

**THE MISSING FACILITATOR**  
**AN EXPLORATION OF THE CONCEPT OF THE PARTICIPANT-FACILITATOR**  
**IN PROCESS WORK**

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**Abstract**

According to Arnold Mindell, the world suffers from a lack of facilitative awareness. This essay examines how Mindell's work seeks to make facilitation (in all of its forms) more present. While facilitative awareness tends to be identified with professional or other designated facilitators, this awareness can in fact be developed and used by anyone, anywhere. With this in mind, Mindell introduces the concept of the participant-facilitator who, unlike the professional facilitator, facilitates challenging every-day situations from the position of a participant.

Mindell's written work provides the basis for a theoretical discussion of the participant facilitator. Personal stories and field studies document my own engagement with the concept and with the skills and shifts in awareness that participant-facilitation requires.

**Keywords**

Process work; worldwork; facilitator; participant-facilitator; awareness

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In this essay I explore the concept of the “participant-facilitator” in process work and Arnold Mindell’s vision of how facilitation can become an every-day practice. Process work is an approach to the facilitation of human awareness used by therapists and facilitators in their work with individuals, couples, families, groups, and organizations. Developed by Arnold Mindell, process work is described by Julie Diamond and Lee Spark Jones as “an evolving modality,” the result of Mindell’s “lifelong quest to piece together the mysteries of human consciousness, physics and psychology. Starting out as an attempt to incorporate physical experiences and body symptoms into Jungian psychology’s primarily dream-based methods . . . [it] has become an awareness modality with applications in areas such as organizational and community development, diversity and leadership training, spiritual practice, individual therapy, relationship counseling and group work.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Julie Diamond and Lee Spark Jones, *A Path Made By Walking: Process Work in Practice*. Portland: Lao Tse Press, 2004, 4.

Using Mindell's written work in the areas of conflict facilitation and personal, community and organizational development as the basis for my exploration, I will show how process work not only provides a theoretical framework and methodology for therapists and professional facilitators, but also a philosophy of life. I will trace Mindell's ideas about how process work methods and tools and the attitude of "deep democracy"<sup>2</sup> can be developed and used in every-day situations and interactions. I suggest that Mindell's work outlines a vision in which facilitation becomes a general practice: you and me, as participants in our every-day lives, facilitating our own tensions and conflicts "to create a more meaningful and exciting world."<sup>3</sup>

I seek to contribute to theoretical discussions of process work by examining Mindell's introduction and articulation of the concept of participant-facilitation and by discussing its place within the larger framework of process work. I am motivated by my belief that when students and practitioners of process work consider the concept of participant-facilitation, at the moment, we do not typically foreground its political dimension. By this I mean that we tend to overlook Mindell's articulation of individual responsibility (and possibility) in terms of our relationships to others, to our communities, and the world. Mindell argues that facilitation is "a political act"<sup>4</sup>—a "politics of awareness."<sup>5</sup> I want to make this dimension more visible. In addition, I seek to contribute to the practice of process work by offering an account and analysis of my experiments with the

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<sup>2</sup> See Arnold Mindell, *The Leader As Martial Artist: An Introduction to Deep Democracy*. San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1992, 5: "a special feeling or belief in the inherent importance of all parts of ourselves and all viewpoints in the world around us. [ . . . ] It is found in all perennial spiritual traditions, especially in the martial arts, Taoism, and Zen Buddhism. It is our sense of responsibility to follow the flow of nature, respect fate, energy [ . . . ]. Deep democracy is our sense that the world is here to help us become our entire selves, and that we are here to help the world become whole."

<sup>3</sup> Mindell, *The Leader As Martial Artist*, 3.

<sup>4</sup> Arnold Mindell, *The Deep Democracy of Open Forums: Practical Steps to Conflict Prevention and Resolution for the Family, Workplace, and World*. Charlottesville: Hampton Roads, 2002, 63.

<sup>5</sup> Arnold Mindell, *Sitting in the Fire: Large Group Transformation Using Conflict and Diversity*. Portland: Lao Tse Press, 1995, 27.

role of the participant-facilitator. The essay begins with a discussion of what facilitation and participant-facilitation mean, why they matter, how they are informed by key concepts of process work, including awareness, fields, roles, and the notion of responsibility. It ends with an exploration of some case studies that connect these concepts to my own experiences.

One definition of the participant-facilitator suggests that the participant-facilitator is a “group member who acts in a facilitative manner.”<sup>6</sup> But Mindell uses the term in a much broader sense as well. In the Introduction to *The Deep Democracy of Open Forums*, he writes:

My personal agenda is that everyone in organizations will make the transition from being either a participant or a facilitator to what I call a “participant-facilitator.” I would like all of us to enjoy the single role we have in the larger body, and in addition, I want us each to become one of its wise elders, in the role of the facilitator making group life easier for all [ . . . ].

Our organizations, communities, and world can be amazing places to live and work if each of us knows about the responsibility of using our own awareness as a participant-facilitator, act as one who cares for the system’s process, and sees its real and imaginary dimensions. Knowing these dimensions gives each of us more power than we realize; as participant-facilitators anyone can influence even the most intractable organization. Far from being disempowered individuals in the hands of powerful people and massive world machines, each of us has the ability to *stop* the cycles of history in which power moves from tyrants to the tyranny of the oppressed.<sup>7</sup>

In my view, when Mindell asks readers to consider participant-facilitation as an every-day practice, he is challenging us to take responsibility—to learn and use the tools of process work, use our awareness, and develop an attitude of radical openness to experience. This “special feeling sense may well be the

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<sup>6</sup> See “facilitation” <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Worldwork>: Accessed May 12, 2008: “Worldwork.”

<sup>7</sup> Mindell, *The Deep Democracy of Open Forums*, viii-ix.

outcome of psychological growth, or may be simply given,” but it can also be developed in our daily lives “whether cleaning house, relating to others, driving to work, conducting business, politics or carpentry, studying or writing,” if we approach everything we do, every situation we encounter, from the point of view that “the world is here for us to become our entire selves, and that we are here to help the world become whole.”<sup>8</sup>

Mindell’s point that “each of us has the ability to *stop* the cycles of history” is both appealing and frightening—appealing because it suggests the possibility of active participation; frightening because it also suggests something about individual responsibility. This is of particular interest to me, because the question of responsibility, my relationship to the world in the context of large world events and problems has always vexed me. Having grown up in post-war Germany, I left home and emigrated to Canada in my late teens, in part as an attempt to distance myself from what seemed to me an impossibly burdened history (not to mention a stern mother who had plans of her own for me). Reinventing myself as a Canadian seemed, at least when I was seventeen, a good response to the undesirable task of being German. I had witnessed debates in the public realm about who was to blame for the death of six million Jews, who was not to blame, what was the role of individual responsibility, was there such a thing as collective guilt and responsibility and, if so, how could the collective take responsibility. History had already happened and the best one could do was not to repeat it. But I had no tools to understand or engage with what had occurred other than to distance myself, to run away.

Leaving home or history are perhaps always impossible projects. Even though I was determined to do things differently from my parents, “Germany” persisted inside of me no matter how much physical space separated me from the actual place. I left Germany, but it has not left me. As

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<sup>8</sup> Mindell, *The Leader As Martial Artist*, 5

Mindell points out, “history is not just a story about yesterday, but also about ghosts among us today.”<sup>9</sup> We will repeat history until we consciously engage and react to these invisible forces that move us about, as they manifest themselves here and now. When we do this, we “fully participate in history and contribute to transforming the times in which we live.”<sup>10</sup> Or to put it another way: “if you choose awareness in the typical, ongoing conflicts and occasional resolutions of every-day life, you participate in the universe’s self renewal. That’s how to change world history and the course of time.” He argues that “internal experiences, relationships and fate are connected with the economy, crime, drugs, racism and sexism, not only in your ethnic group and part of town, but also with other ethnic groups in other parts of town. It ends up that whenever [you] work on one problem, [you] are working on the whole history of the human species.”<sup>11</sup> For Mindell then, awareness is not only a question of individual responsibility, but also an instrument of global change.

One memory that for me encapsulates the confused messages about responsibility I received when I was growing up involves a story my mother often told about a doctor she admired. She often told the story as we passed by signs of recent accidents—scattered glass, a shoe in the middle of an intersection, a bashed up car by the side of the road. This doctor, she said, had advice for her and several other young women who were training to be nurses during the war. He counseled the young women that, should they come across the scene of a serious accident, they take off their nurses’ hats and run in the opposite direction, as fast as their brogued feet could carry them.

I don’t know if my mother told that story because it seemed odd advice to her (she loved nothing more than being helpful and being of service), if it reflected her own sense of powerlessness, or if she wished for a

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<sup>9</sup> Mindell, *The Deep Democracy of Open Forums*, 114.

<sup>10</sup> Mindell, *The Leader As Martial Artist*, 7.



world where such flight and delegation was actually possible. She never explained. Perhaps the story was meant to relieve the young nurses in training from the burden of responsibility, reassuring them that someone better trained and better able to help—a real doctor with real expertise—would shortly be there to take care of everything. I don't know. I often think about this story not only because it says much about Germany and that time, but also because it reflects something of my own confusion about what it means to be responsible. Who is qualified to help? The trained experts? Those with rank? Who stays? Who attends? Apparently not me.

In *The Shaman's Body*,<sup>12</sup> Mindell offers a different answer to my questions about responsibility:

Taking responsibility means accepting everything you say, feel and hear, write, see and communicate as part of you. Accepting your accidents and your lies is an act of compassion. Taking responsibility means that if you are sick, you must understand that the body is bringing up a dream you have not yet known. If you have relationship problems, accidents, or world problems, things are happening to you with which you are not in agreement. Taking responsibility means focusing awareness not only upon the events you identify with but also upon the events you want to disavow.

Taking responsibility requires appreciating what happens to you as potentially valuable. Such an attitude belongs to shamans, therapists, and Taoists, it also appears in Zen. [ . . . ]

But taking responsibility requires more than having the right attitude. You need to pick up your secondary process<sup>13</sup> [ . . . ]

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<sup>11</sup> Mindell, *Sitting in the Fire*, 24.

<sup>12</sup> Arnold Mindell, *The Shaman's Body: A New Shamanism For Transforming Health, Relationships, and Community*. San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1993.

<sup>13</sup> "Process," as the term is used in process work, refers to the "flow of overt and covert communication within an individual, family, group, culture or environment [including] inexpressible feelings dreams, and spiritual experiences." Process work theory differentiates between two aspects of process: "primary process" refers to "self-descriptions, methods and [the] culture 'with which an individual or group identifies,'" while "secondary process" refers to aspects that individuals or groups "prefer not to identify with," projecting "these aspects onto people [they] view as the 'enemy', and marginalizing or admiring these qualities and identifying others with 'superior or inferior traits'." See Mindell, *Sitting in the Fire*, 42-3.

In a world where life is so short, you cannot afford to neglect anything you do. Each act is one of potential significance.<sup>14</sup>

The challenge that Mindell puts to his readers in *Sitting in the Fire*, and which I want to put to myself and my fellow process work students as we ponder how we want to practice and use the tools of our new trade, is as follows:

How many conflicts have you failed to resolve in your personal life? Why are they unresolved? Have you accepted responsibility?

. . . How many problems have you resolved in your immediate family?

[ . . . ] When was the last time you articulated a conflict in a group or organization? How did you do it? Did you seek a quick fix instead of trying to understand the roots of the conflict? Did you think about money or efficiency first, or did you go for the deep issues?

Do you offer to facilitate problems that arise in your home, at your job, at the supermarket or on the street? How do you define social responsibility? Does it include intervening in social tensions everywhere, including movie theatres and restaurants? To be more than a conflict mediator or organizational development expert, to make real change, you will have to answer these questions and clarify your deepest goals.<sup>15</sup>

Throughout our formal training as students in the first Masters of Conflict Facilitation and Organizational Change (MACF) cohort, and especially as it neared its end, we debated and pondered in what forms and how our training could now become part of our livelihoods and our lives, how each one of us would and could take process work out of the school and into the world. Each one of us will find our own answers to Mindell's challenging questions but, for me, practicing participant-facilitation is the idea that propels me forward. As a participant-facilitator, the world is my client<sup>16</sup> as well as my teacher. I am free to work and practice my skills as a facilitator whenever I feel moved

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<sup>14</sup> Mindell, *The Shaman's Body*, 52-3.

<sup>15</sup> Mindell, *Sitting in the Fire*, 40.

to do so: when the world and the next conflict come calling—in the form of inner tensions I might experience, a body symptom or illness, relationship troubles with friends or family, tense street scenes, or every-day challenges and disappointments at work. My ongoing experiments with participant-facilitation are an attempt to answer some of the questions Mindell asks and to take what I have learned in the MACF training program into the back alleys of my neighbourhood, into my relationships, my workplace. It is my way of engaging with the daunting and exciting possibility of making “real change” and of taking on the full extent of my limited responsibility in “co-creating our global field.”<sup>17</sup>

Perhaps for me the role of the participant-facilitator *is* a kind of calling, as evidenced in my early, largely doomed, attempts at peace-keeping and moderating the warring antagonists that appeared, exercising the usual but inadequate arsenal of childhood tools that included appeals to reason, distraction, cajoling, pleading, and acts of sabotage. My perpetual failure to make a difference on the home front must also have been the beginning of a quest for answers—a search for a different way—of which I caught a glimpse in a meeting impressive ease and centredness. What impressed me about her was her lack of defensiveness and her ability to support her attacker. She took his side in the argument, encouraging him to express his ideas and feelings even more clearly and directly, without losing site of her own viewpoint and the positions of others. I had never seen anyone do this before nor, I believe, had anyone else in that group. Whatever accounts for her remarkable presence that day, I believe it was her detachment and openness to what was happening that set her apart from the rest of us who attended that meeting. Most of us simply tried to shut down the disturber, while Kate switched roles and joined the disturber in his attack. I found this remarkable and, after the meeting,

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<sup>16</sup> The idea of the world as the client inspired Mindell to develop worldwork (see Mindell, *The Leader As Martial Artist*, 4).

<sup>17</sup> Mindell, *The Leader As Martial Artist*, 116.

asked Kate where she had learned to be that way. She said she had taken workshops in something called process work and recommended some books. Looking back at this moment, I think that Kate modeled participant-facilitation in a situation where there was no designated facilitator; she had some knowledge of process work and facilitation but, perhaps more importantly, she also had something that Mindell describes as “one-in-a-hundred consciousness.”<sup>18</sup>

Mindell coined the term as a result of his initial experiences using process work methods with large groups:

My original optimism about our potential for applying the ancient principles of deep democracy to modern . . . problems was discouraged by the rigidity I met in institutional settings around the world. Implicit and explicit social codes, frozen traditions, rules, and the sheer power of organizational frameworks always seem to block awareness of conflict and the possible meeting of differing viewpoints. Furthermore, the unequal distribution of wealth and material and informational resources makes the idea of harmony, peace, and institutional democracy seem like a naïve American ideal.

These difficulties made me doubt and rethink my own assumptions, theories, and methods. Now I feel that only a few people in a hundred at any one time are required to achieve the attitude of deep democracy and use worldwork tools [. . .]. [My approach] is not based upon the naive assumptions that partners in conflict must share the same abilities or awareness or that they must even agree upon the existence of conflict or the method of working on it. [Its] methods . . . do not require equal or common social, cultural, material, or political ethics or frameworks to be applied.<sup>19</sup>

One-in-a-hundred consciousness means that a person is “able to maintain some degree of objectivity, [is] able to work on [herself] rapidly in public, and

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<sup>18</sup> See also discussion of “*One-in-a-Hundred Consciousness*” in *The Deep Democracy of Open Forums*, 36; *The Leader As Martial Artist*, 85; and *Sitting in the Fire* 18.

<sup>19</sup> Mindell, *The Leader As Martial Artist*, 9.

[is] aware of field concepts.’<sup>20</sup> The effect of one “such a person in a group is immeasurably important,” he writes. “If [there is] only one person in a group [who] perceives the subtler undertone of what is transpiring and can articulate it in a meaningful way to all, the group feels safer, people feel respected, and the meeting works.’<sup>21</sup>

One-in-a-hundred consciousness is another way of describing the participant-facilitator. And it is related to Mindell’s concept of the elder.<sup>22</sup> Mindell summarizes and contrasts the ways of eldership to those attitudes typically associated with leadership:

- The leader follows *Robert’s Rule of Order*; the elder obeys the spirit.
- The leader seeks a majority; the elder stands for everyone.
- The leader sees trouble and tries to stop it; the elder sees the troublemaker as a possible teacher.
- The leader strives to be honest; the elder tries to show the truth in everything.
- The democratic leader supports democracy; the elder does this, too, but also listens to dictators, and ghosts.
- Leaders try to be wise; elders have no minds of their own. They follow the events of nature.
- The leader needs time to reflect; the elder takes only a moment to notice what’s happening.
- The leader knows; the elder learns.
- The leader tries to act; the elder lets things be.
- The leader needs a strategy; the elder studies the moment.
- The leader follows a plan; the elder honors the direction of a mysterious and unknown river.<sup>23</sup>

Indeed Mindell equates the role of the elder with the role of the participant-facilitator: “The elder is a ‘participant-facilitator,’ an ordinary

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<sup>20</sup> Mindell, *The Leader As Martial Artist*, 85.

<sup>21</sup> Mindell, *Sitting in the Fire*, 36.

<sup>22</sup> Mindell suggests that the presence of elders is facilitative and that it does on occasion develop organically; however, it is not only a function of age and life experience; it is possible for process-oriented facilitators, consciously to develop and practice feeling skills and attitudes or metaskills. See *The Deep Democracy of Open Forums*, 164-66 for a more detailed discussion of the development of eldership. For an in-depth discussion of the metaskills of eldership, see, 183-96.

person who feels responsible for caring for all. The world is a scary place to be without them. However, when such an elder is present, the world becomes a guesthouse, a sort of ‘home’ where just about anything and everyone seems to be welcome and somehow needed. Elders create an atmosphere for people and for the invisible spirits in the air whose lack of representation makes us humans nervous.”<sup>24</sup> By contrast, he explains,

when you are not in the role of the elder, group problems seem foreign to you, and you are barely aware that the word’s problems are related to your own static and frozen self. As long as your personal history prevails, the organic nature of role switching—leaving one role and developing new ones—becomes impossible. However, when eldership prevails, you become a *participant facilitator*, edgeless and free. For you, freedom manifests as the truth in the various roles and the awareness experiences into and out of which you move.<sup>25</sup>

In a 2002 interview, Mindell further explains the participant-facilitator in terms of the awareness that belongs to this concept, stating that “the highest form of awareness that you can have is being a participant-facilitator [meaning] you are one side or one part of the situation and simultaneously you need to be responsible for all the roles and all the people and all the different . . . feelings that are coming up.”<sup>26</sup>

I did read some of the books on process work Kate suggested, but I can’t remember which ones, or what I took away from them. Clearly, I must have found what I read intriguing enough to enroll in some workshops and eventually pursue a formal training program in conflict facilitation and organizational development. But in truth, I decided to train as a facilitator without really understanding what this meant or how that choice would

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<sup>23</sup> Mindell, *Sitting in the Fire*, 184.

<sup>24</sup> Mindell, *The Deep Democracy of Open Forums*, 164.

<sup>25</sup> Mindell, *The Deep Democracy of Open Forums*, 168.

<sup>26</sup> Transcript of “Verbatim Interview with Arny and Amy Mindell,” from Wisdom Radio, On Spirit of the Times at New Dimensions Radio, December 30<sup>th</sup>, 2002.

<http://www.aamindell.net/publications-articles-media.htm>, accessed April, 12, 2007.

ultimately address the larger questions that have preoccupied me most of my life—and which continue to pose themselves to me at mid-life (more or less)—about how to live life and about my task(s) in this world.

For Mindell, the basic task of the process-oriented facilitator—whether as designated or participant-facilitator—is “awareness work.”<sup>27</sup> Nothing much distinguishes the designated facilitator from the participant-facilitator. However, there is one critical difference: while the designated facilitator has the explicit consent of the group she is facilitating, the participant-facilitator in every-day situations is self-authorizing and occupies the role without explicit consent. In essence and in theory, they carry out the same function and take on the same basic tasks. When you have mastered process work (to the extent that mastery is possible) and you work as a professional facilitator, chances are you will be a good facilitator; when you have mastered process work and live your every-day life as a participant-facilitator, you are an elder. Either way, your task is to ease “the difficulties of every-day human life” by using process work’s awareness methods in order to bring to light the inherent wisdom contained in individual and world problems. Central to process work is the notion that “*within what we call problems are paths we haven’t yet explored.*” Process-oriented facilitators help make things easier by bringing to light these unexplored paths, using their awareness of “feelings, images and motions” in order to facilitate the experiences and awareness of their clients.

To find the magical path of heart and of least action, you must develop your awareness, you must become a better observer of what happens inside and outside. Notice exactly what people say and do as their evolving process sniffs out various paths and seeks least action. Name what they identify with and appreciate what they don’t identify with.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Mindell, *The Deep Democracy of Open Forums*, 59.

<sup>28</sup> Arnold Mindell, *Earth-Based Psychology: Path Awareness from the Teachings of Don Juan, Richard Feynman and Lao Tse*. Portland: Lao Tse Press, 2007, 6.

The process-oriented facilitator follows the known and unknown, dreaming parts of processes, knowing that dreaming happens not only when we are asleep, but “all day long in our feelings, gestures, body language, words, and signals.”<sup>29</sup> She knows that people dream, but that they are also being dreamt, that the universe may be dreaming us.

But what is this awareness work? And what is awareness?

Mindell writes:

Instead of defining awareness—which many before me have tried—I will simply suggest that awareness is basic to everything we know. Awareness is basic to all psychology and science. Our sense of awareness is connected to noticing, watching, knowing, mindfulness, realizing, wondering and consciousness. [. . .] *Awareness is prior to any form of creation, manifestation, or consciousness. The a priori existence of awareness and its resulting tendency to notice and wonder are psychology’s basic principles. In fact, the a priori existence of awareness is not only a first principle in science, but it also appears in mythology. [. . .]*

If awareness is basic, it is a kind of field or medium, a kind of oneness that creates or produces two different frameworks—or two different observers, so to speak. In this way of thinking, awareness manifests itself in different forms of self-reflection and wonder. Awareness is an inherent tendency that precedes self-reflection, curiosity, and consciousness.<sup>30</sup>

So, process work facilitators use their awareness to follow the processes of their clients—whether these are individuals, couples, families, groups or organizations—defining “process” as the moment-to-moment flow of experiences and events. Clients identify with some parts of their process, and not with others. Process work theory refers to these aspects of process as primary and secondary. One aspect of the facilitator’s task involves supporting the client to experience more connection with those parts of her process that are secondary or further removed from her every-day awareness and self-

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<sup>29</sup> Mindell, *Earth-Based Psychology*, 7.

<sup>30</sup> Mindell, *Earth-Based Psychology*, 11-2.



identifications. Process work theory does not offer or seek an account of the origin of events or experiences, but assumes the *a priori* existence of a field of awareness. To put this another way, for Mindell awareness is an “ontological given,”<sup>31</sup> while awareness of awareness is not. In addition, “awareness has various dimensions,”<sup>32</sup> including “real” as well as “dream-like” dimensions: awareness includes consensus reality aspects which can be measured and agreed upon, and non-consensus reality aspects which are subjective and qualitative and, to some extent, uncertain. Non-consensus reality experiences are typically discounted or less valued in western, cosmopolitan cultures.<sup>33</sup> Process work theory, however, assumes that both realms of experience have equal value, and are equally needed to account fully for our experiences and for the world; discounting the non-consensus reality, dreaming dimension may be one of the chief reasons for why we experience ourselves as having problems.

Process work theory differentiates three awareness experiences: *consciousness*, *awareness*, and *lucidity*. Mindell refers to our every-day perception of consensus reality, the world of cause and effect and time and space, as *consciousness*; he calls the perception of dreams and dreamlike subjective experiences *awareness*; and he refers to the perception of very subtle experiences or sentient awareness, as *lucidity*. According to Mindell, “[l]ucidity and consciousness are different levels of awareness.” He suggests that “most of us are either lucid and live in the sentient world or conscious and focus on

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<sup>31</sup> Anup Karia and Stanya Studentova, “Eldership and Inner Work: Working With Large Organisations: An Interview with Max Schupbach,” *Far In, Far Out: A Collection of Essays on Inner Work*. Research Society for Process Oriented Psychology. Glenview, IL: Lulu Press, 2006, 144.

<sup>32</sup> Mindell, *Earth-Based Psychology*, 17.

<sup>33</sup> Mindell explains further: “I have several answers for why we marginalize the Dreaming and ignore our sentient tendencies. First few people focus on subtle tendencies; there is little community support for doing so. Then, these tendencies are subtle, and their meaning is not immediately apparent. Most people do not think about quick sensations they do not immediately understand. Finally, to catch actions and thoughts as they are arising from the background of subtle tendencies, you must have developed your mindfulness and concentration, which I call lucidity.” See Arnold Mindell, *Dreaming While Awake: Techniques for 24-hour Lucid Dreaming*. Charlottesville: Hampton Roads, 2000, 11.

every-day events and social issues.” Mindell uses the term “enlightenment” to mean “simultaneous lucidity and consciousness, that is, having a sense of the origin of all things and simultaneously living with full awareness of the amazing diversity of this world.”<sup>34</sup> Mindell understands sentient awareness as the root of both awareness and consciousness. Sentient awareness is non-dualistic, pre-verbal, and subtle, and becomes something we can verbalize or visualize: “it unfolds into what we notice as awareness of a feeling, motion, or nearly describable experience of dreams.”<sup>35</sup> And it becomes consciousness when, in every-day life, we become aware and notice what we are doing and what is going on around us. Unlike other approaches to facilitation that focus their attention primarily on consensus reality, process-oriented facilitation brings awareness to the consensus reality aspects as well as the non-consensus reality aspects of experience, tracking processes on all three levels as they fluidly move among consciousness, awareness, and lucidity.

In order to account for relationships and movements between people, and between people and objects, process work theory develops a field theory. *Awareness* (unlike consciousness and sentient awareness) is dependent on the facilitator’s ability to perceive the world in terms of fields. She must understand individuals, groups, organizations, and places not only as people, or groups of people, or structures and buildings and processes, or as particular locations with particular characteristics and individual histories, but also as expressions of particular attributes of the field. As a result, when process-oriented facilitators understand themselves as working with a field, they deal “with the events or issues, wherever they appear: in groups, in our relationships, dreams, body symptoms, and fantasies. [. . .] In a relativistic universe governed by non-locality patterns, process-oriented field work means

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<sup>34</sup> Mindell, *Dreaming While Awake*, 36.

<sup>35</sup> Mindell, *Earth-Based Psychology*, 17.

following awareness, whether our focus is on outer or inner events.”<sup>36</sup> In process-oriented thinking “the inner self, relationships and the world are all aspects of the same . . . process” even though “the social sciences speak of ‘inner self,’ ‘relationship’ and ‘group’ as if these were phenomena that could be separated.”<sup>37</sup>

Everyone within a field is subject (and to varying degrees sensitive) to unseen forces, which to some extent determine the movements and actions of people, and whose effects can be felt as a particular “vibe,” mood, or atmosphere: fields can be appealing or not, tense or relaxed, playful or serious, and so on. Fields contain tangible and visible objects, but they also possess invisible and intangible aspects. Fields affect and, more importantly, connect everything and everyone within them. Everything within a field is structured and organized by it, and conversely, everything within the field, at the same time, also constitutes and participates in it. There are two ways of accounting for fields: one way suggests that fields *result* from differences and polarizations; the other way suggests that fields *create* these. As Mindell explains: “[i]f we perceive the field as being the primary force behind all things, we develop shamanism. When we feel our personal moods create fields, we develop psychological explanations.” Process work theory attempts to “put the two [views] together.”<sup>38</sup>

According to Mindell, “we think we manage or organize our lives and groups, but actually fields create and organize us as much as we organize them.”<sup>39</sup> Mindell explains: “a field expresses itself in its beliefs, which create individual and group identities. Even though the field is invisible and much larger than the people it moves, it manifests itself quite practically in our beliefs. We experience our values and visions as pressing us to do certain

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<sup>36</sup> Mindell, *The Leader As Martial Artist*, 69.

<sup>37</sup> Mindell, *Sitting in the Fire*, 66.

<sup>38</sup> Mindell, *The Leader As Martial Artist*, 22.

<sup>39</sup> Mindell, *The Leader As Martial Artist*, 15.

things, and we sense these values as grouping us together creating identities.”<sup>40</sup> Mindell suggests that “in most fields . . . what we do differs from what we say”<sup>41</sup> and at the same time as this incongruence is the root of “tension and conflict,” it is also a sign that a field is seeking to balance itself. As a rule, groups and individuals resist becoming aware of their incongruent communications because this implies that they might have to change and make room for their disavowed and marginalized aspects. Conflicts and communication problems arise because individuals as well as groups tend to identify strongly with only “one form of behaviour, one philosophy or one part and negate the existence [or value] of others.”<sup>42</sup> As a result, individuals and groups become polarized—separating or coming together around particular points of view, “roles.” They become the “differentiated parts”<sup>43</sup> of fields.

Roles are to some extent related to Jung’s archetypes<sup>44</sup>; they are impersonal (i.e. not identical with individuals), trans-cultural and, in process work terms, non-local; roles persist in time, and change only very slowly. Field awareness allows the facilitator to see not only individuals and events, but also roles or the forces Mindell sometimes “spirits” or “dream figures” animating and speaking and expressing themselves through the individuals and events. Process work methods allow facilitators to make these forces present—to *re-present* these unseen but nonetheless *felt* spirits —by either occupying and exploring these roles or viewpoints themselves, or by encouraging their clients to occupy and explore as many roles and viewpoints as possible within a field. This is important because, in any field, some roles will be familiar, others not; some will be valued and others not. The point is to make the messages and potential or virtual viewpoints of *all* roles heard,

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<sup>40</sup> Mindell, *The Leader As Martial Artist*, 16.

<sup>41</sup> Mindell, *The Leader As Martial Artist*, 14.

<sup>42</sup> Mindell, *The Leader As Martial Artist*, 33.

<sup>43</sup> Mindell, *The Leader As Martial Artist*, 25.

accessible, and useful, and to allow individuals temporarily to leave their every-day identities to interact with a range of diverse roles (familiar and unfamiliar, desirable or repugnant) in order to gain awareness and insight of potential aspects of their larger selves with which they do not typically identify. In this way, the process work facilitator's interventions in the field enhance self-reflection.<sup>45</sup>

Mindell stresses the importance of experimenting and occupying viewpoints we tend to disavow or project onto others. He sees this in terms of necessary political acts, as a "politics of awareness" and part of his "theory of history [where] everyone is partially responsible for co-creating our global field." He explains:

Everyone who lives and experiences racial tensions or conflicts . . . is partially responsible for them. In fact, anyone who even hears about such incidents is responsible. Even if you only see a racial or terrorist incident on television, you are responsible for it because your reactions are part of the overall tension waiting to be processed. If you deny the [terrorist's viewpoint] in yourself, if you allow yourself to live only as a nice person and repress your spontaneous tendency to conflict, confront, and stand for your highest principles, if you avoid potentially fiery interactions, then others will have to occupy this [role]. And there are no guarantees that they will do it more consciously than you.<sup>46</sup>

A fascinating idea in process work theory is that the facilitator is not only understood as a person carrying out a particular job, but also as a "role" in the sense I have described above: she occupies a virtual viewpoint within a field. In this sense, when we speak of facilitation as a role, what is meant is that an encompassing awareness is always already potentially present within any given field, whether or not it is represented and occupied by a designated

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<sup>44</sup> C.G Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, Trans. R.F.C. Hull. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1969.

<sup>45</sup> See Mindell, *The Year One*, 82.

<sup>46</sup> Mindell, *The Leader As Martial Artist*, 116.

facilitator, and whether or not this role is actually occupied by anyone. The role of the facilitator is thus one among all other possible viewpoints in a field, but it differs in one critical respect from the others: “The facilitator does not belong to any given . . . part” except inasmuch as “interest in the whole can be considered a part as well.”<sup>47</sup> The facilitator – “the part overseeing what is happening . . . [the] ‘dreaming eye’ in the field”<sup>48</sup> – is an aspect of any field or, as Mindell puts it, “one part of [the] overall process.”<sup>49</sup> In this sense, the facilitator is always a participant-facilitator, participating in and affected by the field, subject to its various forces.

This idea distinguishes the process-oriented approach to facilitation from others that assume that the facilitator is extrinsic or separate, operating in some way as a neutral outsider, applying a pre-existing set of tools in a particular situation. Perhaps all forms of facilitation, not just the process-oriented approach, involve awareness work. But, unlike process-oriented facilitation, most approaches are mainly focused on the consensus-reality level and on conscious experiences; consequently, without the tools or conceptual frameworks to access the symbolic, emotional, or subtle dimensions of experience—the “hidden, invisible, intangible emotional processes”<sup>50</sup> that appear in “moods, motivations, group problems, and inflations, depressions, illusions, and dreams”<sup>51</sup>—other approaches may aim at encouraging dialogue or discussion, or address problems through analysis, diagnosis and prescription, but they do not and cannot typically access and bring into play non-consensual information that affects and often disturbs the functioning individual client or groups. The basic aim of process work and process-orientated facilitation is to help a client access and use the change

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<sup>47</sup> Mindell, *The Leader As Martial Artist*, 50.

<sup>48</sup> Mindell, *Quantum Mind*, 550.

<sup>49</sup> Mindell, *The Leader As Martial Artist*, 50.

<sup>50</sup> Mindell, *Sitting in the Fire*, 19.

<sup>51</sup> Mindell, *The Leader As Martial Artist*, 12.

(and potential wisdom) that is already present in a problem, disturbance or symptom, but which cannot be consciously accessed or of which awareness is lacking altogether. Many approaches to facilitation have a set of tools that the facilitator uses and applies, regardless of the nature of the client and the field. The process-oriented facilitator, however, follows the field. Her main tool is awareness. As Mindell puts it: “the field teaches the facilitator how to work with the field itself by remaining void, or open to the movement trying to happen.”<sup>52</sup>

Because the role of the facilitator is always already part of the field, it can sometimes be spontaneously occupied. In process work terms, such instances can be seen as unconscious role occupation, arising from a vague sense that something is amiss, missing, or needed. According to process work theory, if a certain role is “not sufficiently filled in a group, those who are closest to its characteristics will be drawn . . . to fill it.”<sup>53</sup> For example, in formal group processes, participants may find themselves occupying a role unconsciously, “without realizing that they have been drawn into the field of conflict to help”;<sup>54</sup> they can find themselves compelled (or in process work terminology “dreamt up”) by the field to act in, say, a facilitative way. But individuals can also choose and experiment with the facilitative role deliberately, as students of process work do in training situations when, supported by the designated facilitator, they facilitate from the sidelines. As Mindell describes it: “the obvious facilitators stand at the front, yet many others can ably facilitate the whole process from any position in the room. In fact, those on the ‘sidelines’ can be as helpful or sometimes more helpful than the identified facilitators who get the most focus.” And he recommends to facilitators that “when you don’t know what to do . . . you can always look for help from your team members. If they have their hands raised, ask them to

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<sup>52</sup> Mindell, *The Leader As Martial Artist*, 51.

<sup>53</sup> Mindell, *The Year One*, 87.

help you facilitate. Their ‘sideline’ comments about the atmosphere in the room . . . can be a turning point for everyone.”<sup>55</sup> Especially in training situations, trainee facilitators sometimes find these moments of participant-facilitation difficult, experiencing them as a failure or as a challenge to their authority, centrality, or competency. But Mindell points out that such moments of participant-facilitation are in fact remarkable and important precisely because they remind the designated facilitator that her role does not belong to her alone, that the ability to represent wisdom, experiment with awareness, and “change the world”<sup>56</sup> is not the proprietary domain or sole responsibility of the designated facilitator. “Everyone is responsible for every role, including the role of the facilitator.”<sup>57</sup>

However, Mindell points out that in most situations, the role of the facilitator remains “less adequately filled than any other role.” As a result, he argues that

creating and populating the new facilitator with all of its differing viewpoints is a matter of planetary life and death. We can expect the anthropos<sup>58</sup> to find its own way and create necessary and unpredictable changes once we have done our job by sensing and representing the field we live in and by sensitively and courageously filling in its roles.”<sup>59</sup>

Mindell’s work can thus be seen as an ongoing project, the making (and simultaneous recognition) of a new myth, motivated by his conviction that creating the knowledge that will allow people to occupy the facilitator’s role is critical for the planet’s survival. He has addressed himself systematically,

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<sup>54</sup> Mindell, *The Deep Democracy of Open Forums*, 165.

<sup>55</sup> Mindell, *The Deep Democracy of Open Forums*, 56.

<sup>56</sup> Mindell, *The Leader As Martial Artist*, 43-4.

<sup>57</sup> Mindell, *Quantum Mind*, 550.

<sup>58</sup> The term “anthropos” refers to the conceptualization of the universe as a sentient entity with human or human-like qualities, a “personification of the universe that appears in many myths about the origin of the world” (see *The Year One*, 148 and *The Leader As Martial Artist*, 18-19).

<sup>59</sup> Mindell, *The Year One*, 140.



in his writing as well as his teaching, to the unfolding and development of this particular role. Mindell's approach suggests that the role of the facilitator is an ontological given, a non-local function, related to archetypes of awareness, wisdom, or wholeness, embodied in earlier times and other places by Taoist sages, shamans, or priests.<sup>60</sup> Perhaps for Mindell, the "new facilitator" is one of the "new archetypes trying to emerge into consciousness,"<sup>61</sup> part of a "new myth," a post-modern myth, where "human beings intervene where earlier gods existed."<sup>62</sup> In this myth, power no longer "reside[s] in one individual" but is distributed by and within in a field.<sup>63</sup> Mindell is telling the story of deep democracy, of difference and simultaneity, "diversity and sameness,"<sup>64</sup> in which participant-facilitators are protagonists; a story where there is "no succeeding or failing," "neither winning nor losing, neither inside nor out, neither Yin nor Yang."<sup>65</sup> It is also a story of hyphenation, of inhabiting or occupying diverse positions simultaneously (of being both participant and facilitator) and experiencing a different form of awareness: awareness focused on the field and on the space and the relationships among its parts. Like the hyphen, this new awareness preserves difference, while at the same time making the connection between parts obvious. The focus of this new myth is "deeper and more fundamental . . . upon the swirling cycles that create the wholeness we call the world." As Mindell notes with characteristic open-endedness, "[s]ome hope that this focus will emerge in the figure of the new elder who has been missing in our

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<sup>60</sup> Mindell, *The Year One*, p 139.

<sup>61</sup> Mindell, *The Leader As Martial Artist*, 3.

<sup>62</sup> Mindell, *The Leader As Martial Artist*, 151.

<sup>63</sup> Mindell, *The Year One*, 136

<sup>64</sup> Mindell, *Quantum Mind*, 556.

<sup>65</sup> Mindell, *The Leader As Martial Artist*, 154.

global tribe. Others experience such focus as their own capacity to love, which appreciates and facilitates all the elements of change.”<sup>66</sup>

Until this new elder emerges, Mindell points out that there is a danger in our tendency to delegate responsibility and project our longing for rescue or salvation, our authority and power, on others – on our leaders, politicians, scientists (they should know where to go and what to do next); and danger when we long for some magical other to appear and solve our problems, when there is trouble in our relationships, our families, our communities or organizations. Perhaps, as Mindell suggests, we fantasize that “we could just disappear and withdraw from our . . . family, school, business, friends, or even country”<sup>67</sup> rather than deal with our messes. But this tendency to withdraw and to only identify as powerless victims is detrimental to ourselves, to our relationships, as well as to our communities and organizations, “precipitating their collapse as if they were paper buildings.”<sup>68</sup> Unaware of our “potential ability to change the situation, [we] are satisfied with retreating into the identity of a powerless participant . . . dreaming of some heroic facilitator who will one day appear on her horse to save the situation.”<sup>69</sup> Even if Mindell is having a bit of fun here when he casts the female facilitator in the leading role of contemporary rescue fantasies, he is serious when he argues that many if not all of the world’s problems may be compounded by such dreams of heroic rescue, of solutions coming from elsewhere and “outside.” He challenges our belief that “the world’s problems have nothing to do with us [and] that acute crises will be solved by people and forces outside of us” (1989, 136). Mindell suggests that tension and conflict are signs that a field and perhaps also the anthropos is seeking to

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<sup>66</sup> Mindell, *The Leader As Martial Artist*, 160.

<sup>67</sup> Mindell, *The Leader As Martial Artist*, 30.

<sup>68</sup> Mindell, *The Deep Democracy of Open Forums*, 5.

<sup>69</sup> Mindell, *The Deep Democracy of Open Forums*, xi.

balance itself. However, whether this tendency of fields to self-balance becomes “constructive or destructive . . . depends upon our ability to intervene in the evolution of [the field].” According to Mindell “tension can lead to war just as easily as it can lead to the development of deeper relationships and more lively communities and organizations.”<sup>70</sup>

Mindell thus frames the self-balancing ability of fields in terms of potential or implicit wisdom—that is, a field’s wisdom is literally “folded in” (implicated) and in need of unfolding. Supporting the unfolding of this inherent wisdom is the task of the process-oriented facilitator.

Self-balance becomes wise in that special case when all parts are encouraged to express themselves completely. Only when explosiveness *and* sensitivity, leaders *and* disturbers are fully present and supported will a system usually resolve its own problems. [ . . . ] All the parts in a field, even those we do not like or those we believe are useless, must be present and supported. Leaders and disturbers, macho behavior and sensitivity, insiders and outsiders, power and fear, criticism and support all must be present and identified in a given system. Some [roles] are more difficult to identify because they are what I call ghosts, implied or background feelings in the atmosphere. Ghosts such as jealousy, love, contempt, and dignity need to be brought forward and identified as well. Once all the parts are identified, they must be encouraged to speak. A system that gives no time or space to its ghosts will eventually be disturbed or destroyed by them.”<sup>71</sup>

Fields “are not wise, they are *potentially* wise,” and therefore need our “conscious appreciation and intervention for their wisdom to appear.”<sup>72</sup> In other words: the role of the facilitator as a channel or agent of awareness needs to be occupied in order for the field to manifest its wisdom.

Mindell insists that, whether we know it or not, we are not only needed by our groups, communities, and organizations, but we are also

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<sup>70</sup> Mindell, *The Leader As Martial Artist*, 32.

<sup>71</sup> Mindell, *The Leader As Martial Artist*, 33.

<sup>72</sup> Mindell, *The Leader As Martial Artist*, 19.

deeply implicated in what happens in them; that, even though we may think of ourselves as separate and outside of events—as hapless bystanders or innocent victims—we are always already part of a non-consensual reality where everything is connected and where boundaries are blurred. As a result “we must learn to accept our limitations as participants in our planetary process and simultaneously discover how to facilitate that process”<sup>73</sup> Trained and designated facilitators are needed in formal groups, in conflict or organizational work. But participant-facilitators — “ordinary people who have an interest in the wellbeing of the entire field”—are also needed. In the past, the “uncanny and awesome nature of . . . fields, which permeate the world in which we live”<sup>74</sup> used to be the responsibility of shamans, but today, Mindell argues “it is everyone’s job to facilitate the connections among [the polarities they contain] and make [their] tensions . . . useful in the marketplace, in the streets, and, of course at home”<sup>75</sup> —to use the transformative potential of tensions and conflicts to create community, better relationships, and more sustainable organizations or, in Mindell’s words, “to create a more meaningful and exciting world.”<sup>76</sup>

The notion of facilitation as a form of individual responsibility, facilitation as a shamanic and transformative every-day practice, is as compelling as it is daunting. According to Mindell, we have a choice: we can see ourselves as separate from the events and troubles taking place around us, or we can understand ourselves as part of “every conflict around us [and] become part of the solution.” But Mindell is also clear that, although

[m]any of us would like the world to change . . . we don’t want to endure the trouble of helping make that happen. It’s easier to dream of

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<sup>73</sup> Mindell, *The Leader As Martial Artist*, 37.

<sup>74</sup> Mindell, *The Leader As Martial Artist*, 11.

<sup>75</sup> Mindell, *Sitting in the Fire*, 23.

<sup>76</sup> Mindell, *The Leader As Martial Artist*, 3.

better leaders who give charismatic speeches about community or civil rights, decreases or increases in military and police protection, improvements in the economy and the betterment of humankind.<sup>77</sup>

Becoming part of the solution has a price which “few of us are willing to pay.” You “begin by being humble. Go back to school. Learn awareness. Learn about rank.” Yet even if you are willing to pay “this minimum price,”<sup>78</sup> even if you read up on current political and social issues, study process work, practice its skills, read the literature, learn its theoretical precepts, the shift in attitude and awareness that the practice of process work requires may remain elusive. Something else must come into play and this, Mindell writes, is beyond individual control:

I have seen in my practice how many shamanic abilities appear when you stop doubting the reality of the spirit. In this moment, something in you transforms, and you develop a deep attention, a steady focus on irrational events. This basic shamanic tool is attention to the dreaming process. When your inner life calls and you stop doubting, a personal transformation begins. But all this is not up to your will. You can work at transforming your personal life to make it more meaningful, but success with your attention is like a blessing that cannot be produced at will. Inner and outer teachers may spur you on, but it is finally up to the spirit to move your assemblage point—the way you identify, assemble, and conduct yourself, and your sense of reality.<sup>79</sup>

For me, learning process work and, perhaps more so, the daily practice of process work, involves remembering and forgetting, changing my mind (again and again) about how the world works and my beliefs about how I exist within it. It affects how I experience the limits of my identity; what I construe and experience as meaningful. It involves what Mindell calls moving “your assemblage point” or what Max Schupbach has more recently described in terms of acquiring a new “operating system.”<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Mindell, *Sitting in the Fire*, 18.

<sup>78</sup> Mindell, *Sitting in the Fire*, 18.

<sup>79</sup> Mindell, *The Shaman's Body*, 5-6.

<sup>80</sup> Karia & Studentova, “Eldership and Inner Work,” 152.

Learning process work not only means operating from within a new conceptual paradigm, it also means experiencing the simultaneous presence of the old and the new. Mindell describes this back-and-forth movement of remembering and forgetting in the conclusion of *Riding the Horse Backwards*, where he writes about the impossible challenge of learning and practicing process work, about change more generally, and about eldership:

How do you grow to the point where you remain balanced in the midst of attacks or where you even look forward to their challenge? How do we develop detachment and compassion? Everything, even death, seems to point to the need for these attitudes, but who can maintain them for more than a moment? [. . .]

To learn detachment you must do what you normally do! Fight life as much as possible. Try to control it, push the river, be as “bad” and as egotistical, ambitious and tough as possible. Fight fate! HOLD ON TO EVERYTHING! At least until it wrenches itself free from you. This is process oriented learning; accepting and going through each stage as it comes up and reaching your goal without ever knowing how you got there.

Perhaps you can’t learn [process work], except through awareness—and then only for a moment. But notice how you forget it again, how you try, but fail to understand it, how you want to be wise and interpret, how you want to change and master the world. And finally, or rather, once again, when all else fails, you realize that life itself teaches process-oriented thinking by wearing out all the other survival methods. After all, who is ready to change before exhaustion?<sup>81</sup>

Much of my learning has been characterized by this struggle between wanting to master a body of knowledge and realizing that my success in bringing this knowledge to life is, in some sense, beyond my control. Becoming an elder or a participant facilitator, in the sense that Mindell suggests, requires more than mastery of intellectual concepts: it requires loosening (or perhaps even losing) the identification with one’s primary processes and personal history. And this

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<sup>81</sup> Arnold Mindell, *Riding the Horse Backwards: Process Work in Theory and Practice*. Portland: Lao Tse Press, 2002, 210.

may not so much be a matter of choice as of fate. It also occurs to me that the attitudes described by process work—while always helpful—may not always be needed; that my “ordinary self” is adequate in most situations and most of the time. But when a difficulty arises, when something troubles my mind, when something ceases to be easy, the ghost of the facilitator appears in the dream that things should or could be otherwise. Easier. Perhaps it is at this moment that the participant-facilitator re-members herself, assembles herself in a different way, whether through an act of will, through conscious effort, or because the new paradigm has to some extent become second nature. In a recent article, Amy Mindell put it this way: “certainly none of us wants or needs to be a facilitator all the time. That would be unrealistic and unnatural.” But like her, I share the longing for a world “in which it is possible, when needed, to shift from a more superficial form of democracy . . . to a lived experience of a deeper democracy in moment-to-moment interactions [by paying attention] to the background feelings, dreams, and subtle communication signals of all participants.”<sup>82</sup>

My first example of what participant-facilitation might look like in every-day situations involves an example of “field work” in the form of innerwork, and I want to suggest that innerwork is an integral part and perhaps the basis of participant-facilitation, not only because it may prepare you for future action in a similar situation but also because, according to field theory, working at the individual and intra-personal level also affects the development of the field as a whole inasmuch as fields “exists regardless of time, space, and physical separation.”

This characteristic of fields has important consequences for how we understand ourselves. Terms such as *personal* and *impersonal*, *individual* and *collective*, *me* and *you*, *inner* and *outer* are relativistic terms without absolute significance. Every feeling,

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<sup>82</sup> Amy Mindell, “Bringing Deep Democracy to Life: An Awareness Paradigm for Deepening Political Dialogue, Personal Relationships, and Community Interactions.” *Psychotherapy and Politics International* 6(3): 213.

thought, movement, and encounter is simultaneously an inner and outer event. Thus meditation or innerwork is a form of worldwork,<sup>83</sup> just as world events are also personal ones.<sup>84</sup>

According to Mindell, “working with a field means dealing with the issues wherever they appear: in groups, in our relationships, dreams, body symptoms, and fantasies. . . . In a relativistic universe governed by non-locality patterns, process-oriented field work means following awareness, whether our focus is on outer or inner events.” Outer injustice or conflicts require innerwork as much as “confrontation and direct action”—especially in situations where outer action is not possible or not advisable. In such situations, process work recommends “to work on the problem internally, to change the outer situation by changing the inner one.”<sup>85</sup>

It may not always be possible to confront or facilitate an outer conflict directly, but it is always possible to engage the field by taking the outer conflict and processing it inward—to facilitate and unfold it as an inner experience. It may not always be possible to occupy the role of the participant-facilitator in the moment (be that because of not knowing enough, ignorance, or momentary lack of awareness), but it is always possible to reconstellate an event and explore its various roles and facilitate their unfolding through innerwork.

My story involves an event that took place several years ago, before I knew anything about process work. It is a small story that continued to trouble my mind for some time. I came to see this story as an illustration of what happens when the role of the facilitator is not occupied, and hoped that returning to the story with awareness, processing the experience consciously, would be helpful not only in terms of understanding the past, but also in terms of understanding myself more fully in the present. By working on this

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<sup>83</sup> Worldwork is the application of process work to global issues, seen as field phenomena.

<sup>84</sup> Mindell, *The Leader As Martial Artist*, 17.

<sup>85</sup> Mindell, *The Leader As Martial Artist*, 69.



situation after the fact, I hoped to understand how, by approaching the scene from a process-oriented perspective, I might have been able to act differently, and how an act of participant-facilitation might have changed the outcome (and perhaps also me).

This story involves a train ride to Cologne to see an art exhibition during a time of considerable turmoil in Europe, since NATO was about to launch its military intervention in the genocide taking place in Kosovo. Throughout Europe, people were gathering in large numbers to protest the deployment of NATO forces, believing that while the genocide should be stopped, war was not the right answer. The morning train was crowded with activists travelling to a peace rally in Bonn as well as seriously inebriated soccer fans heading in the same direction to watch a Bundesliga match. Not long after the train left the station, a strikingly beautiful, dark skinned woman entered the rail car looking for a seat. As she was making her way down the aisle, one of the soccer fans said “Hush, hush, hush: Neger in den Busch,” a racist taunt meaning something like “nigger go back to the jungle.” In an instant there was tension. Passengers sat up in their seats. The woman continued on her way, into the next compartment. Although my heart was racing and I wanted say something, I was frozen. The man across from me moved aside the newspaper that had covered his face and, speaking in the general direction of the soccer fans, said that he would not tolerate such behaviour. This escalated the tension to prompt one of the peace activists to stand up and sternly declare that she supported the man with the newspaper, provoking the soccer fans to take tentative swings at the air in front of her, while the rest of us watched. Feeling compelled to do something, I found myself standing next to the woman who supported the man with the newspaper, declaring—somewhat unoriginally—that I, too, supported the man with the newspaper. In the meantime, someone had called the train conductor, who announced that the train would make an unscheduled stop to

let the disturbers off. A few minutes later the train stopped and the conductor marched the soccer fans out of the compartment. Problem solved. In the remaining two-hour journey, no one said another word about what had happened.

If anything, this story illustrates for me what I believe Mindell is talking about when he suggests that awareness in our every-day experience of the world is minimal, that we act automatically, compulsively; that we are drawn into roles and that, without awareness, we are doomed to repeat history.<sup>86</sup> “We are unconsciously pulled and pushed by the problems at home and in the world. However, we are only rarely conscious of our inner experience of these forces and of our ability to work with or against them.” Although “everyone notices the forces of our troubled environment and changing culture[, t]o become conscious citizens of the third millennium, we must consciously react to these forces. Only then can we fully participate in history and contribute to transforming the times in which we live.”<sup>87</sup> But the story, and the stories that follow, also show how the degree to which an individual is able to operate from within a process work framework determines the extent to which the individual is able to participate in events in a fundamentally facilitative manner.

Mindell at times refers to the forces that trouble us in term of spirits—“spirits of the time”—allowing us to some extent to see the world as animated by impersonal spirits.<sup>88</sup> This perspective would have allowed me to

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<sup>86</sup> See for example, *Sitting in the Fire*, p. 168 -169: “We repeat history . . . whether or not the people involved know this history.

<sup>87</sup> Mindell, *The Leader As Martial Artist*, 7.

<sup>88</sup> See Mindell, *The Leader As Martial Artist*, 25. While the term “role” is more commonly used by process workers at the moment, Mindell introduced the term *timespirit* in an attempt to update the concept of *role* and, more specifically, to capture the “temporal and transitory nature of roles in a personal or group field.” According to Mindell, the term “is meant to remind us of the transformational potential of the world around us.” He explains: “timespirits are like figures in our dreams. They are like whirlpools or vortices in an otherwise invisible field; they attract you, suck you into their swirl of energies. When you identify with a timespirit in a given field, you actually experience the emotions of that spirit; your

see the conflict on the train in terms of non-local energies that shape global politics as much as they shape small-scale tensions, such as the one I am thinking about here. Perhaps the racist taunt was merely the catalyst for the spirits of war and peace to show themselves. Field awareness would have allowed me to see the opposing viewpoints as necessary constituent parts of the overall process, would have provided a meta-position, an overview; and it might have allowed me to see a larger pattern, in which—ironically—the polar opposites end up looking very much alike inasmuch as both insisted that “something” was not welcome or allowed on the train. I would have understood that, although the troublemakers were removed, the timespirit of racism was still around and—much like the troublemakers themselves—left to find another mode of transport.

Like everyone else on the train, I was in “conflict with conflict,” and disregarded the emotions and dreaming background that also belonged to the experience—a dream perhaps of more relationship, relatedness and diversity, and a sense of being in this mess together. My innerwork explorations of the event on the train connected me to the emotional substratum of my own experience: even though on the surface I was frozen, I also discovered a racing passionate heart that wanted the world to be different, wanted me to be different.

I am not sure exactly why I have returned to this story so often in my mind. Perhaps at the time it was my own frozen state in response to what was going on that most troubled me: I thought of myself as someone who would know what to do or say in such as situation, who would know how to act responsibly, and initially I admired the man with the newspaper for speaking out. But the story also brings to mind my mother’s story about responsibility and expertise, and reminds me how as a woman I am conditioned to some

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consciousness is altered, so to speak. You get angry or become inflated. You feel heroic or victimized. The timespirit’s energies make you moody and possessed, crazy and joyous, depressed and suicidal.”

extent to become passive when there is a man around who appears to know what to do. In hindsight not only my own response, but also the man's response seem inadequate. It seemed as though there was only a limited set of options or moves that could be made in the situation, a limited set of responses that seemed available to me, to us, as a group, on this train. But perhaps what Mindell is talking about when he speaks of individual responsibility has something to do with the ability to respond to the totality of a situation, the ability to respond to the whole of what is happening rather than to identify with one position in a polarized field. Even now, as I write about this scene, I realize that I still find myself looking at the soccer fans as "the others," as the ones to be dealt with by "the rest of us" who are not like them, "the rest of us" who know better than to be racist in public. But what if, as Mindell suggests, I could have used my attention successfully and been an "aware" participant with the ability to participate (i.e., intervene) more effectively? And what would the intervention have consisted of?

Mindell argues that "it is virtually impossible to separate belief from method,"<sup>89</sup> that the beliefs we have about ourselves and others *are* interventions "in that they guide our decisions and make experiences available or, in some cases, unavailable to us."<sup>90</sup> I wonder how a belief in the potential of conflict to create community or knowledge of field concepts would have changed the outcome of the train story? What if I could have been open to the tension and used my awareness "to enter the heart of conflict"? What if I had moved within a "paradigm that is beyond danger and safety, war and peace, violence, and nonviolence," a paradigm beyond viewpoints that are "either *for* or *against* what is actually happening"?<sup>91</sup> What if I had known that "the missing power of transformation [resides] in the

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<sup>89</sup> Mindell, *The Year One*, 83.

<sup>90</sup> Mindell, *The Year One*, 83-84.

<sup>91</sup> Mindell, *The Deep Democracy of Open Forums*, 6.

tension itself and in people's behavior [and that] *conflict is the fastest way to community*”<sup>92</sup>

Process work intervenes, so to speak, at the limit of everyday perception, inasmuch as a person with process work training (ideally) notices and responds to signals and pre-signals that are not typically noticed or responded to consciously by someone without awareness training. “Process work paradigms *are*<sup>93</sup> interventions in the sense that they value and make conscious what people are either consciously or unconsciously doing.”<sup>94</sup> Years after the train trip to Cologne, innerwork allowed me to notice a body signal of which I had not been aware at the time: my own rapidly beating heart. In following this signal, I discovered an erratic spirit in myself that cares little for political correctness and social norms: an un-lived part of me wanted to jump up and act a little drunk just as soon as the racist taunt had been uttered, and to ask if there was anyone on this train who knew what to do about this horrible racism. Behind this fantasy is a dream of a world where people are free to be moved by their passions and to express themselves, a world where difference is not silenced by the tyranny of the normal and the majority view, a world in which harmony and unity are no more valued than diversity and conflict. If I found myself in a similar situation now, I believe that I would be able to bring out this spirit in the background and that some direct communication might happen at the point where, in the old story, the conductor appears to enforce the rules of proper conduct. Perhaps now I would be able to stay awake and use my “grasp of the field [and] put [it] in the service of resolving the problem[.]”<sup>95</sup>

Racism persists and its subtler forms show themselves, as Mindell explains, whenever we ignore “the basic emotional sub-stratum of human

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<sup>92</sup> Mindell, *The Deep Democracy of Open Forums*, 4.

<sup>93</sup> Emphasis mine.

<sup>94</sup> Mindell, *The Year One*, 83/4.

<sup>95</sup> Mindell, *The Deep Democracy of Open Forums*, 44.

nature that makes all of us upset, angry and emotional at times. To invalidate this substratum marginalizes the passion that fuels what we all want and don't want."<sup>96</sup> The "first racist act is to look down on the Dreaming" that "creates, re-creates, destroys, and rearranges everything." While "Australian Aboriginal people, indigenous African shamans, first-nations people in the Americas, etc., still take the Dreaming seriously," western or westernized cosmopolitan cultures marginalize "fantasy, and creativity, art, and music—in brief the mysteriousness of everyday life."<sup>97</sup> In this sense, perhaps most of us are racist. Certainly, for me, making room for the Dreaming, for the "other"—the passing strange thought, the electric flicker of an impulse, a dark flirt, the strange coincidence—remains one of process work's greatest challenges, just as its insistence that it belongs to all of us may be one of its greatest gifts.

Once I began my training in process work, it was no longer so easy to see the actions and behaviour of others as strictly separate from myself. The training required opening up to the notion that what I perceived as the "other," in this paradigm is not only an aspect of the larger field but also an aspect of the self-in-process. At a very basic level, it meant letting go of a fixed sense of identity and a ready divisibility of self and other; it meant entertaining the idea that what is experienced as "other" or "not-me" (regardless of whether this other is seen to be desirable or disturbing) carries a potentially meaningful message for the perceiver, for me, and that my positive or negative responses in relation to this other signal something about the nature of my own relationship to this aspect within me. This next story illustrates how picking up and following a small signal of irritation with another person can be transformative at the personal level, and also at the level of the larger field: how innerwork is also worldwork.

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<sup>96</sup> Mindell, *The Deep Democracy of Open Forums*, 25.

<sup>97</sup> Mindell, *The Deep Democracy of Open Forums*, 118.

This next account of participant-facilitation is meant to illustrate how following a personal irritation can also become organisational development work. According to Mindell, many organizations are haunted by a “ghost who is not willing to give anything to anyone”<sup>98</sup> and since “[e]veryone wants to be appreciated,” many of us working in organizations are moved to “secretly steal[. . .], at least in the sense of covertly eliciting love and encouragement.”<sup>99</sup>, According to Mindell, the role of the appreciator is not typically occupied in most organisations or groups.<sup>100</sup> While he specifically discusses the need for appreciation that facilitators may experience in their work, in my experience his suggestion that “needing to be thanked could [also] be a role”<sup>101</sup> in the field, applies in most organizational contexts. But he offers also another way of looking at this: from a spiritual or Taoist perspective, “no one ‘does’ anything and no one needs to be thanked; the power of life itself is at work and in need of recognition.”<sup>102</sup> However, in everyday reality most of us do not have this perspective and want acknowledgement for our efforts and accomplishments.

One day at work, checking my email, I found myself irritated by a fellow process work student who, I noticed, had received many supportive and appreciative emails after posting an account of an internship project in group facilitation he had just completed. Although he did not say this, he was clearly pleased with and excited about the outcomes of his project and wanted to share his success and good feelings with the wider process work community. The support he received annoyed me, especially because my own internship project on participant-facilitation in an on-line environment had been anything but spectacular, with most of my time spent imploring my

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<sup>98</sup> Mindell, *The Deep Democracy of Open Forums*, 96. Mindell refers to the effect of “something we feel but cannot see” as ‘ghosts’. See Mindell, *Sitting in the Fire*, 89.

<sup>99</sup> Mindell, *The Leader as Martial Artist*, 157

<sup>100</sup> See *The Deep Democracy of Open Forums*, the section called “Being Thanked for Your Work,” 95-6.

<sup>101</sup> Mindell, *The Deep Democracy of Open Forums*, 96.

<sup>102</sup> Mindell, *The Deep Democracy of Open Forums*, 95.

group to show up so we could learn and experiment together. I was jealous and felt that my own efforts were unappreciated, my own project puny in comparison. At the same time, I had contempt for the fellow student who had been so unabashed about sharing his success. In my world, that was not allowed. Who needs validation? Not me. I was bothered by my own lack of generosity and the realization that I secretly needed and wanted to be appreciated too. Through innerwork, I discovered an entire belief structure around the need for attention and approval: I should do things for their own sake and not need external validation, but my ego had other ideas: it wanted my efforts to be seen and appreciated. In that respect I was no different from my friend.

Being one of a small group of university staff who facilitate the development of research proposals, I was pondering the results of a grant competition, the biggest of the year for researchers in the Social Sciences and Humanities Faculties. Looking at the numbers, I realised that in this competition our university had done better than any other in the country. In light of my meditation on appreciation and in light of my sense of often feeling unappreciated and unseen at work, I sent an email to my colleagues and superiors commenting on our remarkable success rate. The administrator in charge responded with an email saying “we are aware of the 52% success rate.” Period. “Yes,” I wrote back, “but do you realize that this represents the highest success across the country?” I felt strongly that this should be noted, and that our department’s contribution in this outcome should be appreciated by our administration. Ordinarily I would not have spoken up about this, preferring to sulk and gossip about the stinginess of our bosses, seizing yet another opportunity to celebrate the administration’s lack of appreciation of its employees. But I could now see that this was also me! So instead, inspired by my fellow student’s example, I wrote a light-hearted email that acknowledged my own need to boast about our group’s and my own



contribution to this success rate, which amounted to almost double the national average, and to congratulate everyone for doing so well. This was not only energizing and relieving to myself, but generated positive feedback about our work and, perhaps more importantly, instigated a number of conversations about generosity and the need for appreciation in an organisation that is characterized by competition and professional jealousies. I can't say that my 'intervention' had any long-term transformational effects on the way things are done in my university but, for a brief moment, the local atmosphere was changed. As a result of this experience, I have also become aware of how low structural rank, in part, prevents us from expressing appreciation for the work of people of higher rank, and how I project my need for appreciation on my bosses. I now no longer see the need for recognition as only a personal issue: I have a sense now that—as Mindell suggests—nature itself, “the power of life,” deserves the credit. On occasion, I am able to respond to the “ghost” that haunts my work place, “who is not willing to give anything to anyone,” without conscious reflection or intent, but with a sense of humour; I am able to receive the gift of appreciation. And when my insistence on being thanked is met with good-hearted laughter, it is as if the courage to face this ghost out loud strikes a deep chord in many people who would like, but perhaps don't feel free enough, to do the same.

As I reflect on my experiences with participant-facilitation over the past three years, I realize that more often than not this role did not come naturally to me: I had to make a conscious effort to step into it. But I long for those moments when small acts of participant-facilitation are no longer a self-conscious choice or an effort of will, but are second nature, where facilitation happens in the moment, without reflection—as I believe it did in the following instance that I remember with much affection and admiration for my friend Susan, a long-time student and practitioner of process work, and her elegant intervention, during a long drive back from Portland to

Vancouver. It had been a fraught day and an exhausting drive and it was getting dark. Susan was asleep in the back seat; my partner, Al, was driving. No one had spoken for a long time. Perhaps there was nothing much to say as his and my relationship was coming to an end, and I was struggling to accept this. There was much that was unspoken in the car. As we approached the border Al, noticing that we were low on gas, deciding that it would be a good idea to get some cheap gas before we crossed into Canada, abruptly yanked the car around to make a left turn, barely missing oncoming traffic. I remember harsh and bitter words forming in my throat, about all the bad driving, and all the stupid decisions he had ever made, when Susan's head appeared between the front seats and she said: "Oh, wow, Al, such great driving. Such *great* driving." This is participant-facilitation: it looks like nothing, but it changes everything. One moment at a time.

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