

# **The Creative Clash of Paradigms**

**An autoethnographic research project studying  
personal experiences of process work and  
ceremonial shamanism**



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## INTRODUCTION

This dissertation represents both a research journey and some steps in a journey of individuation, or 'coming to selfhood' (Jung 1977ed.). I took as my field of study, my experiences within two paradigms that are important and meaningful to me - Process Work and shamanic ceremony, and my struggle to find my own ground and practice in relation to their divergent aspects. In the course of that struggle, I show the deepening of my awareness of both paradigms, and of the self who struggled with them. Moving through different levels and kinds of awareness, the transformative effect of this struggle enabled a new synergy to emerge from what seemed like polarised or unrelated frameworks and perspectives. I examined the frameworks of the two paradigms, and the personal framing of my own individual and collective history around pertinent issues, participated in medicine ceremony with ayahuasca, a vine from the Amazon, and used Process Work awareness skills to continue unfolding the emergent process. I was challenged by my material to grapple with issues that emerged around power and authority, which have both an individual and collective significance. Using my own journey of awareness through these issues as my medium of research, I have demonstrated a process recognisable as the 'transcendent function' (see below) in relation to my experience of a paradigm clash. It turns out that the function of the clash is to create a disturbance which attracts my attention and leads me to unfold information and awareness into a deeper and more fluid unified perspective: then the disturbance fades away, its catalytic work done. This reflects the pattern of any self-organising system, be it individual or collective:

The intent of this new information is to keep the system off-balance, alert to how it might need to change... stability comes from a deepening centre, a clarity about who [the self-organising system] is, what it needs, what is required to survive in its environment.

(Wheatley 2006)

Change and leadership are themes which became more personally accessible to me through this unfolding of disturbance. Engaging with roles of power, authority and rebellion enabled me to go beyond my initial responses of fighting or collapsing, and led to a more unified ability to be *fluid or fixed, process worker or ceremonial shaman*, identifying and disidentifying more readily in relation to the environment and the moment.

Because my research is rooted in unfolding personal experience, the research method I

have used is auto-ethnography, which is 'the study of the awareness of the self within a culture' (Koshnick, 2007). Each of us faces challenges to fully embody our capacity for leadership in one way or another, and we live at a time when current thinking suggests a need for interactive rather than hierarchical leadership. For this reason I hope to have usefully dusted one corner of the amphitheatre of shared practice.

Shamanism is a term that means many things to many people, and I will expand on this in Chapter Four. On the one hand, I want to refer to a framework of earth-based spiritual beliefs, experiences and practices which I am aware will only appear meaningful to some people, and not to others. On the other hand, I want to speak to that part of everyone which has a shamanic sensibility, whilst respecting the diversity of perspectives with which we identify.

I'm aware as I write that the language and concepts I choose, can confer centrality and marginality on different perspectives and kinds of awareness. If I write about ayahuasca as a plant extract ingested for its psychotropic properties, I use a detached, consensus reality level of awareness. If I refer to her as Grandmother Medicine, I enter into the flow of altered or dreaming awareness with language whose shamanic function is to feed and energise a subtle level of relatedness within a sentient universe. A consensus level perspective might see this as imaginative symbolism. Each perspective is important for the whole, as is the dialogue between them. My personal perspective tends towards relational language implying sentient connectedness.

The Process Work paradigm will also be described in more detail in Chapter Two. It is rooted in Jungian psychology, quantum physics, Taoism and shamanism.

Its methods reflect a dedication to accurately following the way of nature, while bringing awareness into the patterns structuring our lives; including those parts normally unseen, unappreciated, disturbing or marginalized. Bringing awareness into this interaction, a surprising and crazy wisdom emerges and a creative way forward in even most difficult situations. (RSPOPUK 2007)

I was involved in learning, practising and teaching in the field of shamanism for about twenty years before I began to study Process Work. Because of my love for both paradigms, my aim in this project was to find out how Process Work and my experience of

shamanic ceremony live together in me. Process Work is deeply rooted in shamanism, and as it continues to evolve, is developing understandings and practices which are contemporary expressions of shamanism. Despite this, there were aspects of my experiences within the two frameworks that I found it hard to reconcile.

I was inspired by Kate Jobe's account of her own experience of a 'paradigm crunch' (Jobe 2004, p20) between her dance training and and Process Work perspective.

In my experience as a learner, a paradigm makes a sort of corral around certain experiences that says, "This is it" and "This is not it". This in/out feeling creates a clash when you have two disciplines, one on each side of the fence, especially when each has personal, collective and spiritual meaning for you *and* they look like they exclude one another. (Jobe 2004, p21)

Similarly to Jobe, I felt that one main focus of the clash was between the *prescriptive* aspects of shamanism that are embodied, for example, in its ceremonial forms and traditions, and the way Process Work values and pays attention to the *momentary flow of unintentional phenomena*. There are several purposes for ceremony's predetermined and traditional forms, including the need to safely contain and navigate people through altered state experiences, the conservation and recreation of culture, and the collective sharing of an experience. Characteristically, the ceremonial structure creates a known container in which participants may surrender to an unknown experience.

Process work, as I will show, has universality and 'deep democracy', or the meaningful inclusion of all parts and levels of experience, as core values in its theory and practice, which makes the sharing of collective ceremonial form much rarer. The project of opening awareness to non-linear perception that is at the heart of much ceremony, is fulfilled in different ways within the Process Work paradigm, and this is one of its most innovative and creative aspects.

These are broad generalisations, intended to roughly indicate the terrain of the recurring themes which led to my research project. As my research progressed, I became less aware of a polarity between the prescriptive qualities of one paradigm and the fluidity of the other, and more aware of the way each paradigm embodied and managed the tension and interplay between these two - essential – qualities. The internal reflection of this shift of awareness, was a corresponding shift in my own ability to embody the same two

qualities in a more integrated way.

In the course of exploring the apparent conflict between the two paradigms, I became embroiled in a complex of issues around leadership and rebellion, marginalisation and power. I was challenged to see where I was attached to a view which mistrusted any spiritual authority, regarding it as inevitably oppressive. At times I viewed both paradigms in this light. Arnie Mindell uses the phrase 'burning our wood' (Mindell 1992) to refer to that aspect of the process in which we take the passion of our one-sidedness to such completion, that we are able through 'enantiodromia' – the degree of fullness that becomes its opposite - to detach from it as our defining identity, and inhabit a role of greater eldership which can hold the bigger picture. This work of self-awareness, which included examining these themes in the context of my personal and collective history, is invited within an autoethnographic research project, which has been described as being

... a demonstration of critical self-understanding, of self as influenced by the confluence of innumerable social and natural forces. (Koshnick 2007)

Bringing awareness to, and detaching from an identification, is a natural life process that moves us willingly or unwillingly. It is the stuff of therapy and perhaps all forms of self-awareness. Jung called this process the 'transcendent function'.

Jung's particular contribution to the psychology of conflict was to point out that if a person can hold the tension between the conflicting opposites, then eventually something will happen in the psyche to resolve the conflict. The outer circumstances may in fact remain the same, but a change takes place in the individual. This change, essentially irrational and unforeseeable, appears as a new attitude to both oneself and others; energy previously locked up in a state of indecision is released and movement becomes possible. Jung calls this the transcendent function, because what happens transcends the conflicting opposites (Sharp 1988).

Process Work develops this psychological perspective and connects it with a collective dimension. The transcendent function also operates at a collective level, in which the field organises us to focus on the conflicts and disturbances that are the gateways to collective transformation. Max Schupbach writes:

From our Worldwork perspective, conflict and tensions, fights and wars, and competition and the desire to overcome, are holistic attempts from different parts of a collective to relate to one another, and to establish a sense of the whole... It is up to us to unfold the meaning of these relationships in a deeper way, so that the pain and friction that is part of conflict can be

transformed into synergy and collaboration. (Schupbach, 2006)

Engagement with issues of leadership and rebellion, and the struggle to embody an authority which is not characterised either by a need – however subtle - for power over others, or by the marginalisation of the diversity of others, are parts of the training ground for the collaboration that we need, in order to live together on this planet. It enables us to develop an eldership in ourselves which can embrace internal and external diversity, facilitating change with greater fluidity and creativity. I hope to have demonstrated a small example of this.

Chapter One describes the methodology of autoethnography, with its applications, benefits and limitations and the controversy which still surrounds its validation within the research community. I hope to add to process work literature by writing about this research method which is eminently suited to some personal styles of qualitative research. I hope it also may add to the dialogue between process work and the wider research community.

Chapter Two is an introduction to Process Work, including an overall view and the aspects most relevant to this study. I explore the ways in which Process Work embodies a contemporary shamanism in its theory and practice, and the ways in which it differs from shamanic ceremony. This chapter introduces the concepts and practices which I use in my research.

In Chapter Three I examine concepts of 'dreaming' which are found in both shamanism and Process Work, and have some parallels in quantum theory. I explore the extent to which these concepts form the basis of a shared worldview between the paradigms. They give us a language to speak about phenomena which are not totally accessible to our consensus reality level of awareness; a language which supports the validity of altered state experiences.

Chapter Four presents some views on what constitutes shamanism, both traditionally and in contemporary contexts, and focusses on some aspects of shamanic ceremony. Drawing attention to the context and positioning of a given perspective, I examine some of the socio-political issues surrounding adoption of shamanic practices by people in Western cultures. This chapter outlines the characteristics of a shamanic perspective as a



framework for awareness processes.

Chapter Five outlines relevant parts of my personal history. This is in keeping with the quality criteria of my methodology, that personal accountability for the work is provided by the researcher being 'a positioned subject both within the text and the wider cultural, political and historical contexts in which they exist.' (Foster, McAllister & O'Brien, 2006) It is also relevant because gaining the fluidity to shift viewpoints depends partly on being able to let go of the identifications based on our personal history, as shown by my inner work particularly in Chapter Eight. I had to confront aspects of my personal and collective history which kept the paradigm puzzle locked until I could free up my identity and awareness from habitual constraints. The information about my background enabled me to show how the research path itself brought significant changes in my personal psychology, thus evidencing an example of the potency and purpose of the path of awareness as it wound through the frameworks of both paradigms, guided by the same dreaming spirit.

Chapter Six describes the beginning of my path of research: the choosing of my topic, and first encounters with ayahuasca, or 'Grandmother medicine'. I review a little of the background of medicine ceremony; its cultural origins, intentions, forms and protocols, to give some understanding of the context of my experience, and to express some of the values of the ceremonial aspects of a shamanic paradigm. I discuss some parallels between ceremonial and process oriented ways of shifting awareness.

Chapters Seven and Eight are an account of participating in medicine ceremony, and the experiences and subsequent inner work. I show the transformative effect of awareness practices, and how that impacts on my relationship with both paradigms. By presenting a journey of personal experience, I show how Process Work can provide awareness tools for transforming a conflict between spiritual paradigms into an experience of dynamic synergy. As a paradigm which provides strategies for facilitating our own conflicts, Process Work is both protagonist and facilitator in my journey. This seems to me of great use in a world where in many respects, our spiritual paradigms are so deeply embattled.

One facet of this study is a tangle of issues around rank, power, fear and rule-breaking. The contexts in which I've engaged with this theme, as I've shown in Chapters Five and Eight, include my early relationship with the Christian church, a collective history around

witchcraft, my experiences as a practitioner within shamanic and medicine paradigms, as well as with political and cultural issues involved in relating to traditions from other cultures. This tangle of issues is key to my internal evolving relationship with rank and leadership, as described in Chapters Seven, Eight and Nine.

I refer in Chapter Eight to others addressing these issues of rank and power while living and negotiating with more than one spiritual paradigm, particularly Third World women writing on ecology, feminism and religion (Ruether, 1996)

Chapter Nine is an account of some further episodes belonging to the research, after I thought I had finished. Though my personal evolutionary processes do not end, the episodes in Chapter Nine are moments of completion because they demonstrate embodying and integrating the qualities that were present, but beyond my identity, from the beginning.

In Chapter Ten I present my conclusions. I show how grappling with the problems led me further into accessing my own authority around spirituality and facilitation, giving me greater fluidity in relation to both paradigms, and beyond. Through the lens of this greater fluidity I show a different perspective on the two paradigms, in which their apparent conflict can be seen as an ongoing and fruitful relationship where neither is as fixed as I at first perceived. Bringing awareness to perceptions of reality changes the experience of that reality. I note that this alchemical process was spoken of by Jung as the 'transcendent function', whereby the psychological work on irreconcilable opposites brings not synthesis but a new synergy. (Jung 1970 edit.) I refer also to Castaneda's Don Juan, who talked about the totality of ourselves which lies beyond any view, and which we may be able to access when two views are pitted against each other. (Castaneda 1974)

Through presenting this research, I hope to encourage awareness around internal and external marginalisation in general, and in particular around spirituality. I know many people have shamanic experiences and do not speak about them. Gary Reiss writes

It has taken years and the encouragement of my teachers to feel comfortable revealing my other-worldly experiences. Even writing publicly about them now is still somewhat unusual. According to mainstream culture, I am a professional who should talk accordingly, and mentioning dreamlike experiences is considered odd. (Reiss, 2001)

By writing as I have, I've shown how process work gives me a framework to 'walk between the worlds' in everyday life, bringing shamanic values into momentary experiences, and moving more fluidly between mainstream and marginal both internally and in my interactions with others, in other areas of life including ceremony. In stepping forward with my views and experiences, I hope to encourage others to do the same, participating together in a rich dialogue between all our many awarenesses of, and dilemmas around, the sacred. I hope to add to a culture of creative conflict and engagement with difference, fuelled by a sense of commonality, which provides us with alternatives to war.

## CHAPTER ONE: AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

When I began writing my first draft of this dissertation, I had no idea of the range and variety of research methods which are currently used. I hoped that if I clambered aboard my subject with enthusiasm and discipline, the path would become clear and I would somehow end up with a strong and interesting enquiry, firmly pinned between an introduction and a conclusion.

As I began to explore my topic, I encountered different sorts of obstacles and difficulties; in the content, the framing, the perspective – in just about every aspect. Gradually I was helped to realise that part of my difficulty was a lack of knowledge about the research context, its agreed parameters and recognised evaluative criteria.

It was not too hard to recognise that my methodology would be qualitative rather than quantitative, and I liked meeting the word 'heuristic'. It is originally related to the Greek "eureka!" which roughly means "I have found (it)" (Wikipedia, 2006). It refers to "enabling a person to discover or learn something for themselves". (Compact Oxford English Dictionary, 2006) It fuelled my confidence in believing that following and writing about a personal experiential journey over a certain period of time, could be valid research. But then where are the boundaries drawn? What is the difference between a diary, an account, and a piece of research? And would it be eligible as a piece of process work research because of my viewpoint as the experiential subject and writer, or because I would compare process work with other paradigms in the course of my journey – or both?

I started to discover how others had answered these and other questions, and how the territory of contemporary research is being mapped. For some decades, a shift has been going on, and a debate, about what can be considered scientific. In the quantum field, it was recognised that the experimenter affected the outcome of the experiment, thus affecting previous fundamentals of a required 'objectivity'. In the social sciences, social constructivism suggested that our encounters with the world, and the way we understand 'reality' and make meaning, are constructed from our cultural standpoint and interactions.

From this point of view, those of us who are especially concerned with understanding 'the other', whether we are for example, counsellors, nurses, conflict facilitators or

ethnographers, are encouraged to see the value of understanding ourselves. It is valuable because of the impact of our subjectivity on our awareness and understanding, and because of the living process of our relationship with the 'other' in which we participate. Some therapeutic paradigms work with understandings of therapist-client dynamics in which our personal and professional selves are entwined, describing this phenomenon in terms of 'transference' and 'counter-transference'. Process work develops these understandings further, particularly by researching and facilitating the field dynamics conditioning all our self-other relationships, and I will describe that in more detail in Chapter Two.

There is a growing legitimacy for reflexive research, in which the use of the self in the research is considered valuable and important, alongside a broader definition of research itself:

Research practices have been changing and developing as postmodern thinking has blurred the boundaries between the disciplines of philosophy, psychology, theology, humanities, anthropology, sociology and literature. Counselling practices have also changed and developed, and in the process some fixed beliefs about psychological concepts of self and identity have been shaken. Narrative practices have challenged power relationships and opened our minds to think of those we help as co-researchers, and sessions as re-search rather than therapy (Etherington, 2004)

One such power relationship is the power of hegemony over naming and describing the world, its people and the nature of our actions and relationships. So a natural consequence of this shift of paradigms has been the emergence and validation of marginalised voices and perspectives. Autoethnography has emerged as a field in which these can be expressed. It is still a relatively young and controversial field of research, as evidenced by the fact that, despite thousands of website references, studies and texts, the term did not appear in either the Oxford English Dictionary online or Websters' dictionary online at the time of writing.

It evolved in the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, at least partly because of a growing awareness that ethnographic research was predominantly carried out by researchers from

mainstream cultures, studying people in marginalised cultures whose own subjective voices were not considered valid discourse.

Autoethnography is a genre of writing in which authors draw on their own lived experiences, connect the personal to the cultural and place the self and others within a social context. (Maguire, 2006)

There are a variety of ways that, and reasons for which the self can be seen as valuable grounds for research. There are also questions which arise: what are the boundaries between autoethnography and autobiography? What are the quality criteria by which a piece of research can be evaluated?

In speaking of film and video, Catherine Russell argues that

Autobiography becomes ethnographic at the point where the film- or video-maker understands his or her personal history to be implicated in larger social formations and historical processes. (Russell, 1999)

Susan Bennett says it is often an analysis of being different or an outsider, seeing the self as others might or explaining the self to others, explaining how one is 'othered'. It is usually written to an audience not part of the group and often describes a conflict of cultures. She distinguishes it from a traditional personal narrative, a single event, incident or experience, a simple description or story, or something written to the self as major audience. (Bennett, 2006)

And what of the difficulties? Etherington (2004) notices that counselors and therapists are increasingly attracted to autoethnography because of an awareness of the importance of family and social systems to the client, and a realization of the impact of the therapist's own cultural identifications on their relationship with the client. She recognizes that a tension exists about self-disclosure that is related to the philosophical and theoretical beliefs that underpin approaches to training. Traditionally, psychoanalytical and psychodynamic therapists do not disclose themselves to their clients, except perhaps in terms of transference or counter-transference, whereas those trained in humanistic approaches would see self-disclosure as part of being more present in the real relationship with their clients, characterized by congruence. (Etherington 2004)

Process work adds a dimension to this perspective, by recognizing that the practitioner's

responses to a client are organized by the field which includes them both, and are therefore both personal and part of the process which is available for unfolding.

Critics of autoethnography accuse it of being self-indulgent and narcissistic. Issues of confidentiality are raised when anonymity of others is not sufficiently maintained in the text. Academics have found that exposing vulnerability in their writing, has impacted on their subsequent lack of professional advancement, and others have experienced being pathologised. (Etherington 2004) Holt writes that “traditional criteria used to judge qualitative research in general may not be appropriate for autoethnography” (Holt 2003) He suggests a need to rethink “terms such as validity, reliability, and objectivity” and recognizes a critical concern with “the use of verification strategies” and “the use of self as the only source of data”. (ibid)

Quality criteria take account of the danger of narcissism, by requiring that the narrative ...provoke readers to broaden their horizons, reflect critically on their own experience, enter empathically into worlds of experience different from their own, and actively engage in dialogue regarding the social and moral implications of the different perspectives and standpoints they encounter. (Ellis & Bochner 2000)

Holt notes five criteria put forward by Richardson: that the piece should make a substantive contribution to our understanding of social life, that it have aesthetic merit, that the author exhibit reflexivity as producer and product of the text, that it should impact on its audience, and that it should express a reality. (Holt 2003) Foster, McAllister and O'Brien point out that

there is also a need for the writer to balance their own experiences with those of the participants so that their personal writing is not privileged over, nor overshadows, the voices of the participants. (Foster, McAllister & O'Brien 2006)

They also assert that

...the use of personal writing in autoethnography may be seen as providing personal accountability for the researcher's work” because the researcher is seen to be “a positioned subject both within the text and the wider cultural, political and historical contexts in which they exist. (ibid)

In the same article, they reflect on some of the skills and qualities required of the researcher using this method: courage to reveal what is usually kept private, honesty, ability to ‘recall previous experience and emotions, and be able to reflect upon them and articulate them in an evocative way...and the willingness to explore beyond traditional ...

expressive forms.' They warn that we cannot claim to fully understand the 'other' through self-study. (ibid)

For those who champion the objectivity and distanced authority of the researcher, this is of course, inadequate, and debate over the legitimacy of this form of research methodology continues. Holt recognizes that 'whereas the use of autoethnographic methods may be increasing, knowledge of how to evaluate and provide feedback to improve such accounts appears to be lagging.' (Holt 2003)



## **CHAPTER TWO: PROCESS WORK - WHAT IS IT?**

Process Work was developed by Dr. Arnold Mindell and colleagues with first books published in the 1980s, and has been evolving ever since. There is so much that could be said, and is available to read in other places, so I will limit this chapter mainly to a review of those aspects of Process Work which are intrinsic to my research.

In a nutshell, Process Work, or Process Oriented Psychology is a study of how we perceive and experience life as human beings. Its systematic understanding is intended for use in as many different situations as possible: people in coma, people with body symptoms, dreams and relationship difficulties, people making theatre and music and art, people in organisations, communities and war zones, people making theoretical leaps to link paradigms and disciplines, people in mainstream and marginalised cultures all over the world. Because where there is life, there is process and evolution and interrelatedness. It trains our awareness to notice phenomena that disturb our identities and intentions, and find out what these disturbances tell us about a process that is meaningfully trying to happen. It considers that everything, every part of an interactive system, every voice and perspective, however unacceptable, is in some way essential to the unfolding whole. This is called deep democracy.

### **DEEP DEMOCRACY**

Arlene Audergon explains how, in the collective and political arena, deep democracy differs from the democracy of 'majority rule' and requires something different of us:

Arnold Mindell recognises that what leads us is not one idea or the other. Our tensions, emotions and long-standing conflicts lead us. What leads us is the atmosphere between us and the underlying field that not only pulls and pushes us, but joins us ultimately to one another. What leads us is the voice, the idea, just on the outskirts of our awareness, that has not yet been heard. What leads us is the interplay between old and new, between that which dominates and that which is marginalised. History leads us. We need leaders who can facilitate this encounter, who welcome diversity, conflict and the feelings and dimension of our experience. (A. Audergon, 2005)

Diamond and Jones note that as process theory developed, the concept of deep democracy 'expanded to include the disavowed dreaming experiences of individuals, as

well as the marginalised parts of a group.’ (Diamond & Jones, 2004) They refer to the development of deep democracy as an awareness method, so that people ‘might use their awareness and access their inner diversity even in the midst of social tension and injustice.’ (Ibid)

Amy Mindell points out that we tend to have an internal ‘majority rule’ ‘which favours only our identity or primary process’ rather than opening up to

...secondary, disavowed experiences. But who is really democratic, especially when we consider our inner worlds which are most often run by tyrannical forces that sit upon our less desirable parts? How many of us are truly open to all sides of ourselves? How many of us notice such spontaneous motions as tripping slightly as we walk, or the scratchiness of our voice, disturbing body feelings, painful body symptoms or troublesome relationship issues? (Mindell, 1995)

To follow such uninvited or insignificant phenomena with a belief that they somehow show the way, in some process that is trying to emerge, we need more than expertise: we need beginners mind.

## **BEGINNER’S MIND**

A few decades ago, before I ever heard of process work, I was writing an essay for a philosophy degree entitled ‘what is knowledge?’ I recalled the story Plato tells of Socrates, that the oracle at Delphi said he was the wisest man on earth. (Plato, edn. 2002) Socrates couldn’t understand it; ‘I know nothing!’ he said. Socrates set out to prove the oracle wrong by seeking out all the most likely and erudite (male) members of ancient Athenian society and questioning them on their knowledge. To his amazement, he discovered the limits of each one, and realised that although he himself knew nothing, he was aware of that, whereas these others each thought they had the definitive grasp on reality. Socrates’ kind of wisdom, told like this, has much in common with the Zen kind, where ‘knowing nothing’ is just the kind of beginner’s mind needed for our awareness to follow the flow of perception from moment to moment. Beginner’s mind allows us to dive beneath the surface of our assumptions and find the unpredictable momentary direction that beckons. These directions can emerge from the most ‘seemingly insignificant aspects of experience’. (Mindell, 1995)

## **BEYOND OUR IDENTITY**

Process awareness values the whole of the unfolding process, and not just some of the states which are parts of that process. Naturally, we often seize on these states as the whole truth, basing our identity on something as unchanging and secure as possible. We have 'edges' against change. An 'edge' is 'a term used in process work to describe the belief system that defines the limit to our identity or who we think we should be'. (JC Audergon, 2005) Some of my research is concerned with struggles that came from my identification with a particular state or viewpoint, and shows how I used process awareness to loosen that identification. Such an identification is known as my 'primary process', whereas parts that are further from my identity are called my 'secondary process'. At the edge of the primary process are beliefs, attitudes and figures which hold closed the gateway to change. Sometimes we may cross beyond the edge of our identity easily in an extreme moment, but if so, we usually need to come back and engage with these beliefs and figures, both because they will tend to reappear if ignored, and because their gifts too need to be wrestled into synergy in the self. I have shown in Chapter Eight how I did process work meditation or inner work, to find out about my edges and discover the fluidity to identify with other viewpoints and experiences.

## **DIFFERENT KINDS OF AWARENESS**

In the story about Socrates, I was interested in Socrates himself, which was fine with my philosophy lecturers, but I was also interested in the oracle – which was not. Her kind of knowledge – and my direction of interest – was outside the boundaries of the philosophical debate at that time. For how did the oracle know that about Socrates? What kind of knowledge and awareness did *she* have? Part of what draws me to process work, is that it is equally interested in this kind of awareness, and with other non-linear phenomena. Through process work's dialogue with quantum physics, many of these understandings are expressed in 'neutral' or 'scientific' language intended to be as universal as possible, and describe phenomena that previously have been the province only of spiritual paradigms, in cultures where scientific and spiritual perspectives have been split apart. Process work defines 'three different levels of reality, each of which is linked to a particular form of awareness'. (Mindell, 2004) Each level is essential for individual and collective life.

## **WHAT ARE THOSE LEVELS?**

## CONSENSUS REALITY

Consensus reality level is the one my philosophy lecturers recognised as valid for academic discourse, and wanted me to stick to. It is the level of 'ordinary' reality; 'Experiences are consented upon or 'objective', repeatable and measurable... most people will agree they exist.' (JC Audergon, 2005)

At the level of consensus reality, Process Work deals with "real" events, problems, and issues connected with the development of individuals, couples, businesses and cities. Groups and individuals use feelings and facts, to describe conflicts, issues or problems. (Mindell & Mindell website 2006)

Into our consensus level awareness, intrude unexpected and unintentional experiences. They include body symptoms, relationship conflicts, dreams, altered states, accidents, synchronicities and oracular knowledge. They may arise as signals that 'flirt' with our attention through different channels of awareness, or we may know them in some subtler way, picking up 'pre-signal' information; information about 'the things we can barely feel and hardly talk about'. (Mindell and Mindell, website 2006) They are the tip of the iceberg of other realms that process work calls 'dreamland' and 'essence'.

## DREAMLAND

In the dreaming or dreamland level the meaningful organisation of these phenomena can be discovered, as processes evolving through the interaction of parts in an integrated field. Past and future are also present, and 'there' is also 'here', just like in dreams and visions, so linear perceptions of time and space do not structure this level. Archetypal figures and mythic beings are as influential as people we work with and have breakfast with. In my research, these figures and parts are sometimes experienced as different internal viewpoints, and sometimes as other actual or imagined figures. Parts and figures belong together: the leader and the rebel, the medicine plant and the seeker of wisdom. Understanding that they are relating in a connected field, we can also find which figures or roles belong to the process but are not represented: they are known as 'ghost' roles and missing roles. If I find myself wanting to rebel and break rules, there is somewhere a figure who is against change. When I struggled between these sides within myself, a missing role of the elder who can appreciate all sides of a conflict, emerged through my inner work.

## ESSENCE

In this eldership role I could experience the 'essence' level awareness, characterised by a non-dualistic unity that embraces and contains all the parts that emerge and interact in the dreamland and consensus reality levels of a process. The quality of experience of this level is often harder to talk about, and is associated with 'the Tao that cannot be spoken.' In other times and places in my life I have known this as 'Oneness' or Wakan Tanka; the Great Holy. Arny Mindell speaks about 'an atmosphere, which can be felt as a moving force, which has not yet explicated itself' and refers also to the 'tendencies' of quantum phenomena. (A & A Mindell, 2006 Website) In Chapter Eight I describe an essence level experience that emerged through my inner work on a difficult experience. That is the magic: the problem marks the spot where awareness needs to be applied to allow a new process to unfold.

## **INNER WORK**

Inner work is the work of noticing and unfolding our inner experiences. It is self-reflection using specific skills and understandings in a dynamic way, to discover unknown and unfamiliar experiences and perspectives which signal their presence. It is shape-shifting, or in shamanic terms 'shifting the assemblage point' – the point from which we assemble our experience of the world.

Unfolding a process involves noticing a secondary or NCR (Non Consensus Reality) experience in the initial description of a problem, amplifying its expression until a new meaning or aspect of identity emerges, and then integrating the new experience into everyday life. (Diamond & Jones, 2004)

## **UNFOLDING SIGNALS**

In order to unfold secondary signals, process work stays grounded in the senses. Noticing which perceptual channel a signal appears in, allows us to amplify and unfold the signal in that channel first, thereby enabling the experience to emerge in its own terms, rather than the terms in which it is experienced by our primary process. Jean Claude Audergon writes "People tend to name an experience as disturbing or fascinating and never enter the experience itself. In Process Work, we focus on entering an experience and unfolding it rather than interpreting it." (JC Audergon 2005) Diamond and Jones describe the natural tendency of signals to amplify, when given attention and encouragement:

Like a person who is lost in the woods, dreaming signals shout to be heard. If they get no response, their voices get weaker. When they finally hear someone calling them, they get

excited! Someone is out there! Their shouts grown stronger again. Amplifying sensory-grounded signals by following feedback allows a dreaming experience to emerge. (Diamond & Jones, 2004)

When I read this, it reminded me of the excitement I experienced from the plant spirits, when we gave them our ‘dreaming’ attention. (See Chapter Five.)

## **CHANNELS OF PERCEPTION**

Other channels are often added – or emerge naturally in the flow of the work - unfolding and anchoring the experience in more dimensions. The main channels we work with are visual, auditory, proprioceptive and movement, and also include relationship and world channels. Our “secondary experiences appear most often in the channels with which we are least familiar, the channels we use with least awareness.” (Amy Mindell, *Alternative to Therapy*, 2002) The relationship channel

...encompasses experiences or events that are communicated through, or felt in relationship to someone else. ...For instance, if someone says “My friend John told me I was stubborn”, this indicates that the person is experiencing a part of herself through relationship. If other people feature strongly in a person’s speech, this suggests that the process is being experienced in the relationship channel. (Diamond & Jones, 2004)

The world channel ‘is made up of experiences that are related to collective, global, social, or political events or institutions.’ (Ibid) These can include signals from nature, like the buzzard I heard calling overhead, when I needed a reminder of my connectedness with other beings.

## **AN EXAMPLE OF UNFOLDING A PROCESS**

Here’s an example of unfolding a body symptom. During the course of writing this chapter, I had a problem with my eyes: I couldn’t focus properly, and worried that my eyesight might be deteriorating. I had been to the optician fairly recently and had no change suggested to my current prescription for glasses. Was this the first sign of diabetes, common in my family? That’s a consensus reality level question. I decided that before I did any other health checks, I would do some inner work. I lay down and paid close attention to how I experienced the visual disturbance. It seemed to be like a fluid sliding substance moving across the surface of my eyes. The description indicated that I was perceiving its qualities in movement, so I let myself drop being Iona, and become some unknown substance that

slides fluidly. That was lovely! How long was it since I had moved in such a simple, pleasurable way, instead of using my body as an efficient (or not so efficient) vehicle for some work purpose? Ages! I continued moving in that fluid sliding style for some moments enjoying the sensuality and playfulness. My message to Iona was clear: move like this more often! Take more time to enjoy the life of the body! Over the next few days I both played and exercised more, going to the gym, swimming and dancing to some wonderful African music. I realised after a while that my symptom had not recurred. The message was also about remembering this sensual and playful style in my writing itself, rather than straining to meet some other imagined expectation or requirement.

This doesn't mean that following the process always relieves a symptom: it may or it may not. But it allows us to go beyond the momentary limits of our identifications.

In the inner work I have described in Chapter Eight, I have found and untangled different roles and viewpoints within myself. Embodying roles and moving between levels of awareness, we practice 'dual awareness' – not simply flip-flopping between identities, but maintaining a witnessing and facilitating self too. One of the 'metaskills', or subtle feeling attitudes, essential to process work is the compassionate interest of this witness-facilitator.

## **ISSUES OF RANK AND POWER**

Much of the inner work in Chapter Eight is around issues of rank and power. Rank can impact on our physical and psychological wellbeing, on our ability to speak out and act, on the way we live and die. Having high rank and using it without awareness can be abusive and provocative. We each have many different kinds of high or low rank, whether social, psychological or spiritual. Mindell lists the following as types of rank that are factors in conflicts in many cultures: skin colour, economic class, gender, sexual orientation, education, religion, age, expertise, profession, health, psychology and spirituality. (Sitting in the Fire) He writes

...if you use rank consciously, its medicine. Otherwise, its poison. You can't get rid of rank, so you might as well put it to good use....You can consciously use your rank to benefit others, or you can mindlessly confuse and abuse those around you by considering them beneath you.

Unconscious use of rank shows in a tendency to marginalize the problems of others. (ibid)

Identifying only with our low rank, considering ourselves beneath others, is equally

poisonous, because our high rank will come out in unconscious and hurtful ways. We will give 'double signals' about it: one signal from our primary process, and one from our secondary. Double signals tend to be disturbing or irritating to receive, especially as we are usually unaware of what we are receiving, and they often exacerbate conflict.

## **DREAMING UP**

Sometimes double messages can create what's known as 'dreaming up'.

Dreaming up refers to the effect of one person's unintended communication on another.

Someone is dreamed-up when they respond to another person's unintended communication signals without being aware of the communication that has triggered their response...Here is an everyday example of dreaming-up: two friends are engaged in a conversation, and one of them does not notice the subtle signals of tension in the other's body posture, facial expression and tone of voice. He begins to react to his friend's signals by withdrawing a little, feeling that his friend is unhappy with him in some way. All of this happens outside of his awareness. His reactions just happen to him. Once he is no longer in his friend's company, these reactions disappear. (Diamond & Jones, 2004)

Using one's dreamed up reaction to support the disavowed part of the process to unfold, requires both that we notice it in ourselves, *and* recognise that it belongs to the whole process, and is not just a part of our own internal psychology. To consciously use our dreamed up experiences can be regarded as a shamanic activity, because it requires a dual awareness of both dreaming and consensus reality realms, and the ability to meaningfully connect the experiences in them both. Some of us tend to get dreamed-up very easily, and may suffer from it until we are able to detach from identifying with the dreamed-up experience, and learn to skilfully bring it in as a relevant gift in processing the field. This has been my experience, and from one perspective, this research project documents my struggle to make use of my dreamed-up reactions in certain group fields, following the threads of my own individual learning, in order to contribute to addressing the same issues as they challenge our collective practice.

## **FIELD EFFECTS**

In groups, organisations and communities, we are inevitably organised by the field as a whole. 'Fields are natural phenomena that include everyone, are omnipresent, and exert forces upon things in their midst.' (Mindell 1992) Fields have non-local, dynamic dreaming



characteristics.

Groups do ... put you into altered states of consciousness, make you feel things you did not want to, remind you of your fear, hatred, anger, ambition, pride, humiliation or greed. Groups can be terrifying. That is why many people avoid large group processes.

But these altered states are not just problems but solutions as well. My suggestion is not to marginalise these problems because they are uncomfortable. Become lucid and conscious, embrace the problem, go down into it, get deeper, and explore the states and people who flirt with you, get to the sentient essence, and help everything transform. (Mindell 2000)

In all these different arenas, from inner work, in relationships of all kinds and in groups and communities, process work's understanding of the dreaming and sentient levels of reality identifies it as a contemporary form of shamanism. Arny Mindell writes of a 'new shamanism' based 'not only upon experiences with indigenous healers, but also upon my own background as a physicist, my earlier practice as a Jungian analyst, and my present work in process-oriented psychology and conflict resolution.' (Mindell 1993)

The practice that is at the heart of Process Work, that of switching roles and 'shapeshifting' or entering an experience outside our identity on its own terms, has the potential to alter our state and access other kinds of awareness, in a similar way to shamanic trance. Process work gives us the tools and the doorways to 'walk between the worlds' as shamans do, and trains our awareness to notice and follow the subtle signals and pre-signals of those worlds as they flirt with us in the moment, reminding us that those other worlds are also right here, right now.

## **CHAPTER THREE: THE DREAMING SPIRIT**

### **Shamanic, Process and Quantum Perspectives**

*“What hinders us from exploring Dreamtime, our natural inheritance?” (Mindell, 2000)*

In the last chapter I referred to Process Work's understanding of 'dreaming'. In this chapter I draw together references to dreaming from a variety of paradigms which value dreaming experiences and phenomena. I locate them in relation to a scientific worldview which many of us inherited, and which accepts only linear and consensus-reality level perceptions. This gives a collective context for my personal attempts to grapple with shifting paradigms.

#### **CHANGES IN WESTERN SCIENCE**

Many of us inherit a traditional Western world-view which considers that

...we are makers of our own destiny...that humans are fundamentally different from other creatures on earth...Nature is considered mainly as a collection of resources to be used at will, an unlimited opportunity to exploit. (Marshall 1995)

A sense of separation and domination is deeply embedded in mainstream Western traditions of science and philosophy:

Bacon's scientific revolution launched a mechanistic view of nature, in which living organisms are seen - and treated - as machines. The partition of the universe into live human mind and passive, mechanical nature was Descartes's gift to modern science. (Mathews)

But perspectives are changing. 'This dominant world-view which fires our industrial, technocratic and man-centred civilisation is however beginning to unravel.' (Marshall, 1995) The foundations on which vast human achievements of the last centuries were built, are being cracked open, like pavements penetrated by wild plants, by feedback from the world of 'nature' that we can no longer ignore.

A new vision of the world is emerging which recognises the interrelatedness of all things and beings and which presents humanity as an integral part of the organic whole. It not only develops the insights of ancient religions and philosophies but is confirmed by modern physics and the science of ecology. It recognises that our own welfare depends on the well-being of nature as a whole. (Marshall, 1995)

This return from a perspective of dominance with little feedback recognition, to one of inter-relatedness is an inner process as much as an outer one: in fact, they turn out to be inseparable. 'The idea of controlling our lives with our everyday minds needs to be reframed and infused with the feeling of following nature as a companion.' (Mindell, 2004)

In the fast-growing consensus among people around the world that our planet comprises interdependent systems, there is agreement that we need to take more careful account of the impact of our actions and inactions. But while we confine this understanding to the linear facts of material reality, we only have part of the picture. The greater part lies in the Dreaming spirit which is manifesting in these phenomena.

### **THE DREAM THAT DREAMS US**

Descriptions of Dreaming and Dreamtime vary between cultures and individuals, and have many aspects. Speaking from a native American tradition, Jamie Sams writes

...the Dream Weave is the name my teachers used to describe the unseen world of spirit, thought, emotion, and intangible energy that is a part of our physical reality. The common denominator that binds together these two worlds of physicality and intangible energies is a grid of energy lines operating like a radio wave or frequency, without visible form. (Sams, 1999)

Sharing similar roots, Okhy Forest describes both the Dream that dreams us, and our participation in it:

Dreaming is the very substance in which the universe spirals and manifests everything, even the inconceivable... This open space of dreaming is our first and most primal reality as humans....It belongs to everyone... In the labyrinth of dreaming, your dream path exists between symbols and realities. (Forest, 2000)

### **DREAMING EARTH**

A British pagan, Gordon MacLellan links the ancient 'Otherworld of the Celts' with a spiritworld we enter 'in dreams, nightmares or magic' and understands it as originating in the land:

...beyond all the personal dreams of visitors, eventually, the Otherworld, is the dream the land itself is dreaming: the accumulated experience of the spiritforce of all who live within the land and in the earth and stones, rivers, mountains, winds and trees themselves. That Dream is like a river running behind everything that happens: this is the Dream that holds the shape of

the land. (MacLellan, 1998).

The deep and mythic dreaming which connects us with land over generations, can often be seen in the background of territorial wars and conflicts. Part of my own personal dream of the future is to see and hear this passionate connection articulated and expressed within the framework of conflict facilitation. Such inclusion which brings dreaming and sentient levels of experience into connection with consensus reality level conflicts, is an important part of 're-wholing' ourselves individually and collectively. In both war-torn and peaceful situations, many of our cultures have become distanced and alienated from a wisdom which is self-evident within indigenous cultures, and which is part of their fundamental wealth and nourishment: these rocks, trees, waters, stars are 'all our relations'. Some people deep in the Dreaming say the same is true of tables, guns and plastic, lest we polarise into a romanticised 'Golden Age' perspective that rejects relatedness with *all* the manifest forms which the dreaming spirit inhabits and enlivens.

### **DREAMING OUR LIVES**

Leo Rutherford takes the view that we dream our lives to be the way they are.

"The World is as You Dream It" is a quote from Numi, Shuar shaman from Equador, as reported in John Perkins' book of the same name. Shamans say that how people live in the everyday world is a product of how they 'see' the world internally; in other words their mythology – the stories they tell themselves of how things are – represents their 'dream' of themselves and life, and their vision of the universe and how they fit into it. (Rutherford, 1996)

This perception is the starting point for choosing and changing what we dream into being.

### **FEEDING THE DREAMING SPIRIT**

Indigenous people often say we have to feed the gods, the spirits or the ancestors to maintain and sweeten our relationship with the sentient realm. This is part of a perspective in which the 'giveaway' is more honoured and valued than the accumulation of material things and resources. It refers to the giving of life-energy, which is the basic currency of wellbeing. Perennial philosophy traditions have maintained that there is a universal and natural law by which this giving of energy creates manifold return. The giveaway is a philosophy of life in small and great things: killing for food can be respectfully done from the perspective that we too will give our lives when our time comes.

Our teachers tell us that all things within the Universe wheel know of their harmony with every

other being, and know how to *giveaway* one to another, except man. Of all the Universe's creatures, it is we alone who do not begin our lives with knowledge of this great Harmony. (Storm, 1972)

The giveaway courts the subtle energy realm, inviting it to co-create with us an unfolding reality from the pre-manifest to the manifest.

Process awareness courts the subtle energy realm too, with a similar invitation. Instead of offerings of sage and tobacco, prayer ties and cedar, we offer the honey of our awareness, and our willingness to shapeshift that awareness into the different perspectives suggested by an emergent process. This awareness is surely the sweetest offering of all.

## **PROCESS WORK AND DREAMING**

Dreaming is at the heart of process work understanding and practice, from its beginning in Jungian psychology and quantum physics, to more recent 'vector' or earth-direction practices which draw together personal, transpersonal and earth-based aspects of Dreaming awareness. According to Diamond and Jones, Mindell

...coined the phrase 'the dream happening in the moment' to convey the idea that all experiential phenomena are manifestations of a dreaming reality and can serve as ways of accessing non-ordinary reality... Mindell's theoretical emphasis shifted from the link between dream and body to the concept of the 'dreaming process' as a unified field. (Diamond & Jones, 2004)

'Dreaming' writes Mindell, 'is the mystical source of reality.' (Mindell 2000) It is 'always present, like an aura shimmering around the objects and events you call everyday life.' (ibid) 'Dreaming is the energy behind everything; it is the life force of all living beings, the power of trees and plants, and the power of motors, business and financial centres.' (ibid) 'My goal' he writes,

is not to notice the Dreaming only occasionally, but to develop a constant awareness of dreaming... from the point of view of the Dreaming, regardless of the complexity of your life, you have only one problem – ignoring the Dreaming background to reality. Ignoring the Dreaming means marginalising the deepest unformulated experiences that create your actions in everyday life. Every time you ignore *sentient*, that is, generally unrecognised dreamlike perceptions, something inside of you goes into a mild form of shock because you have overlooked the spirit of life, your greatest potential power. (ibid)

## QUANTUM DESCRIPTIONS

A process work understanding draws on quantum mechanics and field theory. Quantum physics begins to bridge the deep divide between sacred and scientific thinking which has characterised mainstream Western culture for several hundred years. It gives us another language to speak about the non-local relationship between things, the possibility of experiences and events which are not structured by linear time and space. Process oriented perspectives use quantum thinking to draw together linear and non-linear awareness, individual and collective life. Arny and Amy Mindell write on their website:

Seattle physicist John Cramer's quantum theory explanation of observation... is that there are forward and backward movements in time. He speaks of a "quantum exchange" between observer and observed before observations take place. It seems to us as if Bierman's work may lend us experimental validation for Cramer's ideas. In other words, the roots of observation are time-free exchanges. He calls our ability to know things before we receive physical signals, "**presponding**" instead of responding. (Mindell & Mindell, 2006)

The Mindells wonder, elsewhere on their website, 'just what is needed for individuals and groups to "shape shift" and change "assemblage points" - the points from which we assemble our view of the world.

That is, what is needed to move from the time and space identification of everyday reality to the "Nagual", ... to temporarily move into the "rheo-mode." Rheo means "stream" or "flow".

We therefore speak of a "rheo-mode" to mean the flow of the dreaming process. (ibid)

Through my research in this dissertation, I explore some of the answers to this question provided by shamanic medicine ceremony and by Process Work practices. In order to provide a fuller sense of the context of these explorations, Chapter Four looks at what we mean by shamanism. Having provided an overview of Process Work and some of the tools employed to unfold a multi-levelled awareness in Chapter Two, I demonstrate the use of some of those awareness tools as an intrinsic part of my research process in Chapters Seven and Eight.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: SHAMANISM**

*“I found that all the things I was doing were validated by ancient shamanic practices. The discipline of shamanism enabled me to stop thinking I was off the wall and to be able to enter and return from altered states at will.” (Howard Charing, quoted in Rutherford 1996)*

In this chapter I will give a broad overview of what is meant by shamanism in both traditional and contemporary cultures, and refer to some of the political and social dynamics around cross-cultural practices which form the context of my research area.

### **WHAT WE MEAN BY SHAMANISM**

When we talk about shamanism we conflate roles which are often separate in indigenous societies. The ceremonial leader may be different from the medicine people, who may be different again from the seer who journeys into other realms for diagnosis, guidance and healing of the individual and the collective. In any society which regards the dreaming spirit as animating all inter-related beings, many skilful ways arise for living that dreaming spirit in the everyday - and no everyday task is complete without some reference to and reverence for that spirit.

‘In the culture of my people, the Dagara’ writes Malidoma Some,

we have no word for the supernatural. The closest we come to this concept is *Yielbongura*, “the thing that knowledge can’t eat”. This word suggests that the life and power of certain things depend upon their resistance to the kind of categorising knowledge that human beings apply to everything. In Western reality, there is a clear split between the spiritual and the material, between religious life and secular life. This concept is alien to the Dagara. For us, as for many indigenous cultures, the supernatural is part of our everyday lives. (Some, 1995)

Writing of his experiences in the Guatemalan Mayan village of Santiago Atitlan before the fabric and practitioners of its spiritual traditions were destroyed, Martin Prechtel explains the distinction between the shamans and the Spiritual Gathering of Elders. ‘Shamans were healers of individuals and families while the theocracy of elders were in charge of public ceremonies to maintain the health of the whole village.’ (Prechtel, 2002)

### **A SOCIAL ROLE**

The role of a shaman is, at its heart, a social one, and the shape of that role differs

according to the predilection and path of the individual shaman, the nature of circumstances and the needs of the collective. Joan Halifax includes many social roles and functions in her overview of the traditional shaman:

The shaman, a mystical, priestly, and political figure emerging during the Upper Paleolithic period and perhaps going back to Neanderthal times, can be described not only as a specialist in the human soul but also as a generalist whose sacred and social functions can cover an extraordinarily wide range of activities. Shamans are healers, seers, and visionaries who have mastered death. They are in communication with the world of gods and spirits. Their bodies can be left behind while they fly to unearthly realms. They are poets and singers. They dance and create works of art. They are not only spiritual leaders but also judges and politicians, the repositories of the knowledge of the culture's history, both sacred and secular. They are familiar with cosmic and well as physical geography; the ways of plants, animals and the elements are known to them. They are psychologists, entertainers, and food finders. Above all, however, shamans are technicians of the sacred and masters of ecstasy. (Halifax, 1980)

## **CONNECTING WITH THE ANCESTORS**

Malidoma Some reminds us 'that it is not only indigenous cultures that have a deep commitment to non-Western ideas about reality. Even in a highly industrialised culture like Japan, a connection with the ancestors is taken very seriously.' (Some 1994) In Malidoma's own Dagara culture, connecting with the ancestors is fundamental to social wellbeing, and 'represents one of the pathways between the knowledge of this world and the next.' (Ibid) He notes that this is not the case in Western society. While we can understand this in many ways – effects of industrialisation and migration, historic divergence between scientific and spiritual paradigms – Malidoma connects it with our difficulty in reflecting on our own history:

When a person from my culture looks at the descendants of the Westerners who invaded their culture, they see a people who are ashamed of their ancestors because they were killers and marauders masquerading as artisans of progress. The fact that these people have a sick culture comes as no surprise to them. (Ibid)

## **HIDDEN TEACHINGS BEGIN TO EMERGE**

Western colonial ancestors have contributed to the suppression and attempted destruction of non-Christian spiritual perspectives in many places, and particularly in Africa and South America. Many native American teachings were kept hidden for a long period, not just in



the way esoteric teachings usually are, but in order to preserve them through times when the survival of the people and the teachings was endangered.

Over five hundred years ago a Council of Elders of the Red Nations of North, South and Central America was called to ensure the survival of the sacred teachings through the coming age of darkness' from the Conquistadores onwards. (Ywahoo, 1987)

By the sixties, 'one hundred years of Christian missionary activity, including starvation and incarceration intended to create doubt in the old ways, had passed.' ( St. Pierre & Long Soldier, 1995) Among the Tsalagi or Cherokee, 'children of the fifth generation' (since the forced removals from the land)

were given special duties by their elders to rekindle the sacred wisdom fire, by inviting the people to see the effects of our thoughts and actions upon the Earth, upon ourselves, and one another, and upon future generations. Our elders, some of whom suffered great deprivations and punishments for seeking to maintain our culture, encoded in us through ceremony, song and example the methods of realising a sane world. (Ywahoo, 1987)

## **SHAMANIC ANCESTRY IN WESTERN EUROPE**

If we look to our own ancestry in Western Europe, intending to reconnect with shamanic aspects of our own culture, we may wonder why they are so elusive and fragmentary. There is little to refer to, beyond Celts, Druids and witches. We know a little of Celtic practice, but more about their mythology. The Druids were effectively eradicated by the Romans, and despite much scholarship, modern Druidry is largely recreated. Those designated as witches were tortured and killed in their thousands by the Inquisition and those it inspired. This was a joint initiative of church and state which began in France in the twelfth century to destroy the growing political, economic and religious power of the Cathars in France and northern Italy, and spread over a long period to include others regarded as heretical by the Catholic Church.

Reprints of the *Malleus Maleficarum* in 29 editions between 1487 and 1669 mark the peak of the European craze. This book had been condemned by the Catholic Church in 1490 but continued to be widely used by secular witch-hunting courts. The clergy and the intellectuals began to speak out against the trials from the late 16<sup>th</sup> century. Johannes Kepler in 1615 could only by the weight of his prestige keep his mother from being burnt as a witch. ( wikipedia 2007a)

## **UNDIGESTED HISTORY**

In my view, this history remains largely undigested, and unaddressed. Just as it is

important to do the painful work of awareness on the issues and events of the holocaust in Germany, we owe it to our own potential for wholeness to revisit other historic schisms that still pattern our consciousness and behaviour. Contemporary Western fear of the potential for repression by fundamentalist Islamic movements may be realistic, but it is given added weight by our lack of reflection on our Christian heritage. 'Witchcraft' fell foul of both church and rational science, and as a domain in which many women flourished as midwives and herbalists, was too challenging to a patriarchal society. Today, we use the word 'shaman' partly because it does not share the historical taint of 'witch'. One small but significant indication of this is the current situation of independent midwives in Britain. Operating outside the hospital system while being fully trained within it, and maintaining wholistic principles and practice still not fully embraced within the mainstream, they are today in danger of being squeezed out of practice.

## **NEW MOVEMENTS IN SPIRITUAL PRACTICE**

Issues of religion and spirituality, secular and ecclesiastical power, the exclusively linear paradigms of Newtonian science, cultural and gender-based domination weave inextricably together in any review of Western society's relationship with shamanism. They form the historic background to the contemporary movement of many people towards shamanic and spiritual paradigms which encourage us to find our spiritual leadership from within our own experience, rather than from a hierarchical source of authority. Wildwood describes this current 'widespread questioning of authority and tradition, the demand today to know things of the spirit *experientially*' (Wildwood 2006) I refer to this in my conclusion, in order to show the links between my own wrestling with issues of spiritual authority, form and freedom, and the current relevance of those same issues within a wider social context. In my concluding chapter I refer to the experiences of certain contemporary women in South America who, in negotiating between two paradigms of Christian and shamanic practice, (both of which tend to be patriarchal) evolve a variety of integrative and synergistic solutions for themselves.

While it is not possible, within the space of this project, to go deeply into the broad and historic issues raised above, I feel it is important as an auto-ethnographic researcher to note my tendency, like those described by Wildwood, to identify *against* the authoritative positions described. However, the process of the research itself has enabled me to stretch and shift that identification to a less polarised eldership, as I will show in subsequent

chapters.

## **BORROWING FROM TRADITIONAL CULTURES**

In discussing this movement, over the last 30 years or so, of increasing numbers of people in Western cultures towards shamanic practises originating from indigenous societies, Harner distinguishes several aspects of the reasons for this choice. He includes the speedy results achievable through shamanic techniques for changing states of consciousness, the development of holistic health approaches which led many New Age practitioners back to shamanic sources, and a rising ecological awareness which attracted people to 'a two-way spiritual communication' with 'the other beings of the Earth and with the Planet itself.' (Harner, 1980)

## **RESPONSE OF INDIGENOUS ELDERS**

How has this burgeoning of interest been received by indigenous shamans and elders? Many native elders have gladly shared their teachings. According to the Inca shaman Don Eduardo Calderon, quoted by Kenneth Meadows

...the shamans of the coming Age – the 'wise-shapers' of tomorrow – will arise from peoples who were once the Red Indians' oppressors yet will become the true caretakers of the Earth and the needed teachers, guides and healers. (Meadows 1990)

Some elders, however, have strongly criticised the teaching of 'medicine ways to non-full-bloods, or *metis* people'. (Wahlberg, 1993) Harley Swiftdeer is reported as saying 'I have been confronted, challenged, and threatened numerous times by various factions, individuals and groups claiming to be guardians of traditional native American customs.' (ibid) Some have regarded it as another instance of cultural theft. Credibility is added to this viewpoint when non-native people are seen to quickly take a selection of teachings, possibly with only a superficial understanding, and make a lot of money out of them. And there is a range of views between these polarities, including advice against 'borrowing isolated parts' from 'complete systems that must be seen in the context of the cultures they came from.' (St. Pierre & Long Soldier, 1995) There is also a view that regards the subtle templates of shamanic practice as corruptible by the invasion of a changed practice, thus taking its evolution out of traditional hands.

The majority of traditional teachers recognise the inevitability of this as part of our interconnection, emphasising the need for us to make the teachings our own, connecting

to the spirit of our own land and developing our own authentic practice.

The more you follow the inner voice, the quiet voice, the more you will learn and grow in your own way...You must follow this inner voice even though it contradicts what others are expecting, even though it is contrary to what others are doing and saying. (Wounye' Waste' Win, quoted in St. Pierre & Long Soldier, 1995)

This echoes the perspective of mystics and gnostics within other established religious traditions, including Christianity, and is particularly encouraging in this current era 'between paradigms'. Malidoma Some has a broad vision based on the need for interchange and engagement between cultures; a diversity that is more than the polite coexistence of living side by side.

Because the world is becoming smaller, people from different realities can benefit from learning about and accepting each other. The challenge of modernity is to bring the world together into a unified whole in the middle of which diversity can exist. The respect for difference works only if connected with this vision. (Some, 1994)

## **FREEDOM AND FORM**

The shape of the central knot I am attempting to untie begins to become clearer when we consider the issues of engagement with diversity, together with struggles around freedom and authority. Like others, I turned to a shamanic paradigm partly to meet a need for a spiritual framework which, unlike the Church I grew up with, would not leave me feeling marginalised or oppressed, would facilitate spiritual experience, and would support the validity and authority of my own experience. I enjoyed the fluidity described here by MacLellan:

.. shamanism is evasive and elusive, shaping itself to the needs of its practitioners and their communities; sooner catch mist in a jam-jar than find easy definitions within a shamanic world... there is no single dogma or central authority to measure things against and we are all free to, and do, disagree with each other about everything! (MacLellan 1998)

Yet shamanism, like many other paradigms including process work, requires a tension between prescribed form and the fluid following of the unknown. Ceremony, for example, depends on it, as I will describe in Chapter Seven. This prescribed form can itself be experienced as an imposed authority, by someone struggling for authentic self-following or following of a dynamic process. And ceremonial form can become ossified and unresponsive to the needs of the moment, another dogma or instance of a primary identity,

without a skilled practitioner at the helm. Master ceremonialists in the Native American tradition are notorious for insisting a ceremony be done *exactly* in such and such a way every time without fail – except when they change it, using their rank and expertise to judge the fine tuning of the moment.

I will show how, at different times, I experienced both ceremony *and* Process Work as prescriptive in a limiting way. It is apparent impasses such as this that force us to a different level of experience and awareness in order for resolution to occur, and characterises any journey of individuation. Such personal wrestlings may be part of the evolution of the paradigms themselves and their collective expression. Within the context of spiritual paradigms, the solution of gnostics and mystics often involves rebelling against and disengaging from the collective body and doctrine of practice, in order to be freely led from within. But part of the initiatory journey involves periodic wrestling with self-doubt: has the essence of the teachings been thrown out with the form, does the hard-won inner authority rest on apprehension of deep spiritual truths, or on self-delusion? Such questions cannot be answered on consensus reality levels alone, but need to be resonated within a deeper dreaming vessel.

A review of these themes in my personal history, forms the basis of Chapter Five, in order to give context to the way they unfold within my research journey.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: PERSONAL HISTORY**

I include some information about my personal history for several inter-connected reasons. It is intended to offer some transparency about my experiences and biases as a researcher, informing the way I am 'seen to be a positioned subject both within the text and the wider cultural, political and historical contexts in which they exist.' (Foster, McAllister & O'Brien 2006) From a quantum perspective, 'we cannot be sure who is the observer and who is the observed' (Mindell, 2001), so self-reflective observations help bring awareness to some of the factors which condition the whole of the research project, including the questions I asked, the experiences I had and the conclusions I drew.

### **THEMES**

The themes of authority and power, rebellion and doubt which preoccupied me in my research journey resonate within my personal and collective history, especially in relation to spiritual authority. Within and because of the research project itself, I wrestled with my life-myths - my dreams about reality - in a way that changed me. Within a shamanic worldview, we free ourselves by 'erasing personal history' 'which means healing those aspects of one's past which interfere with life in the present.' (Rutherford, 1996) Process work regards 'burning your wood' as one aspect of that healing; detachment coming when 'you have raged long enough about the issue being discussed...' Then 'there is no longer any wood. The fire is done.' (Mindell 1992) This chapter outlines some of the wood I have needed to burn, in order to study spiritual authority with greater detachment, and in order to accept it within myself.

### **CHILDHOOD**

I was born in the 1950s into a white middle class family in an English town. Primary school and Anglican church were next to each other, and intertwined. I loved St. Francis because his relationships with wild animals made perfect sense to me, and I loved Jesus through the pictures and parables in my New Testament Bible because he loved everybody in a plain and simple way, told stories about foxes and grapes and grain, and made miracles in an everyday way that also seemed just right. I felt at home with them without being awestruck.

As I watched some adults pretending to think and feel differently than they actually did, it

seemed to me that becoming an adult involved forgetting how to be true. Since it was likely to happen to me too, I thought I should write a book of all the things I knew, before it was too late. But I didn't.

My sureness turned to doubt, and the church now seemed empty of spirit, and yet redolent with divine judgement that could make an outcast of me in this life and the next. I had several grounds for feeling unacceptable, including early and secret sexual experiences.

I also had a recurring dream in which I was trying to count two rows of matches, observed from above by an enormous Eye that was both God and Devil, and which absolutely terrified me. I knew as I began counting that I would get it wrong, and that then there would be some kind of unthinkable punishment. By the time I was in my teens, I discovered a background reality which it seems I already knew: that as a child, I had probably lit the candle that burned the house down.

That unintentional firelighting was one of several extreme adventures during my childhood that had traumatic aspects, some of which set deep patterns of guilt and secrecy connecting to the adventurous spirit in myself. The Christian church while having introduced me to my friends and heroes Jesus and St. Francis, was stern and authoritative about sin, sex, guilt, the Devil and punishment. I internalised those values in some way, even while I rejected them and the religious institution they came from.

## **POLITICAL ACTIVISM**

In my twenties I encountered revolutionary Trotskyist politics, studied its theories of capitalism and Stalinism, and became a political activist. I learned a lot about the international structures of power and oppression, and who gained and suffered from them. I identified with a moral and political authority which denounced those authorities and institutions which I had taken for granted as I grew up. I felt proud to be an 'outsider', fighting for a new world which wouldn't put profit above all other values, and in which self-determination, the possibility of determining our own lives, could really exist in a way which went far beyond the parliamentary system. At international conferences, I was deeply moved to hear all of us greeted as 'comrades' by delegates from countries, like some in Latin America, where their struggle was a matter of life and death. I have a sense, today, in which values of global interconnectedness are life and death for all of us.

After several years, I left the political organisation which had framed my life. It seemed to me that the *battle* for a different future was a way of life in itself, and hardly referred to the future which it ostensibly sought to establish. It was a polarisation and a lifestyle that marginalised some parts of life that I was thirsty for: I'd overdosed on the red, white and black of posters, articles and banners. The damp smell of earth after rain and misty wet leaves in city lamplight called me; made me want to breath and live a different way, following nature – including my own nature - more creatively.

## **SPIRITUAL PARADIGMS**

Still not entirely trusting my own creative voice, I went back to college to learn about the literary traditions that would be my context if I were to follow my desire to write. In an intense period I found myself also studying philosophy, while the dimension of spiritual awareness opened again in my personal life. Through an unexpected apprenticeship with a woman I would describe as a modern witch, I learned first-hand about the dynamics of subtle energies and our ability to perceive and affect them. I had a sense of coming home. During that time a close friend was living the last months of her life with cancer, so I discovered and invented healing techniques that I later found were generic.

## **PLANT SPIRITS**

Over a number of years, I had several teachers of healing and subtle or 'psychic' awareness. With one of them, I was part of a pioneering group that did experiential research to discover the subtle energies of plants used by herbalists. This work partially informed her subsequent writings on the Dreaming and astrological aspects of plants (Brooke 1999). Through meditating with a plant, we found we were able consistently to sense its characteristics and qualities, in a most vibrant and exciting way. Though we each had our own way of relating, the entity we were all relating to was recognisably the same – in the same way we might all describe and relate to a person differently, yet recognise them as the same person. I remember being amazed at the way the essence or spirit of the plants seemed to respond to our contact, welcoming it – needing it. I remember too getting a sense of plant spirits as great elders who organise and regulate life on this planet in ways I had hardly any idea of. This kind of shamanic practice is now becoming more widespread, and is known as Plant Spirit Medicine, and co-emerges with subtler scientific understandings of the complex ecological roles of plants. My sense of the wisdom and



eldership available from a connection with plant spirits, inspired me to explore that connection in a ceremonial way in this research.

## **DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES**

I'm aware that this description of plants with sentient awareness is unrealistic to many perspectives, including a mainstream Newtonian scientific one. It belongs more comfortably in an indigenous or shamanic worldview in which

Every tree, every plant has a spirit. People may say that a plant has no mind. I tell them that a plant is alive and conscious. A plant may not talk, but there is a spirit in it that is conscious, that sees everything, which is the soul of the plant, its essence, what makes it alive...(Pablo Cesar Amaringo 1993)

Since we are not separable from what we perceive, I imagine that it is the combination of us and plant, which creates the experience of sentience. I continue to think, speak and act as if plant spirits are sentient beings, because it makes sense to me and it works. I am aware that for others, this is at most a poetic or symbolic reality.

## **CONTEMPORARY SHAMANISM**

For several years I taught people how to access subtle or psychic states of perception, for healing, for divination – and for enriching our lives. I loved it. The next leap came in the 1980s when I began to feel restricted by the lack of physically embodied movement in my practice. Native American shamanism and medicine teachings were beginning to emerge in Europe, and I enrolled on the first year-long course with Eagle's Wing Centre for Contemporary Shamanism. In that and subsequent years learning and then teaching with Eagle's Wing, I experienced times of living as part of the dreaming spirit of the Earth which were ecstatic, and which continue to inform and nourish my life. Elsewhere, I taught and co-taught groups, particularly of women, to make their own deep reconnections with earth and spirit. We used traditional forms, adapted them, and made them up, recognising that given the broken earth-spirit traditions of our culture, some of the most authentic forms were available through our own intuitive awareness. I encouraged other women to trust the authority of their own knowing, and by teaching, learned more myself.

## **INTERPERSONAL DYNAMICS**

By working in such an experimental way, following as best we could the Dreaming in the

moment, we inevitably got into messes. Interpersonal and group dynamics disturbed our ability to work with ceremony and altered states. I co-facilitated work around 'Psychic and Psychodynamic Awareness', but lacked the skills to work adequately with conflict.

It seemed to me that most of us around the world lacked the skills to resolve or facilitate conflict, and that these skills were greatly needed. It was at this point that I began my training in Process-Oriented Psychology, to develop these skills and make them useful in the world.

### **HAVING TROUBLE WITH BEGINNER'S MIND – AND RANK**

When I started studying Process Work it seemed as though I had to give up what I already knew to learn a new system and develop new awareness skills. Initially I felt the loss of being able to speak about 'energy', start groups with a candle and an invocation, and follow my intuition and my penchant for 'healing' in the way I was used to. I was exasperated with becoming a beginner in a new system, learning something so similar and yet so different, unable to translate my skills and awareness, and so had plenty of bumps, rebellions, refusals and blind spots. In training seminars I missed the beauty of ceremony: the central fire, the honouring of earth and elements, the opening and closing of ceremonial space, the use of sage smoke, calling to the spirits, singing and dancing and praying together. Yet I also remembered my frustration with ceremonial forms when we hadn't been able to make of them a vehicle for the living spirit - or process – in the moment.

### **PROCESS WORK**

What I met, in process work, was a paradigm which could name and train us in the steps to find dreaming and sentient experiences in the moment, without the need for props, paraphernalia or very much ritual form. By emptying its practice of as many cultural identifications as possible, process work establishes a ground for interactive and dynamic diversity. By naming issues of rank, and metacommunicating about momentary structures of processes and fields, it creates an environment in which designated leaders can be open to the taking up of the leadership role by others, and a group may co-create an experience whose outcome could not have been predicted. When moments of collective sentient or dreaming experiences do occur, they come through the unfolding of a process which touches everyone, and the doorway between realms opens wide.

At the beginning of this research I felt fragmented between the pull to ceremonial shamanism, and my training to become a process worker. Through the challenges of the research and by following the signals of emergent processes, I have brought the fragmenting forces to light, and a new synergy has become possible.

In Chapter Six I describe the selection of my research topic, and the nature of the ceremonial form I chose to explore. Some of the common ground of Process Work and ceremonial shamanism is discussed.

## CHAPTER SIX: GRANDMOTHER MEDICINE

*'In shamanism the word 'Medicine' means vital force – energy which is inherent in nature. A person's medicine is their power, their knowledge, their expression of their life energy.'* (Rutherford, 1996)

*'We call ayahuasca The Grandmother, and peyote The Grandfather. It's a way of expressing respect for their wisdom, and affection for their relationship with us.'* (Fran 2006, pers. comm., 16 Aug)

### DECIDING ON MY TOPIC

Having decided to write about process work and shamanism through the lens of my personal experiences, I focused my attention on ayahuasca because a friend told me how much easier it is writing about something that you don't know: then the research is a congruent exploration. I looked up at her big painting of white datura flowers hanging like graceful bells among dark green foliage. Datura is a potent psychotropic plant used medicinally and ceremonially, and one which I learned to respect as a powerful reality-shifter, when I was first learning about plant spirits several years earlier. This time it agreed with a thought that had just occurred to me, reminding me that I had never followed up my first and fleeting experience of ayahuasca, the sacred vine of the Amazon. I had had a vision of a snake-like being uniting heaven and earth, inviting me to get to know it more. It seemed as though now was the time!

### MEDICINE PLANTS

Ayahuasca, peyote and other plant medicines used ceremonially have been called 'psychointegrator plants' (Winkelman 1995) The experiences they induce have been described as affecting the personality by

...entering into a personal relationship with a reality established in a mythical time; developing relationships with an animal spiritual realm which is the source of power and self-identification; the dissolution or death of the ego and its resurrection and transformation; and social rituals to enhance social identity formation, group integration and cohesion, and to reaffirm cultural values and beliefs....the ubiquitous simultaneous therapeutic, religious, spiritual and medicinal roles of these plants have implications for understanding the nature of human consciousness and the spiritual. (Ibid)

How we write about these experiences, makes a big difference to how the reader may imagine them. A less detached and more obviously 'positioned' author makes the same information more accessible, easier to imagine:

Ayahuasca ceremony connects the individual to the social group, to an experience of the meaningful interrelatedness of all beings, to the ancestors and to the archetypes and creation myths: it is said that by focussing on a particular myth when taking ayahuasca, the person experiences themselves located *within* the myth, able to understand its meaning.

Ayahuasqueros, the shamanic practitioners working with the plant medicine, say that the plant itself, or the 'madre' the mother spirit of the plant, is the teacher. Time is experienced simultaneously rather than linearly, spatial experience includes the non-local. (SpiritQuest 2006)

Fearful of surrendering to a plant-induced altered state, I at first allowed myself the option of researching without personally experiencing the ceremony. But as time went on, it was clear I would participate. I was lucky to have the opportunity for live research and experience with the help of a close and trusted friend.

## **BEGINNING THE RESEARCH**

For some time I had been part of a peer support group with two friends, who I will call Fran and Alan. Each of us is primarily located within a different paradigm: Fran is a ceremonial medicine woman, Alan a Quaker and deep ecologist. Nevertheless we have affinities with each other's viewpoint and practice, and mostly manage to fruitfully combine them in our engagement with each other. I told Fran, who works with medicine plant ceremony, that I would like to interview her about her experiences with ayahuasca, and probably enter into a ceremony myself. I'd had concerns that she might regard the research as intrusive and my perspective as possibly challenging her paradigm, but she welcomed my project warmly. She said that although she led ceremony with other plants, experiencing ayahuasca ceremony as a participant, she had already been considering asking her teachers to train her in leading ceremonies with ayahuasca, so our learning processes would support each other. She gave into my keeping a piece of ayahuasca vine as a physical token of the beginning of my relationship with the plant spirit known as the Grandmother. A week later, Alan gave me a book called *The Ayahuasca Reader: Encounters with the Amazon's Sacred Vine*. He had gone into a bookshop and had immediately noticed it on the shelf, never having seen anything on the subject before. I regarded his find as a timely and synchronistic agreement from the world channel, to proceed with my project.

With the ayahuasca vine in my house, my reading of the book and other research, I began to experience occasional influences: some artwork I did spontaneously had a vibrant combination and movement of colours I associated with ayahuasca, and I had a momentary altered state that swept over me, in which with a great and joyful clarity I was aware of the simple and beautiful interconnectedness of all beings.

I began to find out more about where ayahuasca grows, the history of its use, its composition, preparation and effects. I also examined the cultural and political questions surrounding its use both within the traditional cultures of the Amazon, and those of us in North American and European cultures establishing sub-cultures of contemporary shamanism.

### **AYAHUASCA: ORIGINS AND USE**

Ayahuasca is native to the Amazonian region – our richest natural pharmacy, now endangered by incursion, destruction and socio-economic change. This area includes parts of Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, Bolivia, Western Brazil and the Rio Orinoco basin. (SpiritQuest 2006) The use of ayahuasca by indigenous peoples is dwindling (although some people dispute this), partly because of the socio-political context in which fewer young people train as shamans and medicine people. Overall however, its use is rapidly expanding in urban centres of the Amazonian countries and worldwide, especially in North America and Europe. The three main organisations associated with this growth from the 1920s onwards particularly in Brazil are Santo Daime, Uniao do Vegetal (UDV) and Barquinia, all of which have a Christian element to their paradigm. (Ibid) According to Charlie Kidder there is a

...growing number of Christian churches throughout South America who have opted for ayahuasca as their sacrament during communion instead of the usual symbolic bread and wine sacraments. These churches claim that the potion helps to promote intense concentration and direct contact with the spiritual plane. (Kidder 2006)

A smaller and lesser-known group or lineage is called the Red Path, and it is within this context that I have based my explorations.

In the Quechua language, *aya* means ancestor, and *huasca* means rope or vine. It has been treasured by many different indigenous peoples for thousands of years, and mixed into preparations used by old and young for healing and for developing awareness. It - she

- is known as the Grandmother vine.

Relational terminology is part of a world view which understands the interconnectedness of all things, and that 'all things' participate in awareness as well as being. 'Grandmother' denotes a being with eldership and wisdom, and expresses respect as well as ancestor relatedness to that wise elder. So the spirit of the ayahuasca vine is called grandmother, and peyote is known as 'grandfather'. Since the spirit is embodied in the material substance, to speak of one is to speak of the other: they are not separate. This engenders a quality of action in which a gesture as simple as cutting a plant, expresses an awareness of the undivided presence of spirit and matter in oneself, the plant and its surroundings, and the purpose for which it is cut.

## **CEREMONY**

The group which organised the ceremony I attended draws the teachings and elders of its path from South America. The form of its ceremony is very specific: its heartfulness and beauty express many layers of meaning, and are designed to stir and awaken our dreaming selves within a framework, bringing profound changes. Above all, ceremony is a container of experience for people travelling 'between the worlds'. Each ritual object, tool and action has both symbolic significance, and an energetic signature and history which adds to the alchemical mix; my description of ceremony below, explains this further. Intent and prayer structure the container on subtle dreaming levels, creating safety and focus for the circle of people who journey. Ceremonial leaders, firekeeper and waterbearers have roles which guide the flow of events and experiences, while leaving people free to each follow their unique journey. Different rounds of medicine, prayers and singing take place through the night.

Prayer can be many things. It can be a focussing of intent on a subtle energy level which is responsive to thought-forming. In this instance, our intent can link in to the Greater Dreaming, and sometimes give us a subtle perception of the dreaming field within whose flow we participate and co-create. In Native American cosmology, there is a many-aspected difference between living as a participant in life, and as a co-creator. The latter has the ability to enter into the dreaming flow of the universe. The parallels with process work as described in previous chapters, are clear and fascinating. I explored these parallels further in two interviews I did with Fran. Some of the material from these interviews is included at the end of this chapter. First, though, I include a word picture of

some aspects of the ceremony I attended, from my journal and written in the present tense, to give some sense of the atmosphere and purpose of the event. My own journey and learning in the ceremony, is the subject of Chapter Seven.

## **FROM MY JOURNAL**

*Standing inside the door of the medicine lodge you would first see the central ground where the fire is built in a certain pattern of slender logs pointing like an arrow away from you towards the head of the circle where the medicine leaders sit with their medicine tools. Between the fire and the people is a graceful arc of mud, rising a few inches from the ground; a moon crescent decorated with flowers and candles, and with a groove running along its crest with blue pigment for one half, and red for the other. Around the fire the earth is smoothed by the feet of the firekeeper as he walks around it, tending and changing, raking a patch of red coals into this shape and that to carry different energetic signatures and to receive the copal and other incenses that are strewn from time to time throughout the night. For we are here all night. There is a moment when we each roll tobacco and herbs into a cornhusk in the shape of a cigar, tie it with strips of cornhusk, and send our prayers and intentions up on its smoke. What is left unsmoked is collected and laid with reverence on the moon arc, becoming another part of what anchors us to our particular purposes as we ride the night. We are served, at different points, by men and women taking certain roles in the ceremony. No doubt there are background stories of struggles around competition and rank, yet as I remember the ceremonial atmosphere as I write, I feel very moved by the grace and devotion of this 'family' and the way they give of themselves to serve this connection of people to Source. The medicine is passed, with instructions about how much to take. Little plastic bags are in evidence, each prepared in advance with a folded sheet of kitchen towel inside, for anyone who needs to 'get well'. This is the terminology for being sick, within an understanding that the medicine cleanses energetically as well as physically. I had dreaded this bit, thinking it would be ugly and unpleasant to have people puking up around me, even if I wasn't one of them, but in the event I hardly notice and when I do, I hear the spirit at work in a way which seems completely natural. Bags are taken out with such grace I don't even notice. The earthy, bodily functions and the subtle mysterious spirit are in fluent partnership here, it seems. The rattle is passed and we sing icaros, songs received in ceremony that guide and shape our journey together.*

*Another act of beauty to make the heart weep: The sacredness, grace and beauty of the*



*simple elements of life is taught without words in this ceremonial community or 'family' as they refer to themselves. Take the Men's Water, for example. At some point in the night, a man makes a 'tobacco' and prays over a glass gallon jar of water. He takes a beautiful pearly spiral shell that fits the palm of his hand, and kneeling on one knee, pours water into it. Then he does one of two things. In one circuit, he pours the water on to the flat of a great dark condor feather, and sprinkles it over and around each person in turn. At another point, he brings it round the circle filling it for each of us to drink, and then shakes our hand, beaming, and wishing us 'Good morning!' It is the first water I have drunk in hours. The shell keeps a little residue of water in its inner spiral core. It makes a deep gurgle that both makes us laugh, and at the same time sounds like one of the great and intimate mysteries of life itself. There is the Women's water, too. Men's Water is sky water, Women's Water is earth water. I am struck by gender roles and wonder about heterosexism.*

*Towards morning, the ceremonial leader makes a tobacco and gives praise and thanks, many personal bits of wisdom for particular individuals, and guidance for the whole community. And as the ceremony comes to an end, the children come in to be with their parents, having been looked after in a separate tipi through the night. The last ceremonial focus is the bringing of food by a few women. A cloth is laid down just inside the door, and different foods are brought in big bowls, decorated with flowers. One woman sits behind the food and makes the final tobacco, eloquently praising and expressing gratitude to all the elements, spirits and beings that made this food possible. Then it is passed around and we eat; fruit, meat, corn.*

*As people begin to leave the circle many gifts are exchanged; tokens of recognition, love, shared journeys. Many demonstrate an awareness of each other's experiences which has come through subtle connectedness, not through words.*

## **DISCUSSIONS ON PROCESS WORK AND CEREMONY**

Fran and I explored parallels between ceremonial and process work understandings. The discussion below, for example, describes what Process Work recognises as the non-locality and inter-connectedness of the dreaming field, and the appearance of the same information in different channels.

I said how beautiful I found it that the coals are raked into different shapes (like an eagle, for instance) at different times throughout the ceremony. 'Yes' said Fran;

the different shapes are gateways, bringing in different energies. One time the fire was raked into the shape of a butterfly. One woman was talking too long – she had lost her connection. I saw the firekeeper take two pieces of wood and gently lay them in the fire in the shape of a butterfly – only two of us saw it. A few moments later, she got back on track, and stopped. I went to start playing my drum – it's a water drum, and the skin can show different changing colours and shapes. Really clearly, there was the shape of a butterfly. I was told that I can learn to see the whole medicine journey in the drum, I don't need to look in the fire, but I haven't actually experienced it before.

Everything really is in everything, its there all the time but we don't see it. Just a glimpse of it is ecstatic, and I guess we probably miss about ninety-five per cent of it, don't we? That's what I go to ceremony for, and what each of us is drawn to, in one way or another.

Fran recounted experiences she has had in ceremony which process work would understand as examples of being dreamed up or organised by the field: she said she had 'channelled the expression of visions coming through to the circle; that she had had no control.' The medicine woman had spoken the visions, and Fran had transmitted them through her body. For example, she had been deeply grieving. The medicine woman said it was indigenous women's pain. Fran found it unbelievably strong, and then experienced joy and laughter. She said:

I'm not attached to the stories, to whose grief it is. I'm not interested in deciding what's mine and not mine. Its just important that I feel it and express it. That has an impact on the web of connectedness. Like when I was transmitting the grieving, it touched other people to connect.... And then women on the other side of the world, too.

We discussed the concept of developing an awareness of deep democracy, and Fran recognised 'Where Process Work wants to engage all voices, all awarenesses, that's my experience as a result of medicine.' This is focussed mainly in the sentient level. For example, when I asked her how medicine works with relationship conflict, she said:

It takes you out of your individual experience into an expanded place. You have a bigger view. When you take a look from there, it shifts. Each time I take the medicine, I get more fluid, more compassionate. I don't have such an opinion about everything – I can empathise with different viewpoints. I used to be quite rigid and fixed, now I'm more fluid.

More often now, I wonder what the expanded view is. I go there and sit in other people's experience. Medicines smash you away. Your ego is so destroyed – sometimes there's nothing to hold on to. I'm more likely now to say I don't know.

## **CROSS-FERTILISATION OF PARADIGMS**

Through our regular meeting in our local peer group, Fran and I began to cross-fertilise our Process Work and ceremonial paradigms. One instance of this was Fran's use of awareness around deep democracy and marginalisation, while she was leading a ceremony. Two women had arrived to participate in the ceremony from another tradition. 'I work with the light' one had said. 'So do I, but I also work with the shadow. Its important you should know that.' Fran had replied. Partway through the ceremony they said they must leave. Fran told them it was important for the integrity of the ceremony that they stay, and to her relief one of them was able to be moved by the ceremony, but they still left early. Fran struggled with self-criticism about their way being better. Remembering the many times in our peer group we have affirmed the importance of what is marginalised and left out, the next time in the ceremony she prayed, she welcomed in all the judgements and feelings of being judged, of not being good enough, saying they all belonged and had a place in the circle. She felt relieved, as though a weight was off her. It brought inclusion for others, too: at dawn, towards the end of the ceremony, a Buddhist woman sang her whole incantation, beautifully. At the end Fran honoured her, and she replied: 'Oh, good, because I wasn't sure if I was allowed.'

## **IT TUNES IN TO WHAT I WANT TO KNOW**

'Every ceremony, said Fran, 'is completely different.'

Often it tunes into what I want to know about or understand. My first time, I wanted to know about working with feathers in a ceremonial way. I asked the medicine man and he said: 'The ceremony will show you.' ... I became a bird - my whole body was a bird. It was a very physical experience. I experienced my shoulders as wings. I could feel what happens as a bird takes flight – I could feel my feathers moving. It frightened me: I felt I'd lost my own body. But it gave me a great understanding of the movement of the feathers. So when I'm holding and working with feathers to bring that spirit to a person, I move them as an extension of my arm as a wing. When I first saw someone do that, it made me cry: the woman was feathers. Ayahuasca opens you up to all the beings.

I didn't know what experiences would come to me when I participated in ceremony. I only knew the question I was taking: I was asking about process work and ceremony - and me, and how we connected. It was quite some time before I realised that both in the ceremony and subsequently for several months, experiences and events continued to unfold like steps in a labyrinth, leading me to a dynamic resolution of that question.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN: EXPERIENCING CEREMONY**

The day of the ceremony arrived, beginning with fear and denial. I wanted to watch TV till the moment of leaving the house, rather than think about preparations. Who in me was scared? My primary process: the one who was afraid she might die, be changed or experience extreme discomfort. In Castaneda's book *Tales of Power*, the Yaqui sorcerer Don Juan works to soothe Castaneda's fears as he anticipates an 'appointment with knowledge'(Castaneda 1974) in which 'the habit of having the world always conform to our thoughts' (Ibid) is about to give way to a completely different assemblage of reality.

I shared the car journey with a friend who was also a first timer, but who was confidently expecting heartfelt and ecstatic experiences. In the car I felt frozen, lost for words. As we passed beyond the landmarks of my regular life, I felt I lost all sense of wellbeing and identity. Talking about it was relieving and returned some sense of recognisable selfhood. I remembered that reluctance and denial are common pre-ceremonial experiences, and Fran and I have often joked about it. The ceremonial field is already in action, and the 'little me' fears annihilation as it can no longer claim to control experience: the gateway to the unknown appears ahead.

### **DISCUSSIONS IN THE CAR**

I thought about the way unresolved issues of power and authority can amplify fears of being out of control, because they associate the experience with being in the control of an Other who is in some way hostile or contrary to our interests. So while we talked during the long car journey, I spoke about two experiences I'd had around feeling disempowered in relation to others.

More than ten years previously, I had been involved in a radical psychospiritual community, whose leaders had intended to crack open our identities in order to cultivate our connection to a deeper truer Selfhood. The rank and authority they assumed was sometimes inspired and sometimes inevitably misguided, yet we were required to surrender to their knowledge of us as we engaged with the initiatory journey. I experienced a deeper communication and love in this community than I had ever known, and a stronger sense of aliveness, but it came at the price of confusion and abuse and left me with the sense of having lost some essential protective layers of myself, while simultaneously

feeding a mistrust in my own perceptions and a vicious inner critic who jeered at me for not having the courage to follow that road all the way to self-realisation.

I also spoke about a long-held dream that I had never followed: to travel to South America and spend time learning directly from shamans. I had hesitated mostly because of a fear that I wouldn't have the strength to be self-determining: that faced with the adherence to tradition by indigenous teachers, I would either take everything on board or have to reject it all. Speaking about it, I noticed this fear seemed to have diminished. Naming my fears relieved them to a large extent, and relegated them to the background.

### **THE THEMES EMERGE ALREADY**

I wasn't aware that these themes of rank, authority and eldership would be the main ones of my research journey. Had I thought about it, I might have remembered that from a process oriented perspective, the whole process is present in the signals of the first thirty seconds! I was identified with a part of me that knew it needed to die or transform. My secondary, emergent process was to be confident (like my companion), powerful and authoritative, like the shamans and psychospiritual community leaders I thought and talked about, and most of all, with some wise eldership, like ayahuasca. My edges included beliefs about losing identity, and authority being oppressive or abusive. During and after the ceremony, I would discover much more about my edges to an emergent identity, and review the history and beliefs that kept me from going over those edges.

### **ARRIVING**

We arrived, and took our places in a tight circle in the big tipi, surrounded by people who mostly knew each other very well, and among whom I knew a few. As relative outsiders we were welcomed by some and ignored by others: this was not a setting which placed importance on everyone meeting each other initially in our everyday identities, yet one way or another everyone's need were taken care of. Nevertheless I missed the way process work facilitators use their rank to help make everyone, especially newcomers, feel equally welcome and valuable in our everyday identities, as well as in the altered experiences that unfold.

The ceremonial space was beautifully decorated, with flowers and candles on the great crescent arc of the altar. Prayers were made, with each person focussing their intent for

the night ahead. I had stated my intent several times over the preceding weeks, and expressed it again as a wish simply to be led on my research journey, to be shown whatever might be useful to me and to others, and a sense of gratitude for the experience.

After the medicine went round the first time, we began to alter, each in our own inner dimensions, though I think the medicine leaders sensed where each of us was. The rattle went round the circle, and as we held it, we each sang. I had no icaro or ayahuasca song, so I sang in her honour all that I noticed in the moment, letting the words come as they would. I included all that I felt was marginalised in the moment – but that's all I wrote after in my notes, and I don't remember what it was. Afterwards, one of the women said that during my song she'd visioned me as a big bird flying around the planet in a mothering way, with lots of humming birds gathering to me. A lovely view of my connecting with marginal bits! A month later, I was to see my first humming bird, on an unexpected trip to Brazil, where the major theme for me continued to be the challenge to develop eldership around rank and marginalisation issues in a spiritual community.

## **VISIONARY EXPERIENCE**

The second time the medicine went round, the experience was stronger.

I had a visual experience that seemed to show me something about the nature of perception. Lines of light converged through three dimensions. As two light lines met, it seemed to me that they exerted a pressure which brought something into being. I understood that the light lines could be two awarenesses or two paradigms, and that as they met together they put pressure on the field of potential or the 'fruitful void', so that a perception manifested, unfolded itself, became available to experience. It was a lucid dreaming experience, whose vivid quality is hard to convey.

## **CONFLICT**

Just after this I found myself silently asking the question: How do the spirit of process work and the plant spirit of ayahuasca get on with each other? At the time I didn't notice how my question connected with the vision I had just received. Nor did I realise that I had been given a kind of koan which would exercise me until I rewired my thinking. Immediately I was answered with a feeling of a lively and joyous interest in life that they shared together: an expansive feeling. But immediately it was followed by a contractive thought and a fear: that if I let go completely to their joint choreography, I could easily do something outside

the conventions of this ceremonial form, and thereby disrupt or disrespect those I sat in circle with. This amplified my slight sense earlier of being an outsider.

I decided not to explore where Grandmother medicine and process awareness seemed to want to take me. I was glad and surprised to find that I experienced no 'bad trip' type experiences as a result, just a sense of disappointment at having held back. When I described this to one woman afterwards, she laughed and said it seemed I wouldn't be happy until I was leading the ceremony. At the time I dismissed this as uncomfortable and unthinkable, but my later inner work showed me how aptly she had put her finger on the issue of leadership.

Chapter Eight describes this inner work.

## CHAPTER EIGHT: INNER WORK AND REFLECTIONS ON THE PAST

In the course of writing about my experience of the ceremony, I came across this excerpt from Arny Mindell's book *The Shaman's Body*:

You... can no longer afford to see your rule-breaker's journey as only a personal battle of individuation.. The results of your deathwalk are important for everyone. Your individual attempts to become your whole self are provoking change around you (Mindell, 1993)

I hadn't been a rule-breaker, though I had wanted to. It bugged me, and provoked me finally to do some inner work, to find out what invited me to explore, at the place where I had got stuck.

### UNFOLDING THE PROCESS FURTHER

I decided to imagine how I might have disrupted the ceremony, and realised that an image of what I might do *had* flirted with me at the time: I had imagined myself getting up and moving across the space between the fire and the circle, particularly the ceremonial leaders' part of the circle. Given the rules of the ceremonial form, because each person's relationship with the fire is crucial, that was taboo. And perhaps because it was taboo, I was obsessed with it. I felt I couldn't tell whether I wanted to do it for any reason other than that I mustn't! Then I realised that getting stuck around this question was to get mesmerised at the edge of the unknown.

I imagined I was back in the ceremony, sitting in the circle. Different sides spoke in my inner dialogue.

One said: 'Don't disrupt the form. By coming here you agreed to respect it. If you want to experience ayahuasca and process work differently, organise it yourself on a different occasion instead of interrupting now. For now, just notice and appreciate.'

The other replied: 'All I can notice is that I've had to stop something that felt like an authentic calling from the medicine itself, to fit in with a form that seems too limiting. I'm not satisfied with that: I don't want to just follow something I don't agree with.'

Still imagining I was back in the ceremony, I got up and walked across to a particular spot. I stood ignoring the patterning of the ceremonial space/time and noticed how strong I felt.



Wondering how others would respond, I imagined what other roles might be represented. Its important to make clear that these are roles as they appeared in the field of my own inner polarities and struggles although they are likely to belong to the group field too in some way.

In my inner dimension, one role said: 'I cannot tolerate your disrespect for the ceremonial form. Since you will not move of your own accord, I will have to physically remove you from the space.' I experienced this as abrupt, almost a little violent. It reminded me of what can happen to people having mental health disturbances: their experience is not regarded as meaningful either for themselves or for the collective. I was being a little like that myself! This is the part of us that is more fundamentalist in relation to other paradigms.

Another role I imagined was an elder who was able to support what was happening, trusting the deeper spirit to carry whatever has stepped outside the ceremonial conventions. The possibility of being met by such a figure was, in itself, a huge relief to imagine, showing me how unconsciously I had identified the authority of the ceremonial leaders as inevitably oppressive. That elder (that I could imagine but not yet quite identify with) said: 'You have disrupted our ceremonial form. Tell us why – what do you have to say to us?'

I replied: 'I *am* the vine that makes the marriage between heaven and earth.' I felt it in the height and strength of my body. Momentarily I experienced eldership from my perspective too, and a confidence in speaking from a transpersonal place. I must have got to a big edge at that point, because I switched to speaking as myself in communion with the vine: 'This ceremonial form has great beauty, and teaches much that needs to be remembered. But we need to not be restricted by it. We need to learn how to carry this medicine and this form inside ourselves, so we can live it in the world.' I needed to hear this myself – and do it!

I was aware of another role that pointed out the needs of other participants, and how different they might be from my own, and I completely agreed with it.

### **CAUGHT BETWEEN ROLES, UNABLE TO LAND**

While I was exploring the dialogue between the 'rule-breaker' role and those who stood for

honouring traditional forms, I experienced such a potent split within myself that I felt as if I 'couldn't land': couldn't get my feet on the ground in one place or another. After a while, becoming able to articulate and reflect on this made it possible to notice how *against* that experience of 'not landing' I was, and how I had a choice not to go along with that evaluation – or that rule! To find out more about such a secondary experience, one inner work tool is amplification. Can't land? Don't land *even more*. Ah! I imagined I floated in the air of the tipi like a ghost, happy at last, and felt I was in the company of lots of other spirits who were holding the whole ceremonial space and everyone in it, with interest and compassion. I was released from my split identity on the ground. Now I didn't need the figures to resolve their conflict: The whole air was singing, golden.

Through that sentient experience, I found a quality of eldership which could appreciate the existence and interaction of all the roles. I noticed that I was primarily someone who liked to resolve polarities, but that I enjoyed the rich and peaceful freedom of this other level of awareness, and knew how valuable it was to cultivate it, with its appreciation of all the different interacting parts. It is the perspective of a figure who is needed not only in inner work, but also in group conflicts, where its ability to celebrate diversity is often transformative.

## **REFLECTIONS ON THE RESEARCH THEMES**

There is a theme which has been central to every level and every stage of this project: the initial research, reflections on personal history, the first inner work, the writing up process and the further inner work stimulated by that.

It is a process around authority and domination. On my way to the ceremony, I suffered from a fear of being overpowered, and past events came to mind. In the ceremony, I submitted to an outer authority but without conviction. In my subsequent inner work I discovered a role of critical authority which dismissed any possible meaning or value for my impulse. Throughout the whole writing process I have had an internal war going on which has frequently paralysed my ability to function. In each instance I have struggled, consciously or unconsciously identifying as someone without authority and leadership, meeting that secondary aspect of myself in both internal and external figures, in the ceremony itself, in inner work reflections and in writing.

## **THE CRITIC DURING WRITING**

What an excruciating experience! It's been like a sort of invisible slavery. I would write something, and get immediate body sensations: tightening, sickness, palpitations. An inner voice has attacked me from every quarter, saying things like: 'How on earth can you focus on something as trivial and irrelevant as this, when there are real life and death issues going on in the world? Who cares about your dilemmas about authority and leadership? Why is it taking you so long to resolve it? What a waste of time!' And so on.

This has been the biggest engagement during the writing process: unpacking the different parts of this process, finding out where the critic although mean, was accurate about what was and wasn't important. And where the things I most wanted to leave out, were actually the main bones of the research where I was shy to be authoritative.

I have had to practice more inner work! I arrived at a place where I felt as if I'd excavated an amphitheatre, built the foundations for a church. Days before, it had seemed more like knitting with treacle or punching my own face.

## **WHAT INNER WORK?**

Some of the most effective inner work I've done has been in the movement channel. I've focussed on the inner movements of my panic, for instance. Amplifying them, I've found myself shaking and twirling and roaring, finding strong movements in my hands and arms, and then in my whole stance. I became a figure who would not give up or give in to the critical tyrant. I noticed the resilience and endurance of the tyrant, and found I could feel it and become it and use it, instead of suffering from it. I felt my heart and my humour again, and from this place could sift the words of the critic and find what was useful in them. I could respond to its challenge to stand up more publicly for what's important and meaningful to me.

The world channel helped me too: when I got stuck one time in critic attack, I heard a buzzard calling over my house. It called to me like a friend, reminding me of the greater reality, our deep connection, and my underlying purpose of wanting to serve that connection in what I write. It reawoke my heart.

## **OVER THE EDGE**

I found out what attracted me to passively suffering such inner criticism: it had a lot to do

with safety, not risking change. One time, crazy with the inner battle, I picked up my longing to go mad, and let go all responsibility to be accurate, intelligent, fair, accountable. I shapeshifted into the kind of madness where you can say outrageous things and not give a damn – Ah! What a relief! I criticised my process work teachers as freely as I had criticised myself, and discovered an exhilaration that went beyond the content of what I said. I found I had been relating to the process work paradigm, and to process workers, as a systemic tyranny, requiring me to follow prescribed rules for doing inner work. I refused, and found my strength again in refusing.... and then saw how I was following the process after all! What an exquisite paradox!

In a number of ways over the time I've been writing, I've been stalking an inner authority and reclaiming it bit by bit. At the edges of a familiar identity or pattern, personal and collective history arose like gatekeepers to bar or open the way. Behind my struggles with spiritual authority in the present, lay events of the past: personal past, and collective past, as I have described in Chapter Five. Below, I show briefly some of the ways issues of power, authority and rebellion conditioned my experiences in the present, and came to light in order to provide an opportunity for change. This is the teleological aspect of individuation processes that Jung focussed on, as distinct from a causative and pathological perspective.

### **PERSONAL PAST**

Like Jung, process work recognises that childhood dreams which are remembered in adulthood contain our life myths: personal conundrums from which we wrestle our self-knowledge, as a long-term process. I reconnected with my childhood dream of being terrified of the Eye, watching me inevitably get something wrong. Chapter Nine describes what changed.

### **COLLECTIVE PAST: WOMEN AND SPIRITUAL RANK**

Many women growing up in relation to the Christian church have been exposed to an association of ourselves at some level with sin, sex, darkness, the Devil, witchcraft, irrationality and temptation. We have had men to stand as priests between us and the divine. From one perspective, theology, science and economics have been an unholy trinity of patriarchal exclusion for centuries. Malidoma Some powerfully describes the perception of women he gained from French Jesuit missionaries in the 1950s, after having

been kidnapped from his family in Burkina Faso when he was four years old:

It stunned me to suddenly realise the extent to which my religious experience had moulded my psyche on the issue of male/female relations. Without knowing it, I had come to see women as both attractive and repulsive. This attitude had begun with the endless homilies on hell, Satan, and, most vividly, on mortal sins fed to me by the Jesuits. From the minute I entered my teens, I began to hear that women had the doors to hell built into their bodies. Even thinking about them could endanger our souls. I could concede that thinking about them was dangerous, in the light of the events that transpired in the Garden of Eden so long ago. After all, wasn't it Woman who had first tempted Man to sin? I also understood that Woman was born punished since her body poured blood every month and she gave birth amid incredible pain. But why women were so cursed was as difficult for me to comprehend as their total absence from our lives. (Some, 1994)

When such attitudes are unconsciously internalised, they add extra dimensions of self-doubt to the more universal question of individuation 'How do you know that what you call your authentic way is not just the need of your little self to refuse surrender?' Rebellion and oppressive authority are likely to be two faces of a process which begs to be unfolded to a new story.

At a certain point in my inner work I was swept by a wave first of fear, then of deep grief, as I connected with the witches of the past. The shadow of the witchburnings in my own and other European countries, initiated by the Christian church, remains mostly unaddressed in the collective psyche despite the passing of time. Scholarship varies greatly on the historical facts. Elisabeth Brooke writes

Originally intended to stamp out heresy – that is, opposition to the established church – witch-hunting became over the five centuries that it continued more 'woman-hunting' than anything else. By the seventeenth century, ninety per cent of condemned witches were women. A veritable reign of terror swept through Europe, and millions of women died. Evidence was gathered on the basis of hearsay and gossip; neighbour denounced neighbour; old scores were settled; and feuds over land were enacted in these courts. The courts were ecclesiastical and had 'special powers'...Torture was officially sanctioned in 1257 and remained a legal recourse of the Church until 1816....Particularly targeted were independent women, spinsters, and widows, or those who did not conform to the low status afforded them by the Church. Women healers and midwives came into these categories and were hounded by the Inquisition. The motivation was probably misogynist. By the sixteenth century an exclusively male medical profession was trying to establish a monopoly. What could have been more

irritating than to have competition from barely literate women, who seemed to have a 'natural' gift for healing? (Brooke, 1997)

Wikipedia suggests figures which are more generally accepted today, but agrees that misogyny played a part in what it still describes as a genocide:

However, the figure of nine million casualties is today believed to be grossly inflated; among other things, the entire adult female population in Europe at the time was no more than 20-22 million... Generally accepted casualty figures amongst historians today range from Levack at around 60,000 to Hutton at around 40,000. Modern historians have shown that the victims of the witchhunt were not always female (in Iceland, for example, 80% of those accused were men), though they were in the majority. Mysogyny is usually considered an important part of the forces behind it, along with social unrest and religious conflicts between Protestants and Catholics. (Wikipedia, 2006)

## **STILL IN THE COLLECTIVE MEMORY**

I remember an experience in London in the early 1980s: among the wide range of people for whom a lesbian lapel badge was nothing to remark upon, many gave huge adverse reactions to a 'Witches Heal' badge.

In one group some years ago, we explored the issues using sociodrama. Sociodrama is a dramatic, therapeutic approach which is sometimes used to unfold processes which still animate the collective dreaming. 'Sociodrama has been defined as a deep action method dealing with intergroup relations and collective ideologies.' (Moreno, 1978) In group sociodrama work in the past I have experienced being in the different roles: the witch, the witch-burner, the accuser, the bystander - but what shocked me and resonated with me most deeply was a moment in a drama when I watched paralysed and speechless as a fellow witch was carried away. The terror of exposure and its possible consequences remained a psychic vulnerability for me because that role in the collective history resonated most strongly with my own particular personal history. Many of us become frozen when huge human dramas emerge into our daily lives, and sometimes it is only with hindsight that we become aware of how we would like to have responded. The collective dreaming field around these particular issues remains largely unconscious, and I think conditions many of us in subtle – and not so subtle - ways.

Nor are the witchburnings a stand-alone incident in history: like other 'ethnic cleansings', wars, pogroms and holocausts, they are an extreme phase of a longer-term historical process. As an internalised and deeply embedded phenomenon, they can generate fear, guilt, shame and intense self-criticism at the edge where one contemplates breaking the oppressive mould. As a woman drawn to express and embody spiritual eldership, I have to be able to do so through wrestling with this history – or herstory as some women would write in linguistic reclamation. In response to its weight, the temptations are to remain marginal and critical, to unconsciously become an oppressor, or to try and avoid having to encounter the issue at all. Deeply buried feelings of rage, and a background itch for justice, do not simply evaporate. "Injustice does not gradually retreat into history" as Arlene Audergon writes in *The War Hotel*. She says:

As long as we do not validate history, we all live in this kind of dissociation, feeling cut off from our own story and from ourselves.....When people are validated in their experiences, they are often able to in turn validate others' experiences, even if the content of the experience is very different from their own. Apparently intractable conflicts can give way at this point to understanding and a desire to move forward. (A. Audergon, 2005)

Writing about these aspects of personal and collective history is, for me, part of that validation process, and has had deep effects, which I will briefly describe in Chapter Nine.

## **WOMEN HEALING EARTH**

During this struggle for self-validation without polarising, it was relieving to discover other voices, and be reassured that I was in good company in needing to wrestle with these issues. Coming across a volume of writings by third world women on ecology, feminism and religion called *Women Healing Earth*, I was grateful to read the dilemmas and insights of women in different countries and cultures coming to terms with forging an authentic spiritual practice which often included more than one paradigm, one of which was often Christianity. These are voices of women who do not romanticise indigenous tradition or see it as unproblematic or without its own patriarchal aspects, who are attempting to retain a sacred relationship with the earth in situations where traditional cultures are in meltdown. Some of them are incorporating Christian and non-Christian paradigms into their lives in new and complementary ways, some of them choose one or the other. Some of them have had to come to terms with several different kinds of discrimination which they had internalised.

## One woman writes

Esther, Elena and Silvia have incorporated both Christian and non-Christian traditions into their lives. For them, the participation in their cultural traditions and in Christianity is not seen as a form of syncretism nor as a dualism. It is not syncretism because the traditional religions are not added on to their Christian practices, nor is Christianity combined into traditional faith. However, neither is it a dualism, because there is no rupture with one religion when they participate in the other, nor are they maintained compartmentalised in their lives. The two religious practices have a complementary relationship that facilitates the integration of their identities as people from ancient cultures who live in a world dominated by Christianity. (Janet May, 1996)

Such equanimity is not necessarily easy to achieve. May describes one woman's reflections on her need to confront her own internalisation of the discriminations she has experienced. (Ibid) She quotes another woman, Esther, speaking of 'the pain we have suffered for centuries' and the need to 'remember this pain and bring it to conscious awareness in the present, to help us understand present reality, and to help us visualise renewal in the future.' (Ibid)

As a result of exploring the issues raised in me by my experience of ceremony, I had to confront my relationship with the Christian church, the spiritual authority of my childhood. In Chapter Nine I will write briefly about two subsequent events which significantly changed that relationship. I include them because it was only after that change that I was able to make a further step in integrating with these issues, the essence of what I had glimpsed in the Grandmother ceremony: joy and playfulness.



## **CHAPTER NINE: CHANGES**

### **SUDDENLY**

During a second ceremony I attended which centred around peyote or Grandfather medicine, my childhood dream suddenly came to mind, of the Eye which had petrified the little girl me counting matches. Suddenly a new voice spoke to the Eye, saying calmly: 'She's bound to count the matches wrong, because she used two of them to burn the house down.' The Eye smiled, for the very first time. The atmosphere changed, to one of companionship and relatedness, on a continuing journey of adventure. An elder had arrived, who could advocate for the timid part of myself. As a result, authority had shifted, and become heartfelt. It was swift, simple and yet reorganised a part of my experience in a profound way. Peyote is known as the medicine of the heart.

### **PROOF OF THE PUDDING**

When someone has 'burned their wood', it becomes possible to experience the perspective of the 'other' in a way which one could not do before. I knew there had been a transformative change in me, when I had the following experience at a process work seminar.

It was held in an ex-convent venue which still displayed plenty of Christian statues and a large crucifix on the wall of the room we were in. During the seminar a guest shamanic practitioner drummed while we danced. I found it a wonderfully heartfelt weave of process and ceremonial strands, and I danced my celebration of that. Suddenly an inner voice said: 'Jesus didn't die for our sins. Its not about taking away our sins – that's not the point. Our sins – karma – mistakes – secondary processes – all of it, is the stuff of how we learn to come to greater awareness. We are all on that cross – that's life!' I had always found the Doctrine of the Cross incomprehensible and alien, and had never thought this out so clearly. During the break, I spoke with the drummer, who had thought about me earlier and been reminded of the words of Bernadette Roberts, an ex-nun. He expressed exactly what I had just discovered for myself. In Roberts own writings, she says:

Something else about Christ bothered me: the notion that he died a terrible death for my sins. This struck me as absolutely preposterous, unbelievable. To begin with I never felt I was a sinner, nor did I see the good people around me as sinners. That the only reason for the incarnation was sin was a notion I instinctively rejected. (Roberts, 1989)

...the real tragedy of Christ's death is that so few understand it. The general interpretation is that Christ gave up his self so the rest of us would not have to do so. (Roberts 1993)

..Christ did not overcome our individual self for us; he only showed us by his death what we too will have to go through to be truly free, not merely free of sin, but free in the most divine sense" (Ibid)

## **GNOSTICISM**

I was finally introduced to the Gnostic teachings: I had known of them for some years, but never really explored them before. In reading about them, I came full circle to the Oracle at Delphi, and found a common heritage of Christian and non-Christian mystics:

Above the ancient Pagan sanctuary at Delphi were written the words 'Know your Self'. This injunction was seen as the fundamental challenge of Gnosticism by Pagan, Jewish and Christian Gnostics alike. The 'Gnosis' or "Knowledge' they sought was self-knowledge. (Freke & Gandy, 2001)

I began to pick up the threads of mystical Christianity which encouraged our authority from within our self-knowing – the Christ within - rather than imposing doctrines and dictates from without. Simultaneously I discovered where the divine feminine was most strongly represented within Christianity, in the myth of Sophia, Goddess of Wisdom, partner in a mystical marriage with the mythical Jesus. 'We are all invited to participate in the mystical marriage, representing the realization of Gnosis.' (Ibid)

At the heart of Gnosis is 'the injunction to 'love one another' not because we should, but, as Paul says, 'because we are parts of each other.' (Ibid) Here Gnosticism, shamanism, quantum physics and Process Oriented Psychology are all in agreement.

The path of Gnosticism involves initiation, and the crucifixion, as part of that initiation, 'represents the death of the initiate's *eidolon* – the 'I am a body' idea'...'to find our true Self we must take up our cross and crucify the ego.' (Ibid) Crucifying the ego is another description of erasing personal history, or freeing ourselves from our identifications so we

can fluidly become all the 'other' parts of ourselves, in all levels from consensus reality, to dreamland and in the unified field of essence.

## **MY OWN INITIATION**

But what does this have to do with my research journey? The appearance of Gnosticism at this point of my journey was significant to me in two ways. Firstly, it confirmed the fruitfulness of my inner work in transforming my polarizations with Christianity into a richer field where insights and new experiences could occur. Secondly, it confirmed, in its description of Gnosis and initiation, the initiatory nature of my own experience. Gnostic initiation *requires* that one wrestle with external authority, trusting one's own rebellious nature, going against all orthodoxies and even one's own teachers, making apparently 'wrong' choices in order to discover, exercise, learn to follow, and stand for, the authority of one's inner knowing.

## **A WINDING PATH**

The path of researching my initial question about an apparent clash between Process Work and ceremonial shamanic paradigms, turned out to be a winding, labyrinthine one, rather than straight and linear, like the snakelike vine of ayahuasca. Despite leaving out many synchronistic and related episodes, my writing up has necessarily reflected this. In exploring my relationship with paradigms with a spiritual or transpersonal dimension, I hadn't expected to excavate layers of the religious paradigm with which I grew up, exposing a personal and collective history which required 'erasing' in order to go beyond the edges of a limiting identification, and assemble the world, including my perception of process work and shamanism, from a different perspective.

## **OVER THE EDGE INTO PLAYFULNESS**

An experience of eldership at the sentient level followed the insight about Gnosticism, at the same seminar in the ex-convent. We did an exercise which involved going outside alone and following secondary signals in the world around us, after first describing our craziest ideal. My craziest ideal was 'I am one of a golden horde of enlightened teachers who have fun hanging out together and doing great stuff around the planet – and cosmos!' At a certain spot in the garden, I saw the face of an ugly witch in a bush. I imagined being her, and suddenly – literally, in consensus reality – birds and insects appeared around me

in shafts of sunlight, on the grass and in the air. The atmosphere deepened as if with an added dimension, and the golden horde of beings seemed neither crazy nor far away – nor exclusively human. Inspired to explore becoming others within the whole ‘golden horde’, I next imagined being the Madonna whose statue I had passed on the stairs. I could feel compassion for all beings, and the need to remember the cross as the way, the path. But I also felt the limitation of such statues in their encouragement of certain states, and marginalisation of other experiences and processes.

I felt an enormous freedom in being able to get inside an experience within a Christian paradigm that had been closed to me, without completely identifying with it. It was like breaking a code, or parting a veil. I thought of Mindell, and felt I was experiencing some of the fluidity I admired in him, to get inside so many different roles and experiences without becoming identified with them. I hadn't had such an experience since practising as a psychic, years before. To be able to reaccess it through process awareness, was like finding the hidden doorways in the house of my self. I felt the playfulness and joy that I had so fleetingly experienced in the Grandmother Ceremony, when I asked the question: ‘How do the spirit of ayahuasca and the spirit of process work get on together?’

## **FOLLOWING MYSELF**

I was ready at last to revisit that moment in the ayahuasca ceremony at which I had got stuck. It was where I had come to my edge: an edge to *not* adapting, to following myself and my own leadership. I returned one more time in my imagination to the ceremony, with the question: ‘What would I do if I were free to follow myself?’

## **PLAYING**

This time I imagined engaging playfully with individual people in the circle. It was easy! Playing, playfighting...or sitting still and allowing the medicine to show me another way through: the spirit of interaction had completely changed. Whatever issues arose about what was or was not acceptable in that space, I felt able to be present, joyful, creative, fluid. I had erased my personal history around those issues; I had burned my wood. I was willing to embody change if the process indicated it, without being attached to or identified with it. I had found a new level of fluidity to be either leader or participant. In loosening up my internal dance between rule-making and structure on the one hand, and momentary following of the unknown on the other, I no longer experienced them as such polarised

absolutes in the paradigms I was examining. Or in the writing up process, where the same struggle had been replicated. I was freer to dream a different dream, and have that reflected by subsequent experiences.

## **NEW SYNERGY**

The labyrinthine path showed me how my inner life unconsciously structured my adaptation to, and rebellion against, the worldviews I was researching. Once awareness is brought to bear on such a process, change naturally follows. Becoming aware of identifications, amplifying and following them all the way, makes it possible to drop them. Authority and rebellion, instead of being hot issues waiting to be tripped over and the conflict between them reactivated, return to a less charged and less personal status in the dynamic flow of states, roles and processes: two faces of the Tao, each an essential ingredient in the diversity of wholeness.

The question, of the relationship of the two paradigms, is no longer a highly charged question, and I am comfortable with the momentary arising of an endless variety of answers. In my practice, with individual clients and with groups, my facilitation demonstrates a more seamless synergy, allowing me to draw on aspects of the different paradigms according to the needs of the moment, in a way that I feel is continuing to develop as my own. As a participant, I am less likely to be 'taken' by a wounded identification, and more able to bring eldership skills to whichever position I find myself in: invaluable training for participating in worldwork issues, collective dynamics and conflict facilitation!

In my Conclusion, I will show the connection between my experiences on an intrapsychic level, and the same issues on an interpsychic or field level, in the collective arena.

## CHAPTER TEN: CONCLUSION

*I said that only if one pits two views against each other can one weasel between them to arrive at the real world. I meant that one can arrive at the totality of oneself only when one fully understands that the world is merely a view, regardless of whether that view belongs to an ordinary man or a sorcerer. (Don Juan, in Castaneda 1974)*

My aim, in this research project, was to examine my experience of a paradigm clash between process work and ceremonial shamanism, deepening my understanding of both paradigms in order to be able to embrace them both in a new synergy, finding my own way of engaging with them both. By describing the unfolding of my awareness processes through the research journey, I hoped to demonstrate possibilities for others finding themselves caught 'between paradigms'.

I chose ayahuasca ceremony as the matrix of my research, because my unfamiliarity with that form of ceremony and altered state made the research a genuine journey of discovery. While the insights from ceremony took me a long way, and dovetailed with insights gained through using Process Work methods, my understanding of ayahuasca ceremony itself and its potential for expanding awareness, must be considered as a small beginner's step.

### CAULDRON

This has been a rich journey with many layers of experiences and realisations in a dynamic interaction with each other. The project itself, as I look back, seems to have become something whole and complete – however rough - with a defined shape, even though the themes continue to unfold as long-term processes do. That defined shape is like an artefact that has been wrought from the clashing; made and unmade and remade using the tools of each paradigm, in the heat of my own focussed attention and battle for completion and congruence. I feel as if I have forged a rough metal vessel, and I can hear that Dreamland vessel ring as I tap it. This reminds me of my vision during the ayahuasca ceremony:

Lines of light converged through three dimensions. As two light lines met, it seemed to me that they exerted a pressure which brought something into being. I understood that the light lines could be two awarenesses or two paradigms, and that as they met together they put pressure on the field of potential or the 'fruitful void', so that a perception manifested, unfolded itself, became available to experience.

Some months after I wrote this, I came across the following description of quantum fields:

... quantum fields, perhaps a different field for each particle, are energy, manifesting into form when two fields intersect. (Wheatley 2006)

It seems to me that the pressure exerted by the meeting of paradigms has created something tangible. As I reflect on the image and sound of the metal vessel, I realise that I have forged my own cauldron!

I notice how the archetype of the cauldron connects with the collective history of the witches that I have written about, and realise how that in itself demonstrates a healing outcome of 'burning my wood' through the project; to have explored the justice issues enough for the present so that they drop away, and the spirit or Dreaming of the witch emerges in the present moment, as the Gnostic Dreaming emerged earlier. At the essence level of reality, witch and Gnostic, shaman and Process Worker are different faces of the same awareness.

A cauldron is a traditional witch's vessel for cooking things up in; food, medicine, magic. Magic – like quantum awareness - is perhaps another word for reaching into the Dreaming and co-creating within that level of reality. The research process seems to have created a vessel which can contain and 'cook' or work on my experiences within a more unified understanding.

What most of these struggles really amount to, is the process of 'getting out of the way': engaging with the internal obstacles that stand in the way of a fluidity of awareness in which the understanding that 'all things are connected' is a lived experience. They are the struggles that make it possible to come to a new moment with beginner's mind. It is when the cauldron is empty, that tapping it will make it ring! From micro to macro levels, great amounts of space are the necessary environment for the unfolding of life processes.

In the short space of time since completing my research project, there have already been a number of occasions when I have brought elements of ceremony into process work gatherings, elements of process awareness into ceremony, and elements of both into my work and life. I have been invited to step into ceremonial leadership roles, and have found myself able to weave leadership skills in to ceremony and collective processes, whether I have been a designated leader or a participant. I have increasingly found myself able to

recognise and support the leadership initiatives of people around me, even when they have appeared in the guise of disturbers, unconfident double messages and other unintentional tricksters.

## **FROM INDIVIDUAL TO COLLECTIVE LEVEL**

One of the tasks that remains, is to show how the themes and issues of this research are reflected on an interpsychic or collective field level. This is important in order to complete the vessel of the research, and to demonstrate how I have fulfilled the requirements of the methodology of autoethnography.

Russell asks that we understand our personal history as researcher to be implicated in larger social formations and historical processes. (Russell 1999) In order to frame the larger context in which my project participates, I refer particularly to some recent writing by Alex Wildwood, Quaker and deep ecologist. He paints in broad brushstrokes a picture of our current epoch in Western cultures from the point of view of spiritual allegiance, writing: 'It was reading Thomas Berry that I encountered the phrase 'living between stories' and it seems to encapsulate our present identity crisis very well.' (Wildwood, 2006)

People living between stories, are people who are also likely to be living between paradigms, and who are likely to be engaging with issues of authority, rebellion, self-determination and experimental pathways. Indeed, Wildwood goes on to describe exactly that:

The widespread questioning of authority and tradition, the demand today to know things of the spirit *experientially*, quite precisely defines the exciting historical moment in which we live. Today growing numbers of people feel free to experiment and choose what works for them; they are applying to the tenets of religion the questioning and testing characteristic of the scientific method itself. (Ibid)

While some people 'deplore what they see as *syncretism*, the mixing and merging of different faiths', Wildwood points out that 'the briefest delving into history shows that this is precisely how religious traditions evolve – by incorporating and adjusting to cultural infusion and exchange.' This echoes the experiences of Third World Women I have quoted in Chapter Eight, creating new synergies that take them deeper into or beyond the influence of both Church and shamanic hierarchies, and the call Malidoma Some makes to engage with and learn from each other's cultures.



## **METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS**

Since there has been little published examination of autoethnography and its criteria within the body of Process Work research, I hope to make some contribution to opening a discussion around a qualitative research methodology well suited to certain process work projects, and thereby also add to the dialogue between process work research and the wider research community.

### **RESEARCH CRITERIA: Ellis and Bochner**

There are a number of specific criteria for autoethnographic research which I outlined in Chapter One. Ellis and Bochner believe the researcher should

...provoke readers to broaden their horizons, reflect critically on their own experience, enter empathically into worlds of experience different from their own, and actively engage in dialogue regarding the social and moral implications of the different perspectives and standpoints they encounter. (Ellis & Bochner 2000)

I imagine and hope that by discussing shamanic ceremonial experiences, process work theory and practice, quantum physics, persecutory and inspirational aspects of spiritual paradigms, and demonstrating the relevance of these topics to people intent on living consciously on this planet, I will touch or stimulate readers in some way, to reflect, disagree and engage. I hope also that the viewpoint of an unfolding personal journey may add to the degree of accessibility of the concepts and approaches being demonstrated. I'm aware that in many places my view has been very one-sided, and this forms one of the limitations of my project – and maybe of autoethnography itself.

### **Richardson**

Richardson asks

that the piece should make a substantive contribution to our understanding of social life, that it have aesthetic merit, that the author exhibit reflexivity as producer and product of the text, that it should impact on its audience, and that it should express a reality. (Holt 2003)

The first part of these criteria I think I have addressed above. Aesthetic merit is an interesting requirement in the context of autoethnography, insofar as we need to remember that there may be no objective or agreed evaluation of aesthetics, that is not culturally positioned. I hope at least that some of the beauty of ceremony, and the shamanic gracefulness of process work, have been visible somewhere in these pages.

That I have written about a reality – or several realities - is clear, and the combination of my experiences and my reflective inner work document my journey as research subject and researcher. I hope some readers may be stimulated to have thoughts, feelings and imaginings which may seed into new dialogues elsewhere. I am passionate about the contemporary shift in understanding about the nature of reality and how it is constructed, and hope to have added a touch of colour to that discussion.

### **Foster, McAllister and O'Brien**

Foster, McAllister and O'Brien point out that 'there is also a need for the writer to balance their own experiences with those of the participants so that their personal writing is not privileged over, nor overshadows, the voices of the participants.' (Foster, McAllister & O'Brien 2006) The principles embodied in both shamanic and process paradigms unequivocally involve me, as a practitioner, in actively seeking out the voices and perspectives of others. My inner work after ayahuasca ceremony is an example of embodying other viewpoints in the field. And yet it is also true that I have inevitably privileged my own perspective in many places, and marginalized others, in order to prioritise my chosen focus and direction of research. Again, this seems to me to be on some level inescapable; perhaps one of the safeguards is transparency of positioning so that my tendencies to take one side or another will be visible and accountable.

Foster, McAllister and O'Brien refer to this positioning and accountability in a later passage, so it may be safe to assume that they accept the connection between the last point and this:

...the use of personal writing in autoethnography may be seen as providing personal accountability for the researcher's work" because the researcher is seen to be "a positioned subject both within the text and the wider cultural, political and historical contexts in which they exist. (Ibid)

From my first experience of using an autoethnographic methodology in research, I have a stronger sense of some of the pitfalls. It is hard to give full rein to anecdotal material that furthers the project, while not digging too deep into autobiographical threads that run away into other interesting arenas: difficult to maintain the project's primary identity! It is hard to maintain a coherent tone, that doesn't veer too disturbingly between casual voice and impersonal delivery. What I particularly appreciate about the methodology, is the way it

lends itself to following a process authentically in its own terms, without imposing any criteria external to the spirit of the project.

Having reviewed methodological criteria, I will turn now to looking at the contribution I consider this project makes to the body of process work research literature.

## **CONTRIBUTION TO PROCESS WORK**

At the beginning of this project, my paradigms crunched. A paradigm crunch is disturbing: it's like living two three-quarter lives, with occasional bumps between them, and an underlying desire to be able to feel whole and congruent. Or perhaps it's like speaking two languages, but having lots of things you want to say that don't translate. Kate Jobe's article (Jobe 2004) inspired me to engage closely and wrestle with this crunch, finding out and framing its precise details. That has unfolded a personal process for me which has been rich and challenging, and has indeed brought a new and exciting synergy which feels like one big life, one language - full of surprises. Castaneda's teacher Don Juan, in the passage quoted at the beginning of this concluding chapter, talks about the need for two views pitted against each other, in order for us to become aware that they are just views, however comprehensive, and that the totality of ourselves lies beyond any view. The practice of dual awareness supports both the process worker and the shaman in us, to enter more fully and more often into the momentary flow of Dreaming.

As I come to this summing up, I'm aware that there is a path rich in experience, still to unfold from my basic research into these paradigms. One of the teachings about ceremonial work is that experiences which happen on a subtle energy level, take a number of months to be assimilated within the different systems and parts of ourselves and our awareness. The kind of 'enhanced tool kit' which derives from joining ceremonial and process work perspectives and practices, will develop through its use over a period of time; the cauldron needs ingredients, and stirring, and tasting, to demonstrate its properties, and the world channel provides invitations from the Dreaming, in its own time. New projects based on an exploratory fusion of paradigms are beginning to be dreamed.

Process work was never a stranger to shamanism, and my research has made explicit the common ground and creative interaction between some of their different facets and practices. Process work theory and practice is very clearly rooted in a shamanic paradigm,

alongside other 'grandparent' tap roots such as Jung, alchemy, Taoism and quantum physics. In researching process work's relationship with ceremony, I have brought out and worked with the tension between two distinctive projects: to unfold the unknown emergent process in the moment, and to enact a ritual with repetitive and prescriptive structures to further a known intent.

In applying a process oriented perspective, I have demonstrated that the experience of being an 'outsider' and a 'rebel' in a group, which is familiar to many people, belongs to that group as part of its marginal identity, and has something to offer which can be made useful. Being 'dreamed up' to experience part of the emerging process which disturbs the group's primary identity, is familiar to me from many group situations, and frequently puts me into altered states of one sort or another in groups, whether I like it or not. I know this is an experience shared by many other people. Turning this from an unwelcome experience into a shamanic style, involves noticing and believing that it belongs meaningfully not just to me and my personal or collective history, but also to the group. I have shown that making it useful depends on a degree of awareness of the whole field which in turn, benefits from 'erasing' or integrating personal and collective history and 'burning one's wood'.

I recently had a very graphic experience of the difference – and connection – between being dreamed up to suffer from the disturbing and secondary aspects of a group's process, and leadership. I was in a ceremony where the physical conditions became more challenging as people took turns to express their prayers and intent. I'm used to experiencing extreme discomfort at this point, even to the point of needing to withdraw. This time I had prepared more fully, taking my time to anchor myself in a bigger awareness beforehand. Then as people began to speak, instead of just suffering as usual, I allowed myself to represent and voice the witnessing environment, with wordless sounds and 'gobblydygook' language, running counterpoint to people's voices. My body felt completely and strikingly at ease. I realised that one way of understanding my usual dreamed-up suffering in such an environment, is to see it as the result of *not doing the job the group process invites me to do*, which is to authoritatively speak for the field. Afterwards, the ceremonial leader remarked on the healing effects she had noticed from my sounds; she felt I had 'sung the spirit'. I reflected on the way my research journey had enabled me to drop the obstacles to a simple, congruent and embodied leadership which could find

expression by contributing something new to a situation, without any issue of challenging the designated leadership or form.

Outsiders and rebels are part of a group's evolution. Learning how to embody that role in as creative a way as possible, and learning how to meet that role with interest from the point of view of the group's main identity or facilitation, are especially relevant to people in all kinds of collective situations, in this epoch 'between stories'. While 'many mystics tend to look down on discord and opposition, implying something is wrong with the people involved' (Mindell 2000) I have demonstrated its potential for bringing us to a deeper sense of the non-polarised Dreaming behind and within us all.

In thinking about my own practice as a facilitator and ceremonialist, I feel a greater freedom and fluidity to work with mainstream and marginal, prescriptive intent and momentary flirts and signals, as a result of my research.

This fulfils both a process work perspective, and also the underlying spirit of ceremony itself, which is essentially a container for entering into the bigger Dreaming. As I have shown, process work's distinction between consensus reality, dreaming and essence levels of reality and awareness, and specific ways of unfolding secondary experiences, support a shamanic practice that can follow the movement of spirit inside ceremony and out, in everyday and altered states.

The limitations of such a project are numerous: I have touched on issues and aspects of history without being able to go deeply into them or put them in context, and there are many threads that could usefully be explored further. I hope to have done some justice to the two worlds that I re-remembered were one, and to all the wonderful beings that we are in those worlds.

Aho Mitakuye Oyas'in  
For all my relations

*(Lakota prayer)*

*My friend,  
They will return again.  
All over the Earth,  
They are returning again.  
Ancient teachings of the Earth,  
Ancient songs of the Earth,  
They are returning again.  
My friend, they are returning.  
I give them to you,  
And through them  
You will understand,  
You will see.  
They are returning again  
Upon the Earth.*

*(Crazy Horse, Oglala Sioux (1842-1877) quoted in WindEagle &  
RainbowHawk 2003)*

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