of their heads and put their focus and attention on the most important thing - the other actor. (Jarrett)

Meisner developed "The Repetition Exercise" in which two actors sit in chairs facing each other. One person begins the exercise by saying anything she observes about the other person such as, "Your shirt is blue." The other actor responds using the exact same words, but in first person, "My shirt is blue." This repetition goes on and on until either actor experiences a genuine shift in feeling and is free to say the next sentence that comes to them in their observation of the other, such as, "You look sad." The other says, "I look sad" and then this phrase continues.

To a newcomer, the Repetition Exercise seems completely ridiculous and makes the new actor wonder how on earth this could ever be helpful to an actor. But after weeks and months of this kind of training, a true transformation occurs and a real, live, in-the-moment connection begins to be felt between the two actors. They are finally really listening to each other.

**Uta Hagen (1919-2004)** was a German-born American actress and acting teacher who followed directly in the footsteps of Constantin Stanislavski and Stella Adler. Her

teachings are the main source for the acting education that I received over the past three years. She was an influential acting teacher who taught, among others, Matthew Broderick, Jason Robards, Sigourney Weaver, Liza Minnelli, Whoopi Goldberg, Jack Lemmon, Amanda Peet, and Al Pacino (“Uta Hagen”).

In her book, Respect for Acting, Hagen encourages the reader to begin by learning who she is and understanding her own sense of identity with the goal of enlarging this sense of self and learning how to use one’s own self to serve the characters one plays on stage. Hagen detested actors who copied other actors because their characters lost their humanity. This is especially likely to happen with actors who play characters from another time period such as kings and queens. On the other end of the spectrum are actors who Hagen says try to be too “naturalistic” and play their characters too ordinarily rather than finding what is extraordinary about our everyday lives (Hagen 23). In a video from one of her acting classes, Hagen states:

When I go to the theater, and I can see the acting, I already don’t like it. In other words, if it’s the performer and his mind and his speculations and what he fixes and arranges is visible to me, it’s bad acting in my opinion. When I believe that there’s a human being in action up there in that moment, alive, right there and then, I get spellbound. (“You Tube”)

Ultimately, Hagen believes that the more the actor develops her own identity, the greater the breadth of experience and possibilities she has to be able to identify with characters unlike her self (Hagen 24).

Hagen advises students to answer for themselves the following questions about their character in any particular scene in order to become fully “aware” (my word, not Hagen’s) of the entire life of the character. She developed extensive exercises helping students develop awareness in these areas:

Who am I?  
What time is it? (century, year, season, day, minute)  
Where am I? (country, city, neighborhood, house, room, area of room)  
What surrounds me? (animate and inanimate objects)  
What are the given circumstances? (past, present, future, and the events)  
What is my relationship? (relation to total events, other characters, and to things)  
What do I want? (objectives)  
What's in my way? (obstacles)  
What do I do to get what I want? (the physical and verbal action) (82)

Hagen even touches on the concept of rank, although she doesn't name it as such. She explains that the actor should study and become aware of how they act differently with different people. For example if she is talking to a scientist, she may look stupid on the outside, but think she's speaking brilliantly on the inside. However, if she is talking to a beggar on the street who asks her for money, she may look like a snob but may feel generous on the inside. Hagen is attempting to highlight how we all act differently depending on our rank in the moment. This also will reflect on our inner experience of ourselves. Being aware of rank and the resulting internal feelings and outer behaviors associated with higher or lower rank, gives the actor lots of interesting information to work with.

Knowing and expanding one's sense of self or identity will get the actor far, but only so far, according to Hagen. When a character, scene, or particular line or behavior doesn't make sense to the actor or doesn't illicit the kind of emotional response needed for the play, the actor must find what's called "substitutions" originating in her own life experience. Substitutions are personal associations that come from real-life situations such as relating the fear one experiences while waiting in a hospital emergency room while a loved one is being operated on to a completely different scene in a play

requiring such fear, desperation, and impatience. Substituting is the act of putting a person or thing in place of another while serving the same purpose (Hagen 34).

One form of substitutions is where the actor then finds the essence of the experience and transfers this essence to the reality of the play. Much like the essences we refer to in Process Work, Hagen's "essences" are colors, textures, music, and elements of nature that are so personal and private to the actor that she could never adequately explain to others why they contain the specific meaning that they do for her. They are ineffable. Hagen writes, "if a new character has, to me, elements of light blue, a field of clover, a Scarlatti sonata, a toy poodle, a shiny blue pond, a piece of cut crystal" (43) then only she knows the subtle, indescribable experience inside to which she is referring. The words are only names given to describe the essence of the thing.

Hagen also discusses at length the concepts of "emotional memory" and "sense memory." Emotional memory is the recall of a psychological or emotional response to an event that produces a strong emotional behavior such as laughing, sobbing, or screaming (Hagen 46). The actor builds a storehouse of "trigger" objects that remind her of unhappy, terrifying, or hilarious moments in her life, for example, in order to elicit strong feelings. Sense memory is the physical version of emotional memory in which the actor recalls physical sensations like pain, pleasure, hot, and cold in order to elicit physical behaviors in a scene (Hagen 52). I see both emotional memory and sense memory as methods of getting actors over edges. If the actor is unable to cry in a scene, we might say she has an "edge to cry" and she could then use Hagen's techniques to remember an emotional painful experience, link it to a meaningful object, and use the object to elicit the crying and cross the edge.

**Michael Chekhov (1891-1955)** was an Academy Award-nominated Russian-American actor, director, author, and developer of his own acting technique used by actors such as Clint Eastwood, Marilyn Monroe, Yul Brynner, and Robert Stack. He is widely regarded to be one of the greatest actors of the 20th century, with Stanislavski himself constantly referring to Chekhov as his most brilliant student (“Michael Chekhov”).

Michael Chekhov was one of a handful of protégés of Stanislavski who both embraced and rebelled against his theories and practices. After the Revolution in Russia, Michael Chekhov had split with Stanislavski and toured with his own company. He believed Stanislavski’s techniques led actors to focus too much on their own personal history and feelings and not those of the character making for performances that were uninteresting and lacked creativity (Audergon 67).

In the late 1920s, Chekhov set up his own studio, focusing on the physicalization of inner experience and atmosphere and mood. He founded the term “Psychological Gesture” (Hodge 89). In this technique, the actor physicalizes a character’s need or internal dynamic in the form of an external gesture. He then mutes the outward gesture and integrates it internally, allowing the physical memory of the gesture to effect the performance on an unconscious level (“Michael Chekhov”).

Chekhov urged his students to familiarize themselves with the atmosphere, tone, or mood of the place, location, or relationship in a given scene or entire play. He considered an atmosphere to be “the equivalent of musical keys” and encouraged actors to act and speak “in tune with it” (Hodge 87). Unlike Stanislavski who would have focused on the actor’s emotional response to a scene, Chekhov would ask the actor to

be aware of the specific atmosphere and how it affects her. For example, an old ruined castle has a different atmosphere than a busy department store (Hodge 87). Chekhov also trained actors to use their imaginations in creating atmospheres and this sensitivity and ability was considered the key mark of a Chekhovian actor.

Interestingly, Chekhov's theory and methods relate to Process Work in a number of ways. First, his use of the Physical Gesture is remarkably similar to our use of hand gestures to both reduce backwards towards an essence level experience and to expand forward from the essence level. Second, his emphasis on a play's atmosphere or mood conjures up Mindell's awareness of atmospheres in fields and mood work in individuals and relationships. It is reminiscent of earlier exercises based on "weather systems" or momentary atmospheric experiences that affect one's internal, relationship, or group feeling. Lastly, Arlene Audergon speaks to Chekhov's use of what Process Workers call "edgework" and the importance of dropping one's personal history. "By focusing on techniques for stepping outside of oneself, Chekhov insisted on working over the edge, working beyond personal psychology in the mythic realm" (68).

**Antonin Artaud (1896-1948)**. He was a radical, avant-garde, experimental actor, director, and poet who spent almost a decade in an insane asylum. He had a dream of liberating the theater in France from civilized, verbal, cerebral, western tradition to a more sensuous, mysterious, subconscious audience-centered experience. In 1931, he saw the Balinese Theatre which had a profound influence on his ideas that he laid forth in his First and Second Manifestos of the Theatre of Cruelty. He wrote:

The theatre will never find itself again...except by furnishing the spectator with the truthful precipitate of dreams, in which his taste for crime, his erotic obsessions, his savagery, his chimeras, his utopian sense of life and matter, even

his cannibalism pour out on the level not counterfeit and illusory, but interior. (Cole and Chinoy 235)

Artaud's collection of essays "The Theatre and its Double" (1970) challenged accepted ways of perceiving in the theater. He celebrated the non-verbal elements of consciousness that could ultimately arouse therapeutic emotions within his spectators (Hodge 6). He wrote of the actor as being an "athlete of the heart" using his emotions "as a boxer uses his muscles" (Artaud 89). He left no specific techniques behind, only poetic visions and metaphors, something like dreams. These offered inspiration to many who diverged from more traditional Western approaches to acting and certainly remind us of Mindell's idea of "dreaming while awake."

### ***Improvisational Theater***

**Augusto Boal (1931 - )** is a Brazilian theater director, writer and politician. He is the founder of Theatre of the Oppressed, a theatrical form originally used in radical popular education movements ("Augusto Boal"). This method uses theater as means of knowledge and transformation of the interior reality in the social and relational field. The public becomes active, so that the "spect-actors" explore, show, analyze and transform the reality in which they are living ("Augusto Boal").

In this process, the actors or audience members could stop a performance, often a short scene in which a character was being oppressed in some way (for example, a typically chauvinist man mistreating a woman or a factory owner mistreating an employee). The audience would suggest different actions for the actors to carry out on-stage in an attempt to change the outcome of what they were seeing. This was an attempt to undo the traditional audience/actor partition and bring audience members

into the performance, to have an input into the dramatic action they were watching (“Augusto Boal”). Certainly, Boal’s methods touch upon a vein of Process Work that has to do with the role of the social activist in group process.

**Jonathan Fox and Jo Salas** founded Playback Theatre in 1975. Fox was a student of improvisational theatre, oral traditional storytelling, Psychodrama and the work of Paulo Freire, perhaps best known for his book Pedagogy of the Oppressed, in which he criticizes traditional education where a student’s empty head is filled by the teacher (“Paulo Freire”). Playback Theatre is an original form of improvisational theater in which audience or group members tell stories from their lives and watch them enacted on the spot. Playback Theatre is sometimes considered a modality of drama therapy (“Playback Theatre”).

In a playback event, someone in the audience tells a moment or story from their life, chooses the actors to play the different roles, and then all those present watch the enactment, as the story "comes to life" with artistic shape and nuance. The re-creation of stories is often non-naturalistic; actors often use metaphor, narration, chorus, genre, movement and song (“Playback Theatre”). This naturally leads into the field of drama therapy with the difference being that the goal of Playback Theatre is a theatrical performance for the benefit of the audience whereas the goal of drama therapy is to work through a client’s internal or familial dynamics in a clinical setting to benefit the client.

**Jacob Moreno (1889-1974)** was an Austrian-American leading psychiatrist and psycho-sociologist, thinker and educator, the founder of Psychodrama, Sociometry and

the foremost pioneer of group psychotherapy. During his lifetime, he was recognized as one of the leading social scientists (“Jacob Moreno”).

Psychodrama is a form of psychological clinical work which explores, through dramatic action, the problems, issues, concerns, dreams and aspirations of people, groups, systems and organizations (“Psychodrama”). It is mostly used as a group work method, in which five elements are present: the stage, the client (protagonist), the director (who is also the counselor and facilitator), the other participant actors, and the audience (who play an active role in the process) (Moreno 13-15). Using theatrical methods, all of these parts come together to use the group to become a therapeutic agent for the client/protagonist.

Psychodrama's goal is to raise spontaneity in an otherwise stuck system. Spontaneity can help give rise to creative, life-giving new solutions to old and tired problems or adequate solutions to new situations and concerns (“Psychodrama”).

Kasha Kavanaugh, explains in her manuscript “Sourcing the Flow: Painting, Movement, the Intentional Field and Co-Creation” the relationship between

Psychodrama and Process Work:

A similar method has been utilized in process work groups exploring methods of unfolding family relationships and personal histories. Here the “stand-ins” would use sentient movement in addition to the information they were given by the protagonist. A situation is described and individuals...dream into their role and begin to move very slowly....The participant starts with letting his or her vision go clouded; have a soft focus to allow for second attention or tuning into the background dreaming. She senses the impulse to move very slowly goes with the movement impulses she becomes aware of. As the movement reveals creative shifts in perception, the mover dreams into the unfolding of the initial concern. What may have begun with roles and signals deepens to the preverbal level and can bring forth information from the sentient realm. (14)

**Arlene Audergon** is the founder of 'Process Acting,' a process-oriented approach to acting which includes awareness of both intended and unintended communication of the character and the actor, the overlap between actor and character, field theory as applied to a play, and edgework. Audergon explains one of the tenets behind Process Acting:

Process Acting has discovered that great allies towards a dramatic and vital performance can be found at the trouble spots in the intersection between actor and character. Perhaps the actor is nervous and can't feel the part, or moves awkwardly and feels full of tension. The most troublesome signals lead the way not only to the actor's liveliness and creativity, but to the deepest inner life of the character and even to the core conflicts and meaning of the play. (64)

Audergon began teaching and coaching actors, artists, and all kinds of performers in the early 1990's first in Los Angeles, then in London, and later in New York. While in London, she taught workshops to actors at both the Actor's Centre and the Little Angel Puppet Theatre. Through these connections, she met Phelim McDermott of Improbable Theatre. McDermott was also familiar with Process Work. Together they co-directed a show called "SPIRIT" which toured around locations in the US, UK, Australia, Canada, and Germany in 2001 (Diamond).

Because Audergon works with all kinds of artists and performers, she no longer uses the name 'Process Acting' to describe what she does. Instead, she, together with her husband Jean-Claude Audergon, has created what they call "Arts Atelier" (Diamond). An "atelier" means "studio" and the concept is that artists of all kinds come to their studio space for as short as one evening or as long as a ten-day workshop to explore their creative process. Audergon describes the scene of a past Atelier:

Each person brought a project they were working on and worked in their own corner of this vast room from morning until late at night. For one or two hours a

day we sat together as a group and worked with individuals, or worked with our group dynamic, and did some exercises to support the creative process (Diamond).

They are currently running 'Atelier' evenings in which the Audergons "invite guest artists and we work with them on the very edges of their creative work. It's not a workshop, and not a show. The idea is to develop a culture of exploring the creative process together" (Diamond).

In my chapter "Edgework" I will explain how Audergon works with actors' edges in performance. In the chapter "Double Signals, Amplification, and Flirts" I will go into more detail as to how Audergon works with actors' and characters' unintended communication or double signals.

There is so much that could be said about Audergon's many techniques using Process Work for the actor that it is difficult to summarize it sufficiently in my one paper. Therefore, I would strongly suggest that anyone interested in the field of Process Work and acting or other performance read Arlene's article in the Journal of Process Oriented Psychology referenced in my works cited, visit the Audergons' website, and also read the interview of Arlene done by Julie Diamond. Arlene Audergon is undeniably a trailblazer for all of us who follow her, in our various attempts to expand Process Work further out into the world of creativity, performance, and specifically into the mystery and magic of acting.

## Actor Preparation

*“In some places I had tried to be as nervous as possible and even exalted, and for this purpose I had made quick, nervous movements. In other places I had tried to look naïve and in order to do so had achieved childlike and innocent eyes by technical means; in still other places I had exaggerated the manner that was long dormant. I copied naïveté, but I was not naïve; I moved my feet quickly, but I did not perceive any inner hurry that might cause short quick steps. I had played more or less artfully, copying the outer appearances of experiencing my part and of inner action, but I had not experienced the part or any real necessity for action. From performance to performance I had merely made a mechanical habit of going through all these technical gymnastics, and muscular memory, which is so strong among actors, had powerfully fixed my bad theatrical habit.”*

- Constantin Stanislavski from his book My Life in Art, excerpted in Actors on Acting, 491

The actor begins by getting to know the script in detail. First she reads the play anywhere between two and ten times to get a solid understanding of the entire story and the overarching theme, message, or seed that runs through the entire play. Only then do many actors begin the job of memorization. I’ve heard of some actors memorizing all of their lines before analyzing the text or making any decisions at all about the acting of the character. As a beginning actor, I find it difficult to read even one scene without beginning to form ideas about my character and making unconscious choices about how to read certain lines.

Once the lines are memorized or while the task of memorization is happening, the actor begins script analysis. Script analysis includes understanding the given circumstances of the scene, determining the need of your character in the scene (as well as the over-arching need for the entire play), making clear choices as to how to get your need met, and knowing what obstacles stand in your way.

Given circumstances are both the details of the plot, the location, the time, the season – the more factual pieces of information - as well as the “story” that the actor creates about what is happening for the character in that scene. The story should come from deep, urgent needs that are clear and motivating, active, engaging for your character. The more gripping and clear the story and motivations we create, the more we enter the story and perform unselfconsciously and the more the audience believes the performance to be true.

For example, in the scene in Closer in which I played the character, Anna, the given circumstances include being in her London flat that she shares with her husband, Larry; it is late at night, June, and her husband has just arrived home from a dermatology conference in NYC. The given circumstances also include that Anna has decided to leave her husband after having had an affair with another man, Dan, for the past year. Dan is someone that both Anna and her husband know. She loves Dan and feels no love, only coldness and indifference towards her husband.

The given circumstances also include what just happened right before the current scene. In the example from Closer, Anna had just had sex with Dan on the couch in her living room. After he left, she took a shower and changed her clothes. This happened just before Larry came home. The event propels Anna into the scene with

Larry, gives a potent background feeling to the whole scene, and gives the actor who plays Anna enough preparation time backstage to enter the scene in a believable way.

The need of the character is defined as, “what the character wants to get” or her objective in the scene. Examples of needs are: wanting the approval of a parent, wanting someone to apologize, needing to hide the truth of a betrayal, needing to punish someone who hurt you, getting a love interest into bed, or wanting a good grade in a class. Although in daily life we may not always feel that our needs are particularly strong, desperate, or of “high stakes,” plays are not real life and in order to capture the attention of the audience and make for a captivating performance, needs should be urgent. In other words, a character “needing to talk to their partner about something” is not necessarily high stakes, unless the character is on the brink of divorce and this is her last attempt to get him to really talk to her. Of course, needs and stakes must also be appropriate to the scene; the actor shouldn’t choose stakes that aren’t really believable for the given circumstances.

Tactics refer to “how” we get what we need, the actions we take as actors. If our need is to get our friend to apologize for hurting us, we may give them the cold shoulder, or we may criticize them. The use of verbs can help in choosing tactics. Some examples are: to drown, terrify, stimulate, withdraw, grasp, empower, persecute, overwhelm, or awaken. During script analysis, we may go through each scene and literally write down a verb next to each line to know how we will be delivering the line, how we will attempt to get our need met with those particular words that the playwright has given us.

In an ideal world, we would always get our needs met, but this would not make for interesting drama! In the world of theater (as well as in the “real world”), there are obstacles that get in the way of our needs being met. Obstacles are what keep us from getting what we want or what we believe stands in our way. They usually appear in the form of relationship issues with other characters in the scene. For example, let’s say our character is a teenage girl who wants to go to a party to see the popular boy she likes (given circumstances) and her need is to get her mother to say yes. But her mother is very strict and doesn’t usually allow her to stay out past ten o’clock (obstacles).

Throughout a scene, we may begin by choosing one way (tactic) to try to get our need met, but then run into an obstacle from the other character (they say “no”) and so we change tactics and try something else. The other character will also have their own need and their own tactics, and you will do things that create obstacles for them.

As beginning actors, if we do all of these things: read the play a few times, memorize our lines, understand the given circumstances, imagine and develop our background story, go through the script or scene in detail and make choices about what our character’s high stakes needs are what our tactics will be to get those needs met, what obstacles are in our way - and find creative new tactics, we will be well on our way to a solid run at our scene. We will have a lot to work with and solid choices to either continue, make higher stakes, or make an altogether different choice that works better.

This brings me up to my current entrance – to prepare for any scene, you need not only to know the given circumstances (location, year, time of year, any details the script or playwright’s notes give you about the character’s personality, background, and history, specific scene details), but you need to know precisely what you are doing all

the way up to entering the scene. Were you just driving a car at night in New England through a blizzard? Were you just taking a bubble bath and then brushing your teeth? Were you just in a huge fight with your ex-partner on the phone in the bedroom? What time of year is it? What's the temperature like outside? Inside? What is in the room of your scene – a couch, chairs, tables, lamps, books? What shape is the furniture in? What is the lighting like? What books are there?

As an actor, you need to have a clear picture in your mind of what the room looks like and exactly where everything is located, even if it is invisible to the audience. Your eyes need to fall directly onto the object in your mind's eye. If you need to locate an imaginary window, door, lamp, or tree outside the window, you can pick a permanent spot in the theater to locate that object.

You need to know the time of year and temperature so that your body begins to innately act like it would if you were in the middle of a cold winter storm at night rather than a hot summer afternoon. Your body will automatically act differently and you ought to be thinking of what naturally does happen and how your body should reflect the season and associated body reactions to it.

There are countless other exercises an actor can do to prepare for a role. For example, you can ask yourself: How would my character shop in the grocery store? How would they shower? How would they answer the door to sign for a package? You can use any current activity from your own life – cooking, washing dishes, dressing in the morning, writing in a journal, etc. and make it into a character exercise, imagining how your character would do these everyday things (Focus on Acting: Process Work for the Beginning Actor II). The questions the actor can ask herself to prepare seem infinite.

Certain ones may help you become more deeply involved in your character depending on your level of experience. Here are a few others to consider from Devon Allen's class

(19 January 2008):

Are your choices clear?

Do you live there (in that house, in that room)?

Are you really listening to and talking to the other characters in your scene?

Do you have total commitment or is there any fall out in the role?

What makes this moment different than any other?

Questions like these help to breathe real life into your character rather than a one-dimensional figure spouting lines on stage.

## **Act II: Process Work Techniques for the Actor**



## Identity

*“Human beings must invent themselves in the midst of an infinity of possibilities, instead of passively accepting their roles because they think they could not be other than they are. Nothing of what is human is barred to anyone. We are all, potentially, good and evil, loving and hating, heterosexual and homosexual, cowardly and brave, etc. We are what we choose to be.”*

- Augusto Boal, founder of Theatre of the Oppressed, in Games for Actors and Non-Actors, 209

I love the concept of identity – who we believe we are, what we believe we are not, who we wish to be, what parts of ourselves we are ashamed of – the whole package that makes me, “me” in my mind and experience. It is endlessly fascinating to me. Thinking about identity is what excites me about acting and motivates me to want to perform. What I love about acting is the permission to change one’s identity and therefore the possibility of an infinite range of self-expression. Sarah Lucht, one of my acting teachers, once said, “We have a whole range as human beings and as actors – we get to mess around with that!”

In regular life, we are expected by ourselves and others to have a certain personality that is pretty much the same all of the time. In Process Work, we would call that a primary process or “the experiences that are better known and closer to a person’s sense of identity” (Diamond and Jones 20). If we start acting significantly

different than that, many people may think we are weird or that something is wrong. If the behavior is unusual or disturbing enough, we may appear mentally unstable. Acting, however, demands that we as actors *not* be ourselves, but rather, completely immerse ourselves in the mind, body, behavior, and life of the character we have chosen to play. From this perspective, acting says, “You must be different; you must change who you know yourself to be; you must drop who you are and be someone else for the performance to be believable.” In this way, acting demands that actors bring out their secondary process in any given moment so that the actor can believably show a completely live character on stage. Secondary processes are simply “those experiences that are further from a person’s sense of identity” (Diamond and Jones 20).

Lane Arye explained the primary and secondary processes well in his book Unintentional Music, “In process work, my sense of “me” is called the primary process and all the things that I consider to be “not-me” are called secondary processes. The primary process is defined not only by my identity but also by my awareness, by the things I do, and by my intention. That means that the things I experience as not-me are secondary, as are things that I have less awareness of, things that happen to me, and those that happen unintentionally” (33-34).

Of course there is an inherent contradiction in this belief that actors must be *different* than who they are. Is the actor really playing a different person from herself altogether or is she simply finding, employing, and show-casing other, more marginal aspects of herself? Some acting teachers insist that an actor’s task is to find the character – her behaviors, mindset, motivations, needs – inside herself, thus implying that the actor is not going through an identity change exactly. In fact, we cannot change

identity or become “someone else” entirely, because we are limited to our own selves and that we must search out these parts of ourselves and nurture them to life.

Other teachers may not even mention the concept of the actor’s own “self” much at all, but will focus more on the character’s behaviors, needs, and tactics and all the necessary practice and preparation for an earnest actor to be able to naturally and organically, without any thought, have the needed behaviors and feelings rise up in the moment they are called for in any given scene. In fact, drawing too directly from one’s own self, life, or experiences could have negative consequences: the act could fall flat on stage, or it might appear that the actor inevitably plays “herself” or a very similar kind of character in every role she takes. This is like internal typecasting, assigning yourself the same role no matter what the storyline, and never venturing very far outside of your comfort zone. While taking classes, under the guidance of this emphasis on character-building rather than self-exploration, I didn’t think much about who I was in relationship to the character, but simply tried to do as much background preparation and backstage preparation physically, mentally, and tactically as possible so that upon entering the scene, I was believable as this other person. In the chapter “The Killer” I will elaborate on some of the various techniques used in the world of acting that helped me prepare both prior to performance and backstage right before entering a scene.

Recall the quote from Uta Hagen that I use at the beginning of this paper:

If I compare myself to a large, meaty, round apple, I discover that my inner and outer cliché image of myself is only a wedge of it – possibly the wedge with the rosy cheek on the skin. But I have to become aware of myself as the total apple – the firm inner flesh as well as the brown rotten spot, the stem, the seeds, the core. All of the apple is *me*. (Hagen 25)

To me, this embodies my entire project and shows the exciting link between acting and Process Work. It says that we think of ourselves in a certain way, a limited way (via the primary process), but we are also every part of the whole of humanity, even the seemingly undesirable parts (via the secondary process). To add to the complexity, our identities are ever-changing. They are always in flux. In one moment, one aspect of us is secondary, then we shape-shift into that part, integrate it, and it becomes primary and a new identity is created. Then a new aspect is secondary to our newly formed sense of self, and we shape-shift into that part, integrate it, and the process goes on. In fact, our “selves” are more like a constantly flowing river rather than a fixed object. The river flows here and there, always changing and adapting, never staying exactly the same for more than a snapshot of a moment.

To me, this idea in acting that we as actors are constantly noticing and integrating our more marginal or secondary parts or processes in order to have a theoretically infinite range to play all kinds of characters with different lives, experiences, emotions, motivations, and personalities is the definition of deep democracy at its best, at least as it relates to deep democracy in innerwork. As Mindell explains in Leader as a Martial Artist, “Deep Democracy is our sense that the world is here to help us to become our entire selves, and that we are here to help the world to become whole” (Deep Democracy Institute).

The Deep Democracy Institute goes on to explain that:

Unlike ‘classical’ democracy, which focuses on majority rule, Deep Democracy suggests that all voices, states of awareness, and frameworks of reality are important. Deep Democracy also suggests that the information carried within these voices, levels of awareness, and frameworks is needed to understand the complete process of a system. Deep Democracy is an attitude that focuses on

the awareness of voices that are both central and marginal. [The theory and method] involves not only openness to other individuals, groups, and diverse views but an openness to experiences including feelings, dreams, body symptoms, altered states of consciousness, and synchronicities as well as an awareness of signals, roles, and the structural dynamics of the interactions between the parties involved.

Synchronistically, the Deep Democracy Institute even uses the actor as a metaphor to more clearly define the term: “Deep Democracy is the experience of a process of flow in which all actors on the stage are needed to create the play that is being watched.”

What this means is that actors who act in accordance with the principles of Deep Democracy must not only be aware of secondary processes in their own psychological identities and at the level of Dreamland, they must also be aware of flirts, subtle feelings, and impulses that arise from the Essence Level. In addition, the deeply democratic actor must also pay attention to synchronicities in the world channel and the field of the character and the actor. The possibilities are endless. In this paper, I am attempting to simply begin addressing some of the techniques that such an actor might use. Ultimately, the exploration of identity for the Process Worker actor is a vast experiment in Deep Democracy. I will begin with edgework, move on to double signals, second attention and amplification, then third attention and flirts, and end with essence work.



## Edgework

*“There is Jesus and Hitler in everybody. You can see it in ourselves and our behavior everyday. What I would tell young actors today is that it is your job to find those behaviors in yourself and bring out those behaviors to the show the audience.”*

- Richard Dreyfus, The View, October 28, 2008

Edges are intrinsic to the concept of identity. If there are no edges, there is no identity. In thinking about how Process Work compares to acting, I began asking myself the following questions: How does the concept of edgework from Process Work help in acting? How does that compare to methods of “edgework” used in the field of acting? Do actors already employ types of edgework in getting into character?

Certainly actors already have ways they “go over an edge” but they don’t call it edgework. What are they doing then? How are they using channels?

In Working on Yourself Alone, Mindell defines edges to be, “names for the experience of confinement, for the limitations in awareness, for the boundaries of your own identity” (67). Diamond and Jones define edge to mean, “a point of contact between the everyday identity and an unknown, or dreaming, experience. It is the boundary between the primary process (everyday identity) and the secondary process (emergent identity)” (126).

### ***Mindell's Levels of Reality***

Before we look further into the concepts of edges and edgework, it is important to explain what Mindell calls the three different levels of reality. First there is Consensus Reality (CR) which consists of what we consider everyday reality where we experience other people, objects, and ideas in terms of space and time. The second level is called Dreamland (DL) where we are aware of night-time dreams, daytime fantasies, figures, and objects that all can still be described easily in words but where the sense of normal space and time doesn't exist. In Dreamland, there still exist roles and polarities. Finally, there is the level of sentient reality, later referred to as the Essence level (EL). In this level, we notice very deep experiences, feelings, and impulses that are typically disregarded by our waking state and have not yet been expressed as images, sounds, or sensations. It is quite difficult to describe these experiences in words and there is no sense of space or time and polarities no longer exist (Dreaming While Awake 34-35).

Edges are experiences within one or more channels. They are not locations in any particular level. Channels are central to the concept of edges because all process information arrives via channels. "Channels are signal vehicles, which convey intended and unintended communication" (Diamond and Jones 64). In the study of Process Work, channels are considered to be the following: proprioception, movement, visual, auditory, relationship, and world. Simply speaking, an edge occurs when information switches from one channel to another. This means that the information coming to you in one form is too difficult for your primary process (usual identity) to accept, so its information remains the same, but it changes channels and emerges elsewhere in a different form.

The relationship between edges, channels, and levels in terms of acting techniques is as such: An actor comes to an edge within a given channel. The technique she employs to work at that edge will be located in one of the three levels.

There are many different ways Process Workers work at the edge or practice “edgework.” Some more psychological techniques in the Dreamland level include imagining a dream figure who could go over the edge, simply encouraging the person, negotiating the edge with the primary process, “forbidding” the experience by acting like the critic who comes up at the edge, or consciously switching channels to visualize or hear yourself going over the edge. Tunneling under the edge by following a direction or subtle hand movement is a technique derived from the Essence level (Diamond and Jones 134 & 144; Mindell, Working on Yourself Alone 68).

### ***Existing Methods of Edgework in the Acting Profession***

Actors already employ various techniques to go over edges. I argue though, that many of these techniques, to a large extent, are employed in the Consensus Reality (CR) level; they are objective and measurable and exercised in the outer world rather than more “psychological” or more “shapeshifting” methods used in Process Work that are invisible and ephemeral and exercised in the internal world of the actor’s psyche and spirit.<sup>2</sup>

Marisa Tomei in The Wrestler hung out at strip clubs in New York and L.A. to become comfortable in that arena. She got to know the strippers and was trained by two of them on how to pole dance (Leno). To break down the channels, she begins in the strip club (world channel), gets to know the strippers (relationship channel) who

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<sup>2</sup> For more definition and discussion of “shapeshifting” please refer to the next chapter titled “The Killer.”

teach her how to pole dance (movement channel). These techniques exist at the CR level because they are all observable in the outer world. You can literally go to the strip club, meet the actual strippers, and be taught how to dance using the pole.

In another example, Forest Whitaker who played Idi Amin in The Last King of Scotland spent months in Uganda meeting Amin's relatives and those who were close to him, as well as many of the Ugandan people, to get a sense of both the strong love and the fierce hatred for the controversial leader. Whitaker explains,

I met his brother and sister and people from the region where he was from. I spent quite a bit of time talking to them and they told me stories of what he was like when he was growing up. I think it was just as important to be in the place he was from, to feel the land and the air and to watch the people. (Indie London)

Whitaker also studied the history of Uganda during the time Amin was in power to understand the context of this man's life: "I did all my really deep research trying to understand the motivations of Idi Amin himself" (Indie London). Like Tomei, Whitaker also uses the world channel (traveling to Uganda and studying history) and then relationship channel (getting to know Amin's relatives) as a means of edgework. Again, Whitaker uses real-life research of facts about his character, interviews real people, and visits the land itself which all exist in CR. In addition, however, we may guess that Whitaker might have also used a kind of spirit-based or earth-based internal edgework to help inhabit Amin's character as he felt the land and air of Uganda.

Similar to Whitaker, the actor Dustin Hoffman spent time hanging out with autistic people for his role as Raymond Babbit in Rainman. Here is an excerpt from an interview with Hoffman about his preparation:

Interviewer: "You worked it up in consultation with real-life autistic men, didn't you? Including two brothers - just as the movie portrayed."

Hoffman: "I introduced Barry [the director] to three autistic guys that I thought could be used as prototypes, and I wasn't sure which one it should be. And he did not prefer the guy I preferred because the rhythm was too slow. He says, "This other guy has a very fast rhythm," and he wound up being the prototype - he and his brother, who was not unlike Tom Cruise, very handsome, a college football star. We got a lot of help from him. I'd call every day and read the scene to him. And he'd say, "My brother would never say, 'I know how to drive.' He would say, 'I'm an excellent driver.'" He was a gold mine." (Total Film)

In a message Hoffman recorded for the Rainman Fund (a part of the National Autistic Society), he explained,

In order to prepare myself for the role of Raymond Babbit, I studied and researched the plight of those who are autistic for approximately two years. I came to know what it's like to be isolated from society, to be removed from the warmth and affection of family and friends, to be incapable of looking at, talking to, sharing any kind of relationship. (Boxxet)

In terms of channels, Hoffman clearly employs the relationship channel in his getting to know the intimate lives of autistic people. He even studies how autistic people are affected by their relationships. In addition, he studies details about speech, playing with rhythm and speed (auditory channel) as a way of working with the edge.

Hoffman's study of the "plight of autistic people" is a CR method of edgework where he studies the very real social history and isolation of those with autism. However, Hoffman's studies of what Process Workers would call the "signals" of autistic people (speed and rhythm of speech) could be argued as Dreamland edgework. In a way the unusual speed and rhythm of their speech are double signals that Hoffman is noticing and then amplifying in himself. On the other hand, one could argue that he is simply observing these signals in real people and attempting to imitate them which is more Consensus Reality-based than Dreamland. In Dreamland, Hoffman would more likely be noticing his own unusual or unintended signals rather than just copying

someone else's. I will discuss double signals and amplification much more extensively in a later chapter.

Actor Mickey Rourke used the proprioceptive channel to do edgework for his character in The Wrestler. He spent seven months in the gym lifting weights and putting on thirty pounds of muscle in order to play the role(Smiley). You could say that he had an edge to having a bigger body and crossed this edge by pumping iron. Again, in this example, Rourke is going over an edge in the proprioceptive channel within Consensus Reality – ie. most of us would agree that he “looks bigger and has more muscle.” Conversely, if he were to work on this edge in the Dreamland level, he might feel inside what it would be like for him to be a “wrestler” in order to inhabit this role from the inside-out. At the Essence Level, he might feel down deeply into the subtle feeling that comes before flexing a muscle, for instance, and let that experience move him.<sup>3</sup>

### ***My Own Edgework***

Acting for me has been largely about internal edgework. If acting were only based on “skills” of memorizing lines, doing character research, identifying needs and actions, doing prep work backstage, and talking to your scene partner, it would simply be a series of steps that take practice to master.

Although all of those steps are required, and a certain “practice, practice, practice” attitude is essential, the real obstacles for me come largely around my own edges. These edges of various kinds, and at various stages in the process, are what

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<sup>3</sup> For more discussion and examples of this kind of essence work, please refer to the chapter titled “Essence Work.”

makes acting difficult and psychologically challenging. It also makes me think – that’s why not all actors are “good” and not all performances “successful.”

Over the course of nearly three years of taking acting classes, I discovered many different types and levels of personal edges associated with acting. Here are a few:

- To think like my character.
- To relate directly, in the moment, to other actors on stage including: looking at them in their eyes and connecting with them, making necessary physical contact, yelling at or fighting with the other actor in character.
- To move while speaking on stage.
- To identify with my character, find their qualities inside myself.
- To empathize with my character and find out how they are likable and sympathetic.
- To believe that I have the ability to act well.
- To adequately prepare backstage – to think like the character, physically prepare, and talk out loud to myself – and not just wing it.
- To transform into the world of the character which means not being “myself” – not identifying as “Lisa” in the moment of acting which makes me self-conscious.

One method Arlene Audergon employs in her Process Acting work, is to help actors work with unintended signals of their characters. However, in some instances, actors meet up with their own personal edges that momentarily prevent them from “picking up” these double signals. She explains, “At other times, to achieve a genuine performance, we needed to work with the actor’s “edge,” or unconscious belief system, which conflicted with the qualities that emerged from unintended signals” (66).

Sometimes, the character may be free to express an emotion such as despair or rage, but the actor herself had an edge to it or an “unconscious value system which did not permit showing such intense emotions” (66). Audergon explains further, “In these cases, the actor needed to process his or her internal conflicts around these emotions in order to play the part as written. Playing these characters provided a route over the actor’s personal edge, leading to personal as well as artistic growth” (66).

In this exact spirit, I explain in more detail in the next chapter, how I worked with my own edge to be more like a “killer” for a character I played in the play Closer. The character, Anna, although conflicted inside, certainly had a “killer” in her – a cold, annihilating ability to cut off another. It was I who had a belief system that it is not okay to act so insensitively to another person. I was faced with my own edge.

## The Killer

*“It’s either life or theater. It’s either life or being killed every night, murdered, slain, devoured, miserable, dedicated, dedicated, and that’s the life of the actor. Because it is not glamour, it is not money. It is serving the play and the public and giving everything to art. That is the theater.”*

- Stella Adler, actress and teacher, to her class, from You Tube

To illustrate how I used Process Work to help go over a major edge in my acting scene and inhabit a different, very secondary part of my identity, I remember my character in the play Closer by Patrick Marber. I performed the scene in front of our class with my scene partner, Fred. After our first run through, my acting teacher, Devon Allen, said it was well done and gave many specific notes (critique) about what went well and what could be developed more. The main note for me was how my character, Anna, is more of a “killer” than I was playing her to be. Anna was not only no longer interested in her husband, Larry, and wanting out of the relationship; she was in fact particularly cold and cutting, especially in this scene, in which she was calculating exactly how and at what moment she would leave him and exit their apartment. Devon told me that I needed to find the “killer” in me, as this probably didn’t come naturally for me, so I would need to work at it to show this aspect of the character congruently.

At the time that I was in the scene, which was about one year ago from writing this chapter, I brought this edgework to my therapy session and asked for help in embodying this “killer” quality. In short, my therapist encouraged me to think of someone who is like a killer, describe them and how they are like that, then go inside and feel that quality. Next she instructed me to make a hand motion that resonated with that quality and then make my face, eyes, lips, jaw, body, stance, and mind like that motion. I found the killer!

The results were much more than I had even hoped. My teacher and the class found our scene totally engrossing and real. They said they wished they could have watched the entire play, it was so good and they were really lost in the world of these two characters. My teacher at least twice said to me in private, “Well done. Really. Well done.” It was rare to hear such an unqualified compliment from her.

However, before I began writing this chapter, I was experiencing quite a fierce internal debate about getting this experience down on paper. The debate was so strong that it prevented me from writing anything at all about this “killer” process and instead I had to do my own innerwork before I could proceed with writing.

The internal argument went like this – one part said, “You can’t simply describe in generic terms how you worked on finding the killer in yourself, you must re-experience it first! This way, you can write from a more congruent and detailed place.” The other part said, “No! I just need to get it down on paper. I already experienced it once when I needed it – when I was in the class and needed it for my scene. Now I don’t need to re-experience it, I just need to write about it and I don’t need to re-experience it to do that!”

This debate went on back and forth, flip-flopping to seemingly no end. It was a big messy fight! As it seemed to be getting nowhere in the verbal channel through role play, I switched to the visual channel and things instantly got juicier. The figures kept yelling at each other back and forth – “You must do it!” and the other squealed back “No, I won’t! You can’t make me do it!” There they were, really going at each other – the first part (the one that said I must re-experience the killer energy) had a big machete and then organically entered the movement channel and was slicing and jabbing it in the air towards the second part (the one that said I should just write about it). The one part began striking the second part, drawing blood, then began chopping off limbs; the whole scene became a bloody mess, a battle, a bloodbath, in my imagination. Finally, there was one last big swoop of the blade, one last cut, and the head was chopped off the second part – Dead.

The first part responds, while holding the bloody machete, “Now let’s get that on paper!”

Now back to consensus reality (ie. everyday life). There I am, standing with a wide grin across my face, my spirit joyous, and my blood racing. I have a realization – another voice enters in. This time it is the spirit of one of my study committee members, Caroline Spark, who I hear saying to me, “Yes, you’re doing it! This is it!” And I realize that “she” is speaking to a more primary part of me that thinks I am not there yet, that this is not the “real thing,” that I am now only ready to re-experience how I became the killer the first time around.

How amazing, I think! My primary process still clearly thinks that this was not “the” work of becoming the killer, this was only preliminary. But clearly, now on the

other side, I see that I just became, picked up, integrated the killer in my innerwork over writing the chapter. It is so obvious that I became the killer in my internal dynamic over whether or not I need to re-experience it. Ironically, the act of killing the voice that says I need only to write it was the organic way that I became the killer. Meaning, this was “the” process or the actual way that I needed to become the killer. I could not (and therefore it was not my process or “way”) to just abide by the rule that I needed to re-experience it to write about it. This part suggested itself a “right” way to become a killer – to go through the motions again, step by step, in a rote fashion, to go over my edge. It says this is the correct and only correct way. Another part of me had to put up a fight about it. It refused to go along with this program. It wouldn’t go down without resisting, yelling, screaming “No! No! No!” I actually needed this fierce resistance to enlist my inner killer!

In fact, the voice of the “Caroline” dream figure is regularly absent from my internal experience. The usual voice says that I am never really “doing it” whatever “it” happens to be in the moment. For example, it might say that I’m not doing Process Work yet in my role as a therapist – it regularly thinks I do other things okay such as make relationship with clients, make a loving safe space, and occasionally say some intelligent things, but it is convinced that none of this is really Process Work. Process Work looks like unfolding signals, amplifying experiences, transforming secondary processes, finding dream figures, and integrating, but if I’m not doing all the kinds of classic Process Work techniques then I am not doing Process Work.

Or the voice says that I’m not really writing yet. It thinks that if I have pages down that are just notes but are not in complete thoughts or written out sentences,

then they don't count as real writing. The voice also tells me that my work with clients through my internship is not really working with clients yet because I'm not making money and I don't have my own private practice. It says that people aren't coming to me because of me, they are coming to the clinic and I am simply getting assigned to them. Or that I am not really an artist yet – I have creative ideas and impulses, but until I really produce significant quantities of any one medium (photography, painting, weaving, sewing) and preferably actually sell some pieces, then I am not really an artist. If I'm still working a "day job" and trying to fit in art on the side, then that also makes me not an artist yet.

As you can see, these kinds of examples are pervasive. My inner experience, which I believe stems from beliefs in my family system, downplays more marginal and financially risky, or seemingly non-lucrative endeavors, as not really "it." If I were an artist who sold my art and made a living, then I would be considered an artist. So money has a lot to do with it. And the product has a lot to do with it – this downing figure thinks that an artist is defined by what she produces and sells, not by what she is inclined to do, moved to do, or how she lives her life.

In the greater scheme of things, I need the killer dream figure to help me not only for my work as an actor in a role that demands this energy, but also to address this internal "downplayer" or "minimizer" – this emotionally stingy and undermining character that crushes my dreams before they can even express themselves. I need the killer to kill off this creature so that I can believe in myself, what I am doing, and the process by which I grow as an actor, as a therapist, as an artist, as an individuating person.

As Stella Adler said so dramatically in a video on youtube.com:

It's either life or theater. It's either life or being killed every night, murdered, slain, devoured, miserable, dedicated, dedicated, and that's the life of the actor. Because it is not glamour, it is not money. It is serving the play and the public and giving everything to art. That is the theater.

The actor has to die into each role she or he plays. Of course, the killer is needed – it is an essential metaskill for being a good actor.<sup>4</sup> In a sense it is a foundational metaskill as the actor must kill herself over and over to become a new character, much like what a Process Work practitioner is required to do constantly. It is a practice in gaining fluidity.

In any case, I certainly need the killer to be an actor. When I have ever been successful in a role in one of my classroom scene studies, it is because I became a different person; I created something new. As I explained earlier on, yes, it is all me, however, on a basic level, I can trick my psychology into believing that I am “playing” someone else and in the process, kill off my own self, allowing me to unselfconsciously be another person who may seem very different from my normal public persona or my primary process.

This is similar to the experience of shapeshifting used by shamans to shift their identity from a human being into a dream figure such as a spirit or animal. In Dreaming While Awake, Mindell explains:

Shapeshifting involves letting go of your human form and becoming the sensation, object, demon, or animal that you have seen in a vision. Acting out a figure from one of your dreams in an authentic manner, truly feeling and moving like that figure, is a method of shapeshifting. (104)

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<sup>4</sup> The term “metaskill” was created by Amy Mindell who wrote the book “Metaskills: The Spiritual Art of Therapy.” Metaskills are the “deep spiritual attitudes and beliefs that manifest in therapy and in everyday life” (15). See the chapter in this paper titled “Life vs. Acting: Having a Metaposition” for more discussion on metaskills and specifically, the metaskill of acting.

In this way I am like a shaman when I shapeshift from my primary identity into the dream figure of the killer.

### ***Character and Scene Preparation***

Now that I've explained my process in Dreamland of integrating the "killer" in my preparation for the scene, I return to Consensus Reality to lay out my personal notes for the scene and finally, include the scene itself. The following are actual notes from my scene preparation for the character of Anna in Closer.

Gather given circumstances

Who is Anna? What do we know about her? (written as if it were me)

- I'm a woman from the country
- Currently living in London in the 1990's
- I was married before, no kids, husband left me for someone younger, he was a wall street man
- I'm a professional photographer, shoot portraits
- I met Dan first (before Larry- my current husband) at my studio to take his picture – he wrote a book that kept me up until 4am – raunchy – about Alice
- We kissed and he wants to keep seeing me

6 mos. later, January

- Met Alice in a café to look at her photos
- Next day, my birthday, I met Larry at the aquarium (Dan wrote a book titled "Aquarium" and I took his photo for the book)

June, 5 mos. later, art opening

- Been with Larry for 4 mos. now
- Dan says Larry will bore me & instead he wants to marry me and go away with him for the weekend
- Haven't seen Dan for one year

June 1 year later

- I've been seeing Dan since the opening
- Got married to Larry recently
- Larry is back from a Dermatology conference in NY
- I've just bathed & am dressed – said I needed to get milk
- Larry showers, returns wearing bathrobe

Once I established the given circumstances, I needed to make certain decisions (unless the playwright tells you exactly what you are doing or holding or wearing). For the scene I performed in, I decided to walk in with a glass of scotch in my hand (actually apple juice) because I thought she might drink scotch – she’s upper-class enough to drink scotch and she’s depressed and desperate enough inside that scotch is strong enough to take the edge off and numb her feelings some. She sits down on the couch in their living room. There is a shoebox with shoes exposed on her right. These are the shoes that her husband brought home for her in the previous scene. She has a postcard of Alice on the coffee table in front of her – also mentioned in the previous scene – it is a photo advertisement of her gallery showing in NYC. There is a blanket to the left of her on the couch.

Here are more specific notes I made on how to prepare myself backstage and how to enter for a practice pretend scene that I did in preparation for the actual scene from the play. This pretend scene was used to help me get more into character, feel the character’s mood, and the atmosphere of the upcoming real scene.

Actions:

- Enter scene with glass of scotch in hand, take a sip
- Look at photo of Alice & turn it over on the table
- Hold head in agony & memory
- Lie on couch
- Notice smell of blanket – remember Dan
- Pick up blanket & take it with me – exit scene

Inner Monologue:

- Oh my god, how am I going to tell Larry? Should I tell him?
- Oh my god, I can’t. He’ll kill me.
- Oh shit, I just fucked Dan.
- Can he tell that I did?
- No, how would he be able to tell?
- How could he know?

Physical prep:

- Smell something of Dan's
- Think of having sex with him

Costume: fashionable, design-minded, upper class look

- brown boots
- jeans
- big brown sweater
- dangling silver earrings
- lipstick, but no other make-up
- hair down

### ***The Scene***

Now here is the scene that I performed with my scene partner. You may want to read it through two or three times to get a clear sense of what's happening as reading a script can be more awkward and cumbersome than a novel. Beware: the language is very "adult" in nature – lots of swearing with graphic sexual language. Most of the information in italics is directions to the actors, except for those italicized words that are clearly meant to place emphasis on certain words in the dialogue.

*Larry enters. He is wearing trousers and the black cashmere seen in Scene Five.*

**Anna** Why are you dressed?

**Larry** Because I think you might be about to leave me and I didn't want to be wearing a dressing gown.

I slept with someone in New York.

A whore.

I'm sorry.

Please don't leave me.

*Beat*

**Anna** Why?

**Larry** For sex. I wanted sex. (I wore a condom).

*Beat*

**Anna** Was it...good?

Larry huffs and puffs.

**Larry** ...Yes...

**Anna** 'Paramount' whore?

**Larry** No...Forty...something street.

**Anna** Where did you go?

**Larry** Her place.

**Anna** Nice?

**Larry** Not as nice as ours. I'm really sorry.

*Pause*

**Anna** Why did you tell me?

**Larry** I couldn't lie to you.

**Anna** Why not?

**Larry** Because I love you.

*Pause*

**Anna** It's fine.

**Larry** Really? Why?

Anna looks at her shoes.

**Anna** Guilt present?

**Larry** Love present. Something's wrong...Anna...

Anna turns to him.

Are you leaving me?

Anna nods.

Why?

**Anna** Dan.

*Beat*

**Larry** 'Cupid'? He's our *joke*.

**Anna** I love him.

*Pause*

**Larry** You're seeing him now...

**Anna** Yes.

**Larry** Since when?

**Anna** Since my opening, last year. I'm disgusting.

*Beat*

**Larry** You're *phenomenal*...you're so...clever.

Why did you marry me?

**Anna** I stopped seeing him, I wanted us to work.

**Larry** (*tough*) Why did you tell me you wanted children?

**Anna** Because I did.

**Larry** And now you want children with him?

**Anna** Yes – I don't know – I'm so sorry.

*Pause*

**Larry** Why?

*Beat*

**Anna** I need him.

*Silence*

**Larry** But...we're happy...aren't we?

**Anna** Yes.

*Beat*

**Larry** Are you going to live with him?

**Anna** Yes. You stay here, if you want to.

**Larry** I don't give a FUCK about 'the spoils.'

You did this the day we met; let me *hang* myself for your amusement.  
Why didn't you tell me the second I walked in the door?

**Anna** I was scared.

**Larry** Because you're a coward. You spoilt bitch.

Are you dressed because you thought I might hit you?

*Larry moves towards Anna, slowly.*

*(close)* What do you think I *am*?

**Anna** I've been hit before.

**Larry** Not by me.

*Larry stands over Anna.*

Is he a good fuck?

**Anna** Don't do this.

**Larry** Just answer the question. Is he *good*?

*Beat*

**Anna** Yes.

**Larry** Better than me?

**Anna** Different.

**Larry** Better?

**Anna** Gentler.

**Larry** What does that mean?

**Anna** You know what it means.

**Larry** *Tell me.*

**Anna** No.

**Larry** I treat you like a whore?

**Anna** Sometimes.

**Larry** Why would that be?

*Silence*

**Anna** I'm sorry, you're –

**Larry** Don't say it, don't fucking say, 'You're too good for me.' I *am* – but don't say it.

Larry *kneels to her*.

*(gently)* Anna, you're making the mistake of your life. You're leaving me because you think you don't deserve happiness, but you do, Anna, you do...

Larry *looks at her*.

Did you have a bath because you had sex with him?

Anna *looks at him. He moves away from her*.

So you didn't smell of him? So you'd feel less guilty?

And how do you feel?

**Anna** Guilty.

*Beat*

**Larry** Did you *ever* love me?

**Anna** Yes.

**Larry** Big fucking deal.

*Silence. Larry breaks down.*

**Anna**...please, don't leave me...*please*.

*Anna holds Larry.*

Did you do it here?

**Anna** No.

**Larry** Why not?

*Larry breaks from her.*

*(hard)* Just tell me the truth.

*Beat*

**Anna** Yes, we did it here?

**Larry** Where?

*Beat*

**Anna** Here.

**Larry** On this?

*He gestures to the chaise-lounge.*

We had our first fuck on this.

Think of *me*?

When?

When did you do it here?

ANSWER THE FUCKING QUESTION.

*Beat*

**Anna** (*scared*) This evening.

*Pause*

**Larry** Did you come?

**Anna** Why are you doing this?

**Larry** Because I want to know.

*Beat*

**Anna** (*softly*) Yes...I came.

**Larry** How many times?

**Anna** Twice.

**Larry** How?

**Anna** First he went down on me and then we fucked.

*Beat*

**Larry** Who was where?

**Anna** (*tough*) I was on top and then he fucked me from behind.

**Larry** And that's when you came the second time?

**Anna** Why is the sex so important?

**Larry** BECAUSE I'M A FUCKING CAVEMAN.

Did you touch yourself while he fucked you?

**Anna** Yes.

**Larry** You wank for him?

**Anna** Sometimes.

**Larry** And he does?

**Anna** We do everything that people who have sex do.

**Larry** You enjoy sucking him off?

**Anna** Yes.

**Larry** You like his cock?

**Anna** I love it.

**Larry** You like him coming in your face?

**Anna** Yes.

**Larry** What does it taste like?

**Anna** It tastes like you but sweeter.

**Larry** THAT'S the spirit. Thank you. Thank you for your honesty.  
Now fuck off and die. You fucked-up slag.

*Blackout.*

\*\*\*\*\*

If your personality is anything like mine, you can see how challenging it could be play Anna congruently! She flows from being strategic and premeditated, to intimidated and fearful, to pleading and self-deprecating, and finally to cold and cutting. That is a complex set of emotions, needs, and behaviors to inhabit within minutes. I found it necessary to feel the underlying killer energy in her to make the transition between experiences have a believable overall feel, making her appear just like a real live person rather than a piecing together of various individual parts.

Although edgework is the main Process-oriented technique I use in my acting preparation, there are several other extremely useful methods one can practice. Next, I focus on amplifying double signals and incorporating flickering signals as additional ways to round-out a character.



## Double Signals, Amplification, and Flirts

*“Whatever happens unintentionally – what disturbs you or ruins your best plans – can, if followed, turn into a thing of great value and meaning. When something unexpected or disturbing happens, this signals the appearance of Nature, of the Tao, of Spirit, of God....Mindell calls it the dreaming process.”*

- Lane Arye, Unintentional Music, 5

In the previous three chapters, I explored the concept of identity, the edge, and one specific edge of my own to a secondary process called “the killer.” Edgework is one way actors can deepen their character and create a more congruent and interesting performance. Besides doing edgework, an actor can notice her double signals using her second attention and amplify those signals. She can also use her third attention to notice “flirts” or flickering signals as a way to access a previously unknown feeling atmosphere or energetic quality that rises up from the Essence level. Both of these methods can aid the actor in enhancing her performance. In this chapter, I explain in detail these two methods and provide some examples to help the reader better understand them.

## ***Double Signals***

Double signals are the unintended gestures, tones, and other signs that point directly to a secondary process. They can occur in any channel. Arlene Audergon explains:

People frequently communicate incongruently; we send two sets of signals. One set of signals is intended, carrying a message that goes along with our identity. [We] also send another set of unintended signals carrying a message that does not conform to this identity. (64)

An actor first must notice her character's intended and unintended signals.

Audergon goes on to say:

An actor must know much more about a character's inner conflicts than the character does. A character may be very sweet and know nothing of the anger she holds back, which sneaks out in the tone or rhythm of her voice, in body tensions or gestures. The actor studies the character and play, explores the character's motivations and feelings and produces the character's intended and unintended communication. (64)

The actor, however, has the double-task of noticing not only her character's double signals, but also her own. It is arguably easier as a director than as an actor to notice the actor's double signals because they are often observable from the outside by the eye or ear but by their very nature, unconscious to the actor herself. An outside eye may notice an unintended movement for example of which the actor is completely unaware.

Even Stanislavski had experiences of what Process Work calls double signals. He wrote about it in Art Notes, "There is some creative power – unprepared, spontaneous movements and alterations of tone that I sometimes introduce impromptu into the performance itself" (Cole and Chinoy 488).

In Process Acting, Audergon works with actors on both their character's intended and unintended (double) signals as well as those of the actor. The actor's double signals are, according to Audergon, "the signals which most disturb us in a poor performance and which can lead to the depth and refinement of a great performance" (64). It is useful to notice or "pick up" double signals because it expands the actor's repertoire of experience and identity. The actor is best when she can draw from the largest possible range of experiences and expressions.

In my example of the "killer" energy in the character Anna in Closer, there was no visible double signal from the outside except in the signal's absence. The killer was a ghost. In a sense, it was a role in the field of the play that was not being represented. Since I was already consciously aware of my desire to pick up the secondary "killer" process, the act of finding the signal was not so much the issue; the issue was my own edge to inhabit this energy.

The relationship between double signals and edges are that the former arise to indicate the presence of the secondary process. Then you amplify the double signal in the channel that it's in. Eventually, you will hit an edge in that channel. At this point, you would do edgework to explore how to inhabit this new energy. Thus, the "killer" energy was quickly acknowledged as missing by my teacher (the absent double signal). I already had an edge to being a killer even before attempting to inhabit this energy. Therefore, my approach was to go straight to edgework. Now I will go on to discuss how to notice and amplify double signals as an actor in training.

## ***Second Attention and Amplification***

As an actor, you can use your second attention to pick up your double signals or secondary process in the moment. These are not written in the script. They are improvised on the spot by using your second attention to pay attention to things that happen just outside our normal awareness. Second attention is the awareness of “unintended, often irrational experiences that are ignored by our first attention” which perceives only consensus reality (Diamond and Jones 23). One way an actor can find a double signal in her character is to ask herself, “What’s almost happening here?” or “What’s not happening here?” For example, if the character is predominantly “tight” or “held in,” the missing part is something that “lets out” (Rhea, February 16, 2009).

By paying closer attention to the unintended movements, gestures, body postures, and speech patterns, an actor can amplify and unfold these strange signals and add more dimension to the character. These additions make your character more well-rounded and fully human. They allow the audience to fully believe in the scene and people in front of them and it makes it all more interesting.

Amplification is the act of doing more of what you’re already doing. That is the simple definition, however, it takes some awareness to notice the subtleties of what you’re doing and which parts to amplify and how far to go. To make the most out of the amplification of double signals, you can use your entire body to express yourself in your character. Use your eyes, eyebrows, wrists, ankles, knees, fingers - every part of your body (Rhea, February 16, 2009).

Process Work employs various techniques for amplifying experience. As an actor, you can work in the movement channel just as a therapist might. You can work with

altering the speed of a movement (faster or slower or more methodical), you can work with the dynamic of the energy (more flowing, cutting, robotic, like thunder, etc.). You can also work with the direction of a movement which in the acting world would affect your blocking or position and location on stage. Finally, you can simply make the movement bigger or smaller (Rhea, February 16, 2009).

With voice, you can affect the speed of the voice making it faster or slower or use emphasis on certain words over others. Actors already make choices about which words to emphasize and decide on rhythms to use. For example, in a scene with a married couple who have known each other for years, the rhythm of the exchange will be faster, like a game of ping pong, than the communication between two people who have just met, who would most likely speak slower in their exchange and be more conscious of their words, as they would be less comfortable with one another, not yet having a rapport together.

The eyes too can be amplified by making them look more drowsy, dead, open, or alive, to give a few examples. Every eye and eyebrow movement, along with facial expression, can significantly affect the communication of the words spoken as well as the affect they have on the audience. Is the person “dead serious,” surprised, exhausted, or excited? The eyes and face can provide a lot of congruency and added energy to make spoken lines come off with more aliveness and impact. The more amplification techniques you are aware of, the more choices you have as an actor (Rhea, February 16, 2009).

I played with amplifying a double signal in some work with Rhea. While previously working on the pain in my back symptom, I found a figure that stands up,

with one foot slightly in front of the other, in a strong upright posture, with arm and finger pointing out and says, “Don’t fuck with me! Tell it to me straight.” (I talk more about this particular process in the chapter titled “Playing the Part in Life.”)

In this case, I had already picked up the double signal in my back symptom which could be described as being very direct and threatening, more than I would normally be in my primary process. Amplification of this would involve becoming even more congruent with my entire body, my language, my eyes, with every bit of me. As an actor, I communicate with my body and my voice – these are my tools.

I spoke the words again, but this time I slowed down my speech as a type of amplification. Standing the same, pointing out with my arm and finger, I said, “Don’t....FUCK...with ME!” This version certainly had a stronger energetic impact.

Next, I tried to focus my eyes more intensely, feel the forward power coming through my body, through my arm, and out my finger. I kept the slower speed of speaking, but allowed my voice to become even more intense to match my body, “DON’T...FUCK... with ME!” Pow! This one was a direct hit. Rhea could really feel this one, it gave her the chills. This version was not necessarily more believable than the earlier versions, but it gave a much more powerful and intense experience for the “audience” which makes a character and a play all the more interesting.

### ***Third Attention and Flirts***

Now that we’ve explored double signals, amplification and the use of second attention, let’s move on to the use of third attention and noticing what Process Workers call “flirts.” We’ll start with an example: Let’s say your character is looking to the right and talking about this or that and then suddenly you as the actor notice a flickering

image of a bird outside the kitchen window on the set. Actually there is no bird there, just a piece of the set construction, but for a moment, you believe that a bird is there.

The type of awareness that noticed the flickering image of the “bird” is called third attention. Third attention is “an unfocused awareness that is attracted by barely noticeable dreaming signals” (Diamond and Jones 109). That flickering image of the “bird” is the flirt. Flirts come in all the channels: visual, auditory, proprioception, movement, relationship, and world. In The Dreaming Source of Creativity, Amy Mindell defines flirts to be “quick, evanescent, nonverbal sensations, visual flickers, moods, and hunches that suddenly catch our attention” (24). Useful descriptions of the various kinds of flirts can also be found in A Path Made by Walking on page 108. For my next example, I will use a description from Diamond and Jones of visual flirts to help illustrate my point. “Visual flirts are fleeting images, quick fantasies, shapes, colors, textures, or hues that catch one’s attention for a fraction of a moment” (108).

As an actor, a flirt may catch your attention unexpectedly, and is certainly unplanned in the script. You let your eyes look at it and lose yourself for a moment, and then rejoin the conversation. If this works for the scene and for your relationship with the other actor, allow yourself to notice strange things, feel their atmospheres or energetic qualities, and allow them to move you. Maybe you take a moment and imagine what the bird would do. You imagine that it sits quietly on its nest caring for its young and the feeling atmosphere this creates is one of needing protection for something vulnerable. Or maybe you imagine the bird is about to take flight and you feel this energetic quality as a sense of a new beginning or freedom for your character.

Let your imagination take you. Integrate the fantasy into your experience of your character in the scene and see how it affects your interaction with the other character.

Another example would be if you look outside that same window and at the same time notice a subtle change in temperature. Maybe it is because you had a flicker of a snow or rainstorm outside. Whatever the reason, your body registers the temperature change proprioceptively. Allow yourself to shiver even if it is not part of the script. Real live moments like these add roundness to the character and general believability that this is a real “person” in the play.

Now that we’ve explored Process Work techniques in the level of Dreamland (double signals) and arising from the Essence level to Dreamland (flirts), let’s venture further down into the essence for more hints on how to enhance your performance of your character using your third attention.

## Essence Work

*In the level of sentient essence, “you notice deep experiences, normally disregarded feelings and sensations that have not yet expressed themselves in terms of meaningful images, sounds, and sensations. These disregarded or marginalized feelings are sentient, that is, preverbal, feelings and sensations.”*

- Arnold Mindell in Dreaming While Awake, 34-35

In my first acting class at Portland Center Stage Greenhouse School of Theater taught by Mike O’Connell, an acting teacher and award winning actor in the local Third Rail Repertory Theatre, we were given a very simple exercise where we had to do the following:

1. Open door, enter room
2. Close door
3. Turn to hang up coat
4. Hang up coat
5. Turn to see chair
6. Move to chair
7. Sit in chair
8. Look straight ahead
9. Turn head to left, center, right, center

That’s all. That was all we physically had to do. We could not omit any of these actions, nor add any others. However, we did have to come up with our own unique given circumstances or story about where we were, why we were there, what was happening in the moment and why. And we had to convey this through our body and

facial expression and atmosphere, from the inside out, to make the audience feel as much as possible what was really happening. After watching each of our exercises, the class members would be guessing the story just shown in front of them.

My story: My boyfriend and I got into a fight this morning and he said that it's all over between us. I am returning home from work, feeling sad and alone. I sit down, emotionally exhausted, still very disturbed by our fight and wondering if our relationship is truly over. I look center, imagining our fight in my mind's eye. I come back to the present, look left to the telephone on a side table and wonder – should I call him? I look center, thinking – what should I do? Where would he be right now? I look right to the door – should I go to his apartment to talk to him?

I identify my need as: to get my boyfriend back.

Because there are no words to say or other characters to interact with in the scene, my body posture, movements, facial expressions and internal atmosphere are all essential to communicating my story and my need to the audience. I decided that essence work could help underline my experiences, show emotional need, and provide an interesting visual and atmospheric palette from which my character's actions are painted.

Remember that in the Essence level, we notice very deep experiences, feelings, and impulses that are typically disregarded by our waking state and have not yet been expressed as images, sounds, or sensations. It is quite difficult to describe these experiences in words and there is no sense of space or time and polarities no longer exist (Dreaming While Awake 34-35). This third level, the Essence level, is where we can use our third attention to unfold an experience.

In A Path Made by Walking, Julie Diamond and Lee Jones discuss unfolding flickering signals backward to their sentient root (essence) or to the “dreaming tendency that gives rise to them” (109). Using your third attention, you can feel into the essential quality of the experience and then show it in a hand movement or gesture.

I recalled the story of my scene again in my mind and immediately I felt a deep hollowness and despair inside, even a shock. To get below that initial reaction, I decided to feel the need more deeply – to get my boyfriend back – and I noticed a new experience inside which was a driving motion. More particularly, it felt like a focused, single-minded forceful forward motion. I used my awareness and realized that the hollowness and despair was more primary and the focused forward motion was more secondary so I followed this feeling more closely.

I made a hand motion of a flat, firm palm, fingers together, on its side, moving in a kind of forward slice, strong and directional. I made the motion slower and smaller until there was no more motion at all and I was feeling only the tendency to make the motion. In this original energy that gives rise to the focused forward motion was “certainty.”

This became the essence of the piece and proved to be much more interesting and telling for the audience than if I had stopped at either an internal story or at the despair and hollow feeling. My classmates were able to piece together much of my story noticing both that I was sad and grieving about something, but also debating inside and planning intently about how to go about getting something. The essence work added much-needed three-dimensionality to my character’s need and actions.



## **Stage Fright: A Word about Nerves**

*“Fuck them! Who the hell are they? Who the fuck cares what they think?”*

- Devon Allen, acting teacher

Portland Center Stage Greenhouse School of Theater

As actors, sometimes our most troublesome experiences in the moment are not about working at an edge to a challenging new identity, but rather in dealing with the extreme nervousness to be on stage at all. This is commonly known as “stage fright.” In this chapter, I will explore my own process through stage fright, how I used both typical acting methods and later process-oriented role play to work with my nerves.

I typically get very nervous before I perform in a scene in class – I shake inside and out, my heart beats fast, and I sweat profusely. This seriously affects my performance including my ability to prepare backstage, to portray my needs onstage, and to relate to my scene partner. Sometimes as an audience member, you cringe in empathic embarrassment as you can see an actor’s hand shake as she lifts up a glass to her mouth or you see her face blush or you notice her voice and body are tense and tight.

One way that actors attempt to deal with nerves is to try to get rid of them. This is often done through what’s called tension and release exercises. These also are meant

to ground the actor before she performs; to get rid of the psychological and emotional remnants of the day, stop thinking, and arrive in the body, here and now. For nerves in particular, tension and release exercises can help you both relax and focus.

I, however, have had several experiences backstage, minutes prior to entrance, where I just simply could not relax my nerves away. I would lie down, go through the tension and release exercises, follow my internal monologue and physical preparation, and I would still be sweating and shaking.

“Fuck them! Who the hell are they? Who the fuck cares what they think?” This is what Devon Allen, one of my acting teachers at Portland Center Stage’s Greenhouse School of Theater told me to say back to the little voice in my ear. The little voice that assured me the audience (in this case my classmates and Devon, my teacher) was critical of my performance. It was my teacher’s very blunt suggestion as to how to speak back to my inner critic that is, in Process Work terms, projected on to the audience. Or you can think of the critic as a “ghost” in the field. There was no one saying anything critical, no one representing that role, so the role of the critic came up inside my own mind and then was projected on to the audience.

I certainly liked this idea of saying “screw you” to my inner critic but had a difficult time not caring what my classmates or my teacher thought of my work. I also knew that part of me did want to impress them or at least not look like an “idiot,” meaning not believable or boring or awkward. I also deeply cared about what my teacher thought because she has a real genius around acting (along with many, many years of practice which I tend to forget). So although this was a good suggestion and I

had some positive feedback to the idea, simply saying “fuck you” to my critic didn’t quite do it for me and I was back at square one, trying to deal with my nerves.

Devon suggested many things for me to try. One was to take even more time doing my tension and release exercises backstage so that I could become more grounded in my body, less inside my head, and more relaxed. I tried this and it still wasn’t enough.

She told me to simply say the word “release” and to take several deep breaths before entering. She suggested that when nerves are really strong, the actor needs something visceral to focus on – an image or an object that grounds you in the moment. I couldn’t come up with anything that worked in the way she suggested. Another suggestion she gave me had to do with the inner monologue used during preparation backstage. She suggested that I needed to take more time to really let the thoughts settle deep down before I enter and that the thoughts should be extremely specific. Again, no luck.

Another acting teacher of mine, Sarah Lucht says that if she thinks she is acting for herself, meaning she is trying to do her own personal best to look good, then she gets really nervous. Instead, she advises to consider that your purpose as an actor is to be true to the playwright, then to your scene partner, and then to the audience, but not to yourself. I also liked this idea, but it was more intellectual and I realized I needed something that came from my own personal experience to be strong enough to counter-act the nerves I was feeling. In fact, I had tried going the first way at least three times with no luck. Knowing the “three strikes rule” of Process Work (try an intervention three times; if it still doesn’t work then it’s probably not the process) I decided to go a

different route. I knew I needed a more process-oriented approach to somehow go “with” the nerves instead of trying to get rid of them.

I also knew that I was afraid, but of what? I asked myself. I pictured the audience of my peers and teacher looking at me with judgment – I imagined forgetting my lines or doing a poor job (either giving a boring or unbelievable performance), and experiencing them thinking critical thoughts about me. I realized role play was essential here to bring forth the ghost of the critical audience member or observer. The conversation went something like this:

**Critic/Audience:** You look like an idiot. You’re boring and totally not believable! And you’ll look completely ridiculous if you forget your lines.

**Lisa:** You’re mean! With your critical eyes, I probably will forget my lines because you’re expecting me to fail!

**Critic/Audience:** You know, you really are no good! You’ll never be any good at this. You’re no actor. You’ll never amount to anything in this field. You should stick to something you are good at.

**Lisa:** Well, I am just a beginner. I have only been practicing acting in classes for a couple years; I still know very little and have not yet had the experience as an adult of being in a production, so I don’t know all of what that entails and requires of a person.

**Critic/Audience:** What does it matter that you’re a beginner. You have no chance of being good – you’re no good now!

**Lisa:** How do you know I’m no good? What are you basing that on? I’m not a master yet and it would take years of dedication to become one. But you don’t even give me a chance of succeeding. You shut me down from the start.

**Critic/Audience:** Yes, I still think you are no good.

**Lisa:** My first acting teacher told me after seeing my last staging of my scene, “You were awesome!” and he didn’t dish out compliments like that.

My current classmates said after my scene in Closer that I was so believable that they didn’t want it to stop, they wanted to watch the whole play. And that teacher told me twice that I was very good, and she certainly didn’t dish out compliments easily.

And other people in my life seem to think I have a knack for acting.

**Critic/Audience:** I think you are just in a pipe dream! You are over-inflated.

**Lisa:** Hmm. Yes, I am dreaming. I am trying to live a dream of mine. Actually, I've always felt shut down by doubt and cynicism from the outside and the inside about my dreams in life. In fact, I haven't dreamt big enough yet. I am only just beginning. And as far as being overinflated, that has never been true of me. Actually I almost always have you around and so never feel like I am ever that great at anything. I under-value myself constantly and don't see the specialness in me or believe that I can do anything well that I really want in life.

**Critic/Audience:** Well, I don't know...I still don't think you'll be any good.

**Lisa:** I see you are less adamant now, but ultimately you are a bully to me and undermine me. You must be either a nasty jealous spirit to whom I should pay very little attention or give little value. Or perhaps you are a fierce ally who challenges me to follow my dreams as far as they go and believe in myself and feel pride in myself.

Well let me say then – I have a right to be on stage. I have just as much a right as anyone else. I am no longer going to explain myself to you or try to prove to you how hard I work. I deserve to be here. I have a right to be here; no more and no less than any other human being on this planet. Period.

**Critic/Audience:** (*silence*) I have nothing left to say. That completely stops me.

**Lisa:** We're done then.

After having this dialogue with myself, my nerves significantly dissipated during my acting scenes. As long as I could remember one phrase right before I entered and even sometimes while in the scene – “I have the right to be here” – my nervousness would subside and I felt more present and upright than ever before. This dialogue or role-play between myself and the critic shows just one example of how Process Work techniques can be used to go more deeply into the critical figure that often is the background cause for stage fright. Sometimes the process trying to happen is much stronger than all the outer techniques of relaxation and focus and we must go into the

disturbance and see what nature is expressing through us. In this case, it is an essential experience of the right to exist, the right to be here, on this planet, in this moment.

Now that we've explored at length many different process-oriented techniques for enhancing an actor's performance, in the next section we will look at how the world of acting can benefit the life of the Process Worker.

## **Act III: Acting for Process Workers**



## **Life vs. Acting: Having a Metaposition**

If I had only one word to describe the difference between life and acting, it would be “metaposition.” Arny Mindell describes the term to mean having a meta-view where, “both everyday life and dreaming are just states of consciousness, viewpoints, frameworks” (Quantum Mind 281).

Consider the “perfect” Process Worker who has a metaposition on her life, always remembering that both her Consensus Reality (CR) life and her dreaming life are both just different perspectives and that certainly her CR life is simply only one reality or state of mind, but that dreaming is also a simultaneously experienced parallel world. Now consider the similarity between the “perfect” Process Worker and the “perfect” actor. The “perfect” actor always has a metaposition on the words she says, the behaviors she makes, the movements of her bodies, her relationships with the other characters, etc. She does not simply act out of habit, she is deliberate and conscious of all her actions, carefully crafting her every mannerism, tone, and slightest movement.

Since many plays, especially what I’m calling traditional dramatic plays, are very close to real life in their look and feel (in exaggerated form), acting has a special kind of contribution to make to the life of the actor off the stage and back in her daily life. The

relationships between the characters look like our own relationships, the rooms and locations look similar to where we live, the character's behaviors even look like the kinds of behaviors we do every day of our lives.

Augusto Boal, founder of the Theatre of the Oppressed, writes:

Theatre can also be the repetitive acts of daily life. We perform the play of breakfast, the scene of going to work, the act of working, the epilogue of supper, the epic of Sunday lunch with the family, etc.; like actors in a long run of a successful show, repeating the same lines to the same partners, thousands of times over. Life can become a series of mechanism, as rigid and as lifeless as the movements of a machine. (xxv)

The frequent similarity between the dramatic play and daily life offers an exciting opportunity for both non-actors and actors to apply this same practice of having a metaposition to their daily lives.

Boal continues:

Humans are capable of seeing themselves in the act of seeing, of thinking their emotions, of being moved by their thoughts. They can see themselves here and imagine themselves there; they can see themselves today and imagine themselves tomorrow.

This is why humans are able to identify (themselves and others) and not merely to recognize. A cat recognizes its master, who gives it food and strokes it, but cannot identify him as a teacher, a professional person, a lover. To identify is to be able not only to recognize within the same repetitive context but also to extrapolate to other contexts; to see beyond what the eye sees, to hear beyond what the ear hears, to feel beyond what touches the skin, to think beyond what words mean. (xxvi)

### ***The Metaskill of Acting***

Amy Mindell, who created the term metaskill, defined it to be the “deep spiritual attitudes and beliefs that manifest in therapy and in everyday life” (15). They are an “ongoing awareness and use of our attitudes in a more *conscious* way in practice” (19). Some examples of metaskills are fluidity, compassion, humor, and detachment.

I experience “acting” as a metaskill to be used as a way of approaching everyday life or even in the therapeutic practice. It is very similar to “detachment” which Amy Mindell defines as “a particular feeling in which we are released from the apparent situation, when we step back and discover a “meta” – or outside – point of view.” Add to this definition, the internal experience of viewing your daily life and activities, however mundane, as if you were an actor in a play, and you have what I call the metaskill of acting. This exact experience or attitude of being an “actor” in daily life may vary somewhat from person to person, however there is a common underlying perspective that life is not only serious or mundane, but is in fact an art in the moment. Each moment needs consciousness and crafting to make it congruent and believable, interesting and captivating to an imaginary audience.

Practicing the metaskill of acting requires the person to make an internal identity shift. Like an actor in a scene, I as a normal person would remember - as I sit down for breakfast with my family, read the newspaper, talk on the telephone, or wash the dishes - that I am in a “play” of sorts. In one reality, I am the character herself, really washing the dishes and loathing it. In another reality, I am an actor playing the part of a woman who is washing the dishes and loathing it. This natural detachment, distance, or perspective helps me remember that CR is not the only reality happening in any given moment. In fact, thinking I am only an actor playing a part, relieves me of the seriousness of anything I might be doing, whether it is going to work or getting emergency surgery or even attending a funeral. It also makes life more interesting and creative.

In Quantum Mind, Arnold Mindell says that, “You can be a person and also a magical being or anything else while carrying on your everyday life” (281). I would add to this sentence, “You can be a person, a magical being, or an actor while carrying on your everyday life.” Life is a play. We are all actors. Enjoy playing all the parts and giving a great performance!

## **Playing the Part in Life**

This story begins with a session I had with Arny in February 2009. I was experiencing chronic back pain virtually every day for four years since a seemingly minor auto accident that I had while driving to work one day. I had seen now two chiropractors, several massage therapists, an acupuncturist, a physical therapist, and even a specialist in Orthobionomy, which is a kind of energy work. I told Arny that the pain had gotten worse recently and I had just finished seeing a chiropractor who had been treating me for several months beginning in the fall of 2008. At first we saw a lot of progress and I was actually having pain-free mornings. But by January the treatments were having no effect on me and after doing my prescribed back exercises, I was also feeling no improvements. The “original” pain was back. So we decided to stop treatment and go in another direction. Maybe see an osteopath, maybe massage again, who knows.

So I went to Arny in hopes of getting both a psychological or “process” perspective on my back pain as well as some consensus reality advice about what to try next. He asked me lots of general diagnostic questions about my back – where exactly does it hurt, show me how you sleep, why that way, etc. He pressed on my back in

different places and checked my feedback. Then he “played” me and asked me to make the pain on his back. He lied down on his side, like I had done, and I began to press with my fingers and palms, trying to find the right angle, the accurate pressure, the appropriate movement that most closely resembled what I felt in my back.

After experimenting with this for a couple minutes, finding the right position and pressure and movement, he stood up and told me to do that against his hands now, facing him. I then pushed harder and intensified my movements. He told me to do the same all the way up my arms and body and make it with my face and eyes too. I squinted my eyes some and pursed my lips. He told me to look at him while I did this. I looked up and into his eyes. They were also piercing and clear. He demanded, “What would this figure say?” I said, “I don’t know...” and felt more deeply and then said, “Don’t fuck with me! Give it to me straight.” I felt a sense of clarity and wanting clarity, wanting it straight. I also felt a sense of wanting connection with another.

Arny told me, “You need to be more like this in your life. You need to let this intense “don’t fuck with me” part live more, in relationship to other people. You say to them, “Hey don’t fuck with me, give it to me straight” and with intensity and “grrrr.” And you need to live it all the aspects of your life.”

He later advised me via email to remember to do a little exercise and some gentle push-ups for two months and if this didn’t work, then get an x-ray of my back.

As a Process Work student, I’m well used to the idea that there is a secondary process or figure imbedded in my body symptoms. Although in itself, this can be a bit offensive to my primary process who insists that the world exists only through her lens. However, sometimes a secondary process or figure can be particularly challenging and

particularly unlikeable and unwanted by my primary process and it will do nearly everything it can to resist this new kid on the block. This was one of those figures.

Ahh, the double bind. One of the most torturous and infuriating psychological experiences! This particular secondary process (the “don’t fuck with me, give it to me straight” intense, somewhat aggressive creature) is very strongly disliked by my normal identity. I am totally against it. I have an aversion to my own intense nature and cringe whenever I notice it is expressing itself. I am frightened by the part of me that would say “Don’t fuck with me” because it makes “my” world unsafe and unstable. If I acted more like this, I imagine I would be all alone and without any love or relationship in my life. I find it hostile and unhappy even though in its pure form, it may be neither of these things. I imagine it would cause conflicts with anyone at any moment which completely freaks me out! In short, I really don’t want to be open to being this way, I don’t want to integrate this part of myself or live it more – all the things I’m supposed to do as a “good Process Worker.”

So then I feel I “should” be more like this figure, more “grrr” and straight and not taking any shit. Not only do I feel I should more like this, but in fact the father of Process Work himself, has told me I need to be more like this! This has a profound impact on me. The teacher, the master, must know what’s right for me, no? However, when I even begin to consider that I need to be more like this, my insides resist and I become angry and hostile, refusing to take such advice. I say, “No, I don’t care what you say, I won’t be that way, I don’t *want* to be that way.” And in my staunch resistance, in my fierce refusal, in my “no way in hell” attitude, I am becoming as we speak, the very figure that I am saying I will not become. I am caught! I cannot respond with the real reaction that I

have without becoming the very thing I am against. I am stuck – and thus the double bind. Oh, it is pure agony!

My partner David told me that he was told once that the only way out of a double bind is to either go completely crazy or to completely detach. I knew I was headed towards crazy, but would probably not be able to go fully over that edge either. And detachment felt impossible. I was caught - hook, line, and sinker.

That night, however, I had a dream. The dream miraculously seemed to suggest a third possible route out of the double bind – acting.

The dream went like this: I am right in the front row of the audience of “The Tonight Show with Jay Leno.” But before Jay comes out to do his opening monologue, a well-known, 50-something year-old, African-American actor walks out on the left side of the stage, and with a serious face, looks directly out to the audience and makes a very brief speech. He’s talking about a movie he was in about a famous boxer. When he finishes speaking, another well-known, slightly younger 40-something African-American actor walks out on the right side of the stage out and also speaks like the first, directly but briefly to the audience about the film. He reminds me of Denzel Washington, but I don’t recognize either of them even though I know they are famous. He then introduces a third actor in the film, a young African-American boy, about age 15 who played the boxer as a youth. The boy is dressed in a boxer uniform – white boots, red shorts with a white stripe down the side, red boxing gloves. Finally, the second actor, the 40-something year-old introduces the real-life boxer, the African-American man who the movie is all about. He is as famous as Oscar de la Hoya. The audience goes crazy, cheering and marveling at the famous boxer.

The dream seems to suggest that acting is the way out of the double bind for me. Instead of going crazy or becoming detached, it shows people “acting” like another person. The three actors who play the boxer in the movie at different stages in his life are not literally the boxer even though they might have qualities of his that they can identify with. He is still a secondary figure for them. They embody him by acting like him, by playing him. The dream says they are famous actors which to me means they are really good actors, exceptional at their craft. This also means to me that they are successful at appearing to be just like him, truly “picking up” these secondary qualities, enough to make a very believable performance, enough to make the movie a total hit.

The significance of this to me is that instead of being in the bind where I think I have to start being something else, especially if I am so strongly against those qualities, then I can think of myself as an actor playing a role. As an actor, I am happy to have the challenge of becoming “someone else” and doing my very best to inhabit this character as fully as I can. Not only is the sense of resistance gone but in fact, the exact opposite is true – I really *want* to be as believable as I can be. The part of the double bind that is my resistance is removed.

Then there is the additional bonus that comes with being an actor - automatic detachment. In a way, I am simply playing a role. It is not personal. Certainly from another perspective, it is always personal. But from this perspective, the character is “not me.” It is really someone else who I am trying to play. So my primary process does not get stuck in feeling like I am trying to incorporate another part of myself, this notion gets successfully bypassed by the consensus reality job of the actor – to successfully play another person.

This dream also suggests that a process is happening at the Essence level. Consider the idea that the role of “the boxer” is a role in Dreamland. The actors represent “the boxer” dream figure in the Dreamland level, but the real-life boxer himself, is the “real thing” – he is the true essence that the actors can only represent in a performance. The real-life boxer is the essence that the actors attempt to show in the movie as only a depiction of the real thing. As is stated in the opening of the Tao Te Ching: “The Tao that can be told is not the eternal Tao.”

Acting as a method of playing alternative roles in life is a refreshing and exciting addition to the expansion and development of my identity in the world. Next I will discuss how acting can contribute to a Process Worker’s exploration of her long-term edges.

## Long-term Edges

*“Long-term edges are seen as opportunities for learning the central lessons of a person’s life – of discovering the life myth, the basic blueprint behind life’s meandering path.”*

- Julie Diamond and Lee Jones, A Path Made by Walking, 147

I see another exciting opportunity where acting can contribute to our personal growth and development in the area of long-term edges. In Process Work, I see a tendency to work on long-term edges in individual one-hour sessions and in our innerwork and of course, in a way, these edges, once we are aware of them, are being “worked on” all the time. However, in the acting profession, as I’ve written more extensively about in the chapter on edgework, it is commonplace to work on edges in a very deliberate way in what we would call the world channel. Actors spend weeks, months, even sometimes years either hanging out with the unusual people or person they are trying to “play” (such as with autistic people for Dustin Hoffman in Rainman) and/or they spend time being in a certain community (such as the strip club for Marisa Tomei in The Wrestler) or country (such as Uganda for Forest Whitaker in The Last King of Scotland) or location (such as a prison cell for Daniel Day-Lewis in In the Name of the Father).

Can you imagine delving so far into your long-term edgework as to spend time with a group of people who are something like what you are trying to become or transform into? Or make radical changes to your lifestyle to feel your secondary power more, for example? Rather than a one hour therapy session here and there to work on a more secondary aspect of yourself, can you imagine changing the very way you live your life, by incorporating new disciplines such as changing your diet and exercise routine (like Mickey Rourke did for The Wrestler) or moving to a different country for three months, six months, or an entire year to spend time with a particular group of people to watch how they live and imitate them and adopt their practices as your own?

Certainly, it could take a level of privilege to make particular changes such as moving to a different country. But my point is that some Process Workers tend to limit edgework to the therapy room or to momentary psychological innerwork. I am suggesting we take it outside of these places and make it more literal and in the world channel, in a way making changes more behaviorally and through imitation. It is like the twelve-step phrase, “Fake it till you make it” which means that you “pretend” to believe in what you’re doing, but you keep at it and eventually, you will believe what you are doing (Rhea, April 2009). We, as Process Workers, could make some behavior changes either in our disciplines, in our surroundings, or in the people we hang out with until we believe that we are different. We can imitate until we see it is truly ourselves we have become.

This brings up a philosophical debate. I believe that our minds, brains, or “psychologies” don’t know the difference between imitation and the “real thing” as long as edges are being crossed. If I imitate the figure that I am trying to become more like in

my personal life, I *am* going over edges just to pretend that I am that person. Likewise with acting, if I go over edges to “act like” a character, as long as I am stretching myself to some extent, I am still effectively going over edges even if I don’t yet identify that to be me. We can fool our thinking minds to believe we really have changed whether we are playing them with total congruence or not.

In addition, the process of going over edges as an actor is like a huge, revolving, psychological compost bin. An actor who works on a character by going over edges is helping her personal life because she is also expanding her own identity. And likewise, when she works on herself psychologically for her own sake, this feeds her ability as an actor to have easier access and a larger repertoire of inner experience to draw from for her character. This feeding goes around and around like the decaying food and debris in a compost bin. The compost bin decomposes into rich fertilizer for your soil. You put it in your soil and grow better plants and vegetables. When those plants die and are added to the bin, they enrich the decaying matter and the cycle continues (Rhea, April 2009).

In the final section of this paper, I share some of my personal journey through the intersection between acting and Process Work. It is a mythical adventure, a fairytale of sorts, through the lands of fame, creativity, and love.



## **Act IV: My Own Path**

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## Fame and Zeitgeist

*“There are times when you must coerce yourself and make a vow to step out of the morass of the self-importance and moods of phantom life. You may need to vow never to lose another battle with the ally and to forget your whole self....As a real person on the path of heart, you may appear to be like everyone else: stubborn and ambitious, jealous and insulted. But your laughter gives you away. There is something free about you in this state. You practice democracy at the deepest level, listen to inner and outer voices, and live and leave each voice as the moment requires.”*

- Arnold Mindell, The Shaman's Body, 192

My own path through acting touches on many of my personal dreamings and conditions. I have almost always been fascinated by fame and celebrity-ism. As I mentioned in the introduction, I have had a recurring fantasy over the years of being on a stage in a huge theater all by myself, standing right in the center. The lights are glaring at me and I am looking out, my chin up. The theater is filled with people; the audience is glued to me.

For me, this dream or fantasy is what fame is all about – a wonderful relationship between myself on stage and the audience observing. But this is not just any kind of watching – rather, there is a sense of interest, admiration, and utter captivation. The audience desires something from me, and I am giving it to them. This is the feeling of being highlighted under bright shining lights, like the sun or the brightest of stars. The

feeling is almost spiritual, like God is present. Certainly, one could say that in my fantasy, is an experience that is one complete expression, passionate, free, limitless, and ecstatic. It is a magnificent feeling. Mindell calls this experience the big U, “In meditation or dreamlike states, the body knows the big U as that long sought-after sense of being carried, as a ship on waves at sea. After I know the U, everything seems right; without it, the various zigzags of life seem crazy” (Earth-Based Psychology 231-232).<sup>5</sup>

Of course, the craft of acting itself is not about fame. When I am preparing for a role, learning lines, or rehearsing, I typically am not thinking about this dream. I am deep in the work of it. But this dream holds me in the background.

In the United States celebrities are treated almost like gods and goddesses. Everyone wants to know every little thing about them: what they are up to, who they are in relationship with, what they are wearing, what they said about this or that, where they live and shop and eat. They are elevated so high that even seeing a celebrity is like seeing a god – it is a miracle!

Certain actors and actresses are very central in our American culture and almost universally loved and admired, for example, Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt, Kate Winslet, or Leonardo DiCaprio, Meryl Streep, or the late Paul Newman. Although they may be different from one another and are all remarkably talented, they all somehow capture an essence of something that is central to our culture. They “flirt” with us in ways that highlight true aspects of their beauty, talent, or genius while simultaneously touching upon deep, unconscious dreaming in us, the audience.

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<sup>5</sup> In Earth-Based Psychology, Mindell speaks extensively about the big U. He defines the big U as “the sum of parallel worlds, the various directions of your dreams, the larger background direction inclusive of all your possibilities” (61).

Not all actors are central though. Some are more marginal, possibly in their “look,” their expression, or their personality. Some actors may in fact be better or worse than those listed above, or other high-profile celebrities, but for some reason are never noticed and never become famous.

All cultures have more central aspects and more marginal aspects. This is also true inside of us – there are aspects of ourselves that are more central and more marginal. What makes one “good” at acting is not necessarily what makes one famous. And on the other hand, being popular does not necessarily mean you are any “good” at what you do.

The German term “zeitgeist” which is literally translated into English as “timespirit” is “the experience of a dominant cultural climate that defines...an era in the dialectical progression of a people or the world at large” (“Zeitgeist”). It is what the culture is ready for, what the culture is momentarily grappling with, and the tension between these two sides. The culture decides what is popular. You could be Emily Dickinson, and become popular only after you die. Whether or not you become popular depends upon what is central in a particular culture at a given time.

This can be a struggle for those of us that have a strong desire to act and express ourselves authentically and fully in our characters, and also have dreams of becoming famous one day. One can certainly follow her impulses to act: she can study acting, practice over years, be coached, audition, and pour her heart into it all. But she cannot control whether or not she gets the part in the play or the film. And even if she does, she cannot control whether or not she becomes popular or famous within the wider culture. This is ultimately up to the culture and the spirits that determine centrality.



## The Creative Spirit

*“During one performance in which I was repeating a role I had played many times, suddenly, without any apparent cause, I perceived the inner meaning of all the truth long known to me that creativeness on the stage demands first of all a special condition, which, for want of a better term, I will call the creative mood.”*

- Constatin Stanislavski, My Life in Art (Cole and Chinoy 492)

While still holding on to the very real and deep dreaming in the background, one must eventually dive in to the work itself and live the life of the actor without thought of what will happen, what is to be. When I am in the flow of acting, the entire outside world disappears, and it is just me, in the river, swimming.

In fact, it has been said that becoming famous is the quickest way to kill your creative spirit. In order to come from that true creative essence, you can't be thinking in that moment about how the public will receive you. If you do, then you can't really reach that place inside where the water flows. Once you try to play to the public's taste then you lose your ability to know what is true inside; you begin to act to please people, and this comes from the outside, going in. What you need is to come from the inside and go out.

Stanislavski called the creative spirit, the “creative mood” and spoke of this experience many times in his writing:

All men of the stage, from the genius to the mediocrity, are able to receive the creative mood, but it is not given them to control it with their own will. They receive it together with inspiration in the form of a heavenly gift....The creative mood on the stage is exceptionally pleasant, especially when it is compared with the state of strain to which the actor is subject when the creative mood is absent. It can be compared to the feelings of a prisoner when the chains that had interfered with all his movements for years have at last been removed. I luxuriated in this condition on the stage, sincerely believing that in it lay the whole secret, the whole soul of creativeness on the stage, that all the rest would come from this state and perception of physical freedom. (Cole and Chinoy 492-493)

What Stanislavski calls “the creative mood” is what don Juan calls following “the path of heart” (Mindell, Earth-Based Psychology 79) or what Process Workers call being in the “dream stream” or using “path awareness.” Mindell speaks of this experience when he discusses sentient awareness as a mystical experience that is ineffable (nonverbal and difficult to describe), noetic (filled with a kind of knowingness), passive (it happens to us, we don’t create it), transient (it comes and goes and is difficult to sustain), and is nonlocal (a feeling of interconnectedness with all things) (Earth-Based Psychology 22-23). He sees sentient awareness as path awareness, “in which path is a sense of inner direction and purpose, as well as the measure of the outer, literal meaning of direction” (23). Mindell explains, “Your body’s path awareness is not only mystical and dreamlike, but also very real” (23).

While I was performing in the scene from the play Closer, I had such an experience. My scene partner and I had practiced the scene countless times, both in a practice space outside of the school, and later in the classroom where we would perform it for the class. We had our lines memorized, our blocking down, and all of our

movements and behaviors determined. But at this point, there was no such moment of bliss. Then, completely unexpectedly, in the middle of our performance in front of the class, I said a line, he said a line, and I was suddenly transported into a state of utter bliss! It is difficult to explain in words the experience I was having. It is like the first lines of the Tao Te Ching, “The Tao that can be told is not the eternal Tao. The name that can be named is not the eternal name. The nameless is the beginning of heaven and earth.” In any case, I will attempt to describe in words my experience that day.

I felt extraordinarily present in the moment and in relationship to my scene partner. I felt almost an acute stillness or silence inside and out. I heard the words come out of my mouth effortlessly and in real time (not coming from memory or knowing what I would say next). While still acting in the scene, I was aware of having a meta-view of the moment. I could simultaneously speak, act, and move while realizing and enjoying an overwhelming feeling of total bliss, ecstasy, flow, and joy. I remember thinking that I never wanted this feeling to end and that I wished the scene could go on and on forever. I was in love with the moment, feeling so close to the spark of life. It was over as quickly and unexpectedly as it came.

Afterwards, I spoke quietly, on the side, with my acting teacher, Devon Allen. I told her very briefly what I had just experienced - total bliss that I wanted to go on forever. She knew exactly what I was talking about and said, “Yes, that is what we all hope for as actors. That is what makes us want to act.”

There are many words you can ascribe to the feeling I experienced – bliss, ecstasy, enlightenment, or flow. I believe I was experiencing the birth of the creative force or riding along the flow of the process river. It is an experience that propels me to

continue my pursuit of acting, it gives me a taste of what it could be like to follow my life with path awareness, and certainly it is a moment I know I will never forget.

## Love

*“What we all do in some way, shape, or form...is about love. Curiosity is love. Ignorance is nemesis.”*

- Colin Farrell, actor, accepting the Best Actor in a Comedy or Musical award at the Golden Globe Awards on January 11, 2009

Synchronistically, I was interviewed to join the Diploma Program on February 14, 2005 – Valentine’s Day here in the U.S. – a day of love, typically for couples, but a day of love nonetheless. When asked why I wanted to study Process Work, I answered, “To learn to love myself.” I wasn’t sure at the time if I wanted to become a therapist, but I knew that I was beginning on a path towards loving myself and still just beginning to understand what that might entail.

One of the things I have learned over these years of study is that to love myself, in part, means to love all the parts in me and my deeper gifts and identities. Loving myself is not only about being compassionate or kind-hearted towards myself, but also includes shifting my identification. It means not limiting my idea of who I am, be that an office administrator or a student or a wife; but instead identifying at least equally so as an artist – an actor, photographer, painter, weaver, knitter.

In my experience as a beginning actor, I recognize that Process Work is central to my way or path through acting. Others may spend years training in a distinguished acting school, perfecting specialized acting technique, even travelling to foreign lands, or spending time with people who resemble their character. My training is through spending years excavating my inner life and following an awareness path. I get the training from finding the seemingly unknown identity of the character inside myself. My own personal development is my training.

Because in my Process Work training, (which is at its heart, awareness work), I need to know myself, I need to continuously explore my psychology deeply with process-oriented approaches to get to know these hidden parts inside myself. I keep on working that process – finding myself, bringing it out, finding myself, bringing it out. Process Work says that everything is in us.

My partner David shared with me a passage by Rainier Maria Rilke, in Letters to a Young Poet, where Rilke advises the young man to not to ask for others to evaluate his writing, but instead to search inside himself for his reason for writing:

You ask whether your verses are any good....Now...I beg you to stop doing that sort of thing. You are looking outside, and that is what you should most avoid right now. No one can advise or help you - no one. There is only one thing you should do. Go into yourself. Find out the reason that commands you to write; see whether it has spread its roots into the very depths of your heart; confess to yourself whether you would have to die if you were forbidden to write. This most of all: ask yourself in the most silent hour of your night: must I write? Dig into yourself for a deep answer. And if this answer rings out in assent, if you meet this solemn question with a strong, simple "I must," then build your life in accordance with this necessity; your while life, even into its humblest and most indifferent hour, must become a sign and witness to this impulse. (Rilke)

He went on to explain to me, “Marge Piercy says, ‘The real writer really writes. You have to love it more than being loved.’ A dancer really dances. That’s it, that’s what they do. You have to love the doing of that more than being loved.”

Adapting his words, I would say now, “The real actor really acts. The real Process Worker really lives Process Work. The real ‘Lisa’ really lives as herself.” If I go inside and ask myself the question, must I be myself. And if the answer is ‘yes’ then I must build my life according to this truth. I must use acting, Process Work, and anything else at my disposal to love who I am and express ‘Lisa’ most fully.

Now as I go out into the world bearing all my various identities, I am reminded of Shakespeare’s famous quote, “All the world’s a stage” (enotes.com).

All the world's a stage,  
And all the men and women merely players;  
They have their exits and their entrances,  
And one man in his time plays many parts,  
His acts being seven ages.

I see myself back on stage – on the acting stage and the world stage. The spotlight is on me, my moment has come, the audience is waiting to hear me speak. It feels so good being there, feeling my right to be there, feeling the energy of the moment rushing through me, all my senses heightened, the silence is profound. I reach down deep inside to find my truth and in one swift, smooth motion, the words flow up and out through my mouth, projecting out into the air for everyone to hear. “This is me!” I say with pride. “I have arrived.” The audience rises to their feet and breaks out into applause. I bask in the lights, the cheers, the love. This is *it*.



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## **Appendix A: The Acting Exercises**



## **Postscript: Process Work Exercises for the Actor**

The first two Character Trait exercises are meant to help with a specific aspect or personality trait of the character that you want to inhabit more congruently. The other exercises are meant to assist with general edgework for getting into a certain character. The Third Attention and Flirts exercise offers a way to use flirts that come up from the Essence level to work with a character. The last two exercises – Vector Walking and Earth Spot – offer earth-based methods for accessing the big U direction of where you and your character intersect. I have written all of these exercises from scratch, from my own imagination. They are based on my understanding of Process Work theory. However, the influence of exercises I have participated in during classes and seminars by Arny and Amy Mindell and others have made a most certain indelible mark on my words and steps. In fact, the exercises would not exist if it were not for their work.



## Character Trait Exercise: Edgework & Amplification

1. What character trait are you struggling to inhabit? In this exercise we will use the “killer” but it can be anything – desperate, self-loathing, voluptuous, etc.
2. Ask yourself, who do you know who is like a killer (or is like the character trait that you are struggling to become)?
3. Think of that person, picture them, feel what they are like.
4. Talk about what you imagine allows that person to be a killer.
5. Now show with your body what they are like. Stand how they stand. Walk how they walk. Talk how they talk. Play that person/figure.
6. Keep hanging out with the figure until you notice little edges such as a movement edge, a vocal edge, or just a subtlety in the kind of killer they are.
7. Go over these little edges – amplify your movement, amplify something about the voice, show more clearly and congruently how they are a killer.
8. While still remembering in your body and mindset the killer figure you just played, now recall the character you are meant to play in your theater piece.
9. Use the new body experience, motions, subtleties, and tones to play your character. Use your imagination to give your character new breadth using this experience playing the killer.
10. If you know some lines from the play you are doing, say some out loud several times, experimenting with this new internal sense of what it feels like to be a killer.



## Character Trait Exercise: Essence Work

1. Ask yourself, who do you know who is like a killer (or is like the character trait that you are struggling to become)?
2. Think of that person, picture them, feel what they are like.
3. Talk about what you imagine allows that person to be a killer (or to be like another quality).
4. Now show with your body what they are like. Stand how they stand. Walk how they walk. Talk how they talk. Play that person/figure.
5. Remain standing through the exercise.
6. Now be silent and still and feel into the essence of this figure. You needn't put words to it, but you can if it is helpful.
7. Make a hand movement to express this essence.
8. While still feeling this essence and feeling the movement, transform your body into that essence and movement.
9. Make your face like that, your chin, eyes, arms, legs, and every part of your body like that.
10. Now say a line or several lines from your scene.
11. Notice how these lines feel different and hopefully more congruent to the character.



## Movement Exercise

1. Decide which character trait you are going to explore that you need help inhabiting.
2. Ask yourself, who do you know who is somehow like this (either someone you know personally or someone in the world, alive or dead)? Say how or why the person is like this trait?
3. Now drop the trait and just dream into that figure, without any talking at all, begin moving around the room. Move like the figure and allow irrational, nonsensical movements to emerge. Don't worry about where they are going.
4. Add noise but do not speak with words (words elicit the mind and we want the mind gone for this exercise).
5. Keep making noises and movements, amplifying the ones that are most mysterious to you.
6. Go back now to your scene or later and remember inhabiting this dream figure. See how affects your performance and ability to shape-shift into the character.



## Third Attention and Flirts Exercise

1. First, if you have a scene partner, let her know that you will be trying an unusual exercise and give her some details as to what you will be doing so she is not caught off guard.
2. Run all the way through one short scene with your scene partner or on your own as a monologue.
3. Now close your eyes, breath deeply a few times, and let your mind go cloudy.
4. Open your eyes, but only part-way and if possible, allow your mind to remain somewhat cloudy or open, and run through the scene a second time. This time, pay attention to any flirts that arise be they visual, auditory, proprioceptive, movement, or relationship. If that is too many channels to be aware of, pick only one channel to focus on.
5. Once you are aware of a flirt, stop proceeding in the scene or monologue. This might happen in the first line or anywhere later in the scene. It doesn't matter when it happens, just as long as you catch a flirt.
6. Use your awareness to notice what the flirt is and the channel it is in.
7. Allow the flirt to expand, amplify, or transform into an essence-like quality.
8. Allow yourself to shape-shift into that quality with your whole body and mind. Notice how it affects your character.
9. Now either begin the scene again or continue where you left off, experiencing this newfound essence while in character.
10. Notice also how it affects your relationship with the other character in the scene and if you want, ask your scene partner how incorporating this essence quality affected them.



## Vector Walking Exercise

You can do this exercise on your own, but it may be more helpful to have a partner there to talk to during each step as a way of reinforcing your experience.

1. Think of a character you are playing who you would like to play more congruently or want to find out how the character and you overlap or fit together.
2. Say a few words about how your life is going these days. Then say a few words about how you would describe yourself these days to a friend. Now say a few words about what your character is like if you had to describe him or her to a friend. Make a couple notes about this if you like and then set them aside.
3. With your current self in mind, stand in a marked spot on the floor and pivot around sensing the direction of yourself at the moment.
4. Once you sense the direction of yourself, walk in this direction for however many steps feel right. Where you stop walking is the next spot to mark. You may want to re-walk this direction several times to get a good feel for it. You may also want to walk it slowly and sense things along the way.
5. Say a few words about what that direction is like, what is there, what experience you have in walking it, even if it is irrational.
6. Now with your character in mind, starting from the second spot, rotate around until you find the direction of him or her. Walk this direction like you did for your first vector, feeling deeply and noticing what the experience is like.
7. Say something about what this direction was like. Mark this spot. You should now have three spots.
8. Now go back to the spot where you first began walking.
9. Walk from this beginning point towards this third spot. Walk this several times to get a good feel for it. Notice anything, even irrational things, feelings, images, tunes.
10. Talk about what this final vector is like. This is the big U of you and your character combined. You may notice how aspects of you and your character both show up in the big U.
11. Use this experience to help you play your character while accessing your deeper self.



## Earth Spot Exercise

It is helpful to have a partner to do this exercise so they can read you the steps while you have your eyes closed.

1. Think of a character you are playing who you would like to play more congruently or are struggling with. Say a few words to your partner about your who your character is, what she is like, and how you are struggling with playing this character, how you normally are, and how your character is different.
2. Then ask a question that you will use later such as, “How can I be more like this character?” or “How can I be more desperate (or snobby, or hostile, or goofy, etc.), like this character?” Write down this question and hold it for later in the exercise.
3. Sit quietly and close your eyes.
4. Let your mind go cloudy. Feel inside your body and imagination where your character is located inside of you. It can be anywhere in your body.
5. Take a moment and feel that place in your body. Feel the energy there, any motion or rhythm that might be there, and sensations at all.
6. While staying in touch with this spot in your body and the sensations there, allow your hand(s) to make a motion like this energy.
7. Now open your eyes and make a quick energy sketch on a piece of paper that shows this energy.
8. Sit quietly again and close your eyes.
9. Imagine where on earth this energy lives. Don’t think about it. Just let a place come to you. It can be a place you’ve been or not, it can be any part of the earth, sky, water, air.
10. Notice how this place has that same energy.
11. Now go to that place in your imagination. Notice everything around you – the sights, sounds, smells, tastes, feelings, temperature, and textures.
12. Now shape-shift into that place on earth. Become that place or part of the earth. Feel the experience in your whole body. Amplify your experience – become more strong, fragile, flowing, explosive, pointy, etc.

13. When you are ready, indicate to your partner to ask you the question you wrote down at the beginning such as, "How can I be more like this character?" Have your partner act like they are your normal self, ad lib. For example, they can say, "I am more like this kind of person, I don't know how to be more like my character. How do I do that?"
14. Respond in words and/or movement with any advice or wisdom from this place.
15. Continue in the role play until you have an insight or feel you have some good advice to use in playing your character.
16. Make some notes on your paper about your new insights or wisdom you received from this earth spot.
17. Talk to your partner about how you can incorporate this advice into playing your character.

## **Appendix B:**

# **Portland Area Resources for Actors**



## **Portland Area Resources for Beginning Actors**

### **Acting Schools & Teachers**

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Portland Center Stage Greenhouse School of Theater: [www.pcs.org/greenhouse/](http://www.pcs.org/greenhouse/)  
Portland Actors Conservatory: [www.actorsconservatory.com/](http://www.actorsconservatory.com/)  
Portland State University School of Fine and Performing Arts: [www.pdx.edu/theater/](http://www.pdx.edu/theater/)  
Nancy McDonald: [home.comcast.net/~nmcdclasses/site/?/home/](http://home.comcast.net/~nmcdclasses/site/?/home/)  
Northwest Children's Theater and School: [nwcts.org/html/home.php](http://nwcts.org/html/home.php)

### **Theaters**

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Portland Center Stage: [www.pcs.org/](http://www.pcs.org/)  
Third Rail Repertory Theatre: [www.thirdrailrep.org/](http://www.thirdrailrep.org/)  
Artists Repertory Theater: [www.artistsrep.org/](http://www.artistsrep.org/)  
Miracle Theatre Group: [www.milagro.org/](http://www.milagro.org/)  
Profile Theatre: [www.profiletheatre.org/](http://www.profiletheatre.org/)  
Lakewood Center for the Arts: [www.lakewood-center.org/pages/home](http://www.lakewood-center.org/pages/home)  
Keller Auditorium: [www.pcpa.com/events/keller.php](http://www.pcpa.com/events/keller.php)

### **Other Websites**

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PATA (Portland Area Theater Alliance): [www.patagreenroom.org/](http://www.patagreenroom.org/)  
SAG (Screen Actors Guild) Portland Branch: [www.sag.org/branches/portland](http://www.sag.org/branches/portland)  
Owen Carey (headshots): [www.owencareyphoto.com/](http://www.owencareyphoto.com/)

### **Magazines**

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American Theatre: [www.tcg.org/](http://www.tcg.org/)  
New York Theatre: [www.nytheatre.com/](http://www.nytheatre.com/)  
Indie Theatre: [www.indietheater.org/](http://www.indietheater.org/)  
Scene 4: [www.scene4.com/](http://www.scene4.com/)  
Theatre Pro: [www.theaterpro.com/](http://www.theaterpro.com/)  
American Cinematographer: [www.theasc.com/magazine/](http://www.theasc.com/magazine/)  
Premiere Magazine: [www.premiere.com/](http://www.premiere.com/)  
MovieMaker Magazine: [www.moviemaker.com/](http://www.moviemaker.com/)

### **Process Work Books and Manuscripts on Creativity and Performance**

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Arye, Lane. Unintentional Music  
Cohen, Jenn. "The Circus Project: Applying Process Work Techniques to Circus and Theatre Arts with At-risk Youth"  
Docker, Natasha. "Bird in the Fire"

Kavanaugh, Kasha. "Sourcing the Flow: Painting, Movement, the Intentional Field and Co-Creation"

Mindell, Amy. The Dreaming Source of Creativity

---. "Working with Movement"

Stella, Matt. "The Dreamfigure's Ball"

Zahner, Carol. "Shame, Sex, God, and Me"