Growing, dying and relating
Exploring the concept and experience of 'the edge'

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Without the concept of an other,

there is no separate I.

Without the sense of an I,

nothing can be seen as other.

There is some power that determines things,

but I don't know what it is.

It has no form or substance,

acts without doing,

keeps the universe in order,

and seems to get along

perfectly well without me.

Second book of the Tao (Mitchell, 2009, p. 58)

Introduction

Adventures in the edge field

For some reason, edges, boundaries, borders, surfaces and limits have always interested me. Why do I have a skin that limits my shape in space and time? Why does my life have a start and an end? Why am I some *one* in particular, with a unique history and body? By thinking about these questions I feel, sometimes, an ecstatic answer just beyond my reach, and it gives me a sense of both peace and excitement.

This paper, *Growing, dying and relating,* is an exploration and deepening of the Process Work concept of 'the edge' and the principles behind the practice of 'edgework.' In psychological terms, I can define an *edge* as the experience of a limit to what we can say or do or feel in any given moment, while remaining comfortable with who we know ourselves to be. I have come to believe that concept of 'the edge' may be one of Process Work's most significant contributions to psychological understanding and to the study of personal and social change.

I originally called this project *Adventures in the edge field* because I found myself profoundly challenged by edges in my Process Work practice and training. I decided I should have an adventure rather than just feeling overwhelmed and defeated by the challenge. I still find myself consistently, personally challenged by my own edges and those of other people and my culture.

And an important part of what I want to say in this project is that this sense of being challenged, sometimes to the very core of my being, is an essential and inherent characteristic of the edge phenomenon.

I think that what Process Work calls an edge is a deep and mysterious phenomenon. And in this project, I attempt to uncover some of the philosophical dimensions of the concept. I find myself passionately thinking about the edge at its essence and my hope is that by finding these deep and sometimes abstract connections, I can bring back ideas, images and stories that might help us navigate the often confusing territory of the edge in everyday life. For I believe that the edge is not just a profound idea, it is also one of our most everyday experiences.

I think edges are pragmatically and practically significant and an important phenomenon to research because without awareness of its function, edges can create all sorts of trouble for individuals, groups and organisations. In organisations, edges are often the cause of 'work arounds' and team problems; they generate inefficiencies and at worst, can cause poor decision-making and the escalation of conflicts (Diamond, 2012).

It is my hope that by articulating and building the theoretical architecture of the Process Work paradigm, I can support communication with other disciplines, promote Process Work ideas and open up these ideas to dialogue and debate. I hope I contribute to the conceptual foundations of Process Work and help create the basis for future empirical research to validate, challenge and refine Process Work.

In this project I am also bringing together two of my greatest intellectual loves, Arnold Mindell and Jacques Derrida. I am bringing together the direction of thought and practice that they each originated, that I will call as a short hand, Process Work and Deconstruction. And I have huge

feeling and passion about doing this. I feel like I am bringing together ideas that help me understand the deepest nature of reality and might have something to do with sustainable life on earth.

Some of the philosophical context I introduce may be difficult for a non-specialist, and part of my challenge in this paper, particularly in chapter three, has been creating a bridge between worlds. Ultimately my hope is for a two-way translation whereby Process Work ideas are translated into a broader context, and philosophical ideas are grounded in an everyday psychological context.

My purpose in this project is to help take the edge concept beyond its therapeutic origin. This continues Mindell's work in connecting Process Work to theoretical physics.[1] While it is the therapeutic efficacy of edgework that inspires this project, I believe that the edge concept and edgework techniques may have implications for every field of human endeavour. To go all the way with that thought is to claim that the edge is a fundamental phenomenon which is core to existential, psychological and socio-political processes.

Research question and methodology

In this project, I begin to address some of these questions:

1. *What is an edge?* Describing and defining: how to identify and recognise edges in yourself, in others, and in culture more generally.
2. *Why are there edges?* Purpose, function and meaning: what are edges *for* and what does it mean that they exist (ontologically and practically)?
3. *How do edges work?* Mechanism and principles: what are the processes and structures that produce the edge?
4. *What can we do with, and at, edges?*

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[1] Mindell also links Process Work to Taoism, shamanism, information theory, depth psychology (Mindell, 1985, 1993, 2000).

My original research question was: what are the connections between the Process Work concept of 'the edge' and 'edgework' techniques and the findings of other disciplines including psychology, poststructuralist philosophy and contemporary neuroscience? My research methods included research synthesis (Pawson, 2006), conceptual analysis and phenomenological reflection (Husserl, 1989; Heidegger, 1996).

As my research proceeded, I realised that my ambition far out weighed my capacity in this project, so I narrowed my focus, guided by the theoretical ideas which were emerging from my analysis of existing Process Work literature and my own edgework study.

I read broadly in the psychological literature and completed a review of neuroscientific research to identify relevant findings for the development and testing of the edge concept. It seemed clear that neuroscience is providing the empirical basis for contemporary psychological theory and practice development (Solms & Turnbull, 2002; Linford & Arden, 2009; Schore, 2012). My review of neuroscience identified a number of areas with promise for further research, which I indicate in chapter one and two. Ultimately however, I concluded that the edge idea itself needed both more phenomenological description and more conceptual development.

 The contribution I have tried to make in this paper is new theoretical development of the edge concept through phenomenological analysis, synthesis of existing literature, and engaging with contemporary theory.

 This shift in my research direction meant negotiating my own edge to get behind my own ideas and thinking. And I notice the edge in my shyness and trepidation as I write this introduction - dare I say that I believe my ideas might make a contribution? I am very grateful for all my advisors in the Process Work community including my study committee and my therapists who

held and hold me to this edge. Part of my 'edge system' is the belief that to make a contribution, ideas must be both perfect and correct. Clearly I will always be failing on that score. Yet I can challenge this belief system now, knowing that different ideas are needed, and it is the interaction between unique, finite elements that brings us true value. I am inspired by Julie Diamond's image of thinking as a form of edgework:

> Thinking is or should be a contact sport – full of the clash and clang of competing systems and frameworks, stretching us beyond what we know and also beyond what we believe (Diamond, 2011).

Challenging my edge system beliefs helps me get behind my own ideas, knowing that by sharing my thinking I give people the chance to be inspired, to disagree and to develop even better ideas in the process.

Process Work

Process Work, originally known as process-oriented psychology, is a multi-dimensional approach to individual and collective change. It was originated by Arnold Mindell in the late 1970s in Switzerland and grew out of his practice as a Jungian dream analyst. Process Work began with Mindell's discovery that people's body symptoms could be meaningfully connected to their dreams (Mindell, 1982; Mindell, 1993, p. 21−23). Over the last forty years, Mindell and colleagues have built a body of knowledge and practice for working with individuals, organizations and large groups on psychological, physical and social disturbances, as chronicled for example in *The Journal of Process Oriented Psychology*. This project is indebted to and inspired by their body of work.

The core value of Process Work is awareness and this defines its therapeutic and paradigmatic goals. Rather than specify any particular outcome or specific direction of change, Process Work

seeks to increase awareness of experiences which are already occurring and to facilitate greater awareness of elements and interactions which our usual intentionality tends to dismiss or devalue. Goodbread explains the purpose of Process Work:

> to make unconscious material available to the client in the particular channel in which it is manifest; it is not to force change in the client by making him change the way he walks, or fantasizes or reasons (Goodbread, 1997, p. 168).

Mindell defines his use of the term process as 'changes in perception' and 'the variation of signals experienced by an observer' (Mindell, 1985, p. 11) and explains:

> Process is like a special train whose destination cannot always be predicted. The observer follows the signals in his real life or in a fantasy trip as they reveal life to him (Mindell, 1985, p. 11).

Often this involves facilitating the interaction between different experiences within a person or between parts of a group. Facilitating the process, or the direction of change, often involves supporting the interaction between more and less familiar aspects of experience. Goodbread explains how this redefines the role of the therapist as an awareness facilitator rather than a programmatic change agent:

> The therapist is in a very real sense more useful in perceiving those things of which the client is not yet aware than he is as an agent of change (Goodbread, 1997, p. 168).

This decentring of the authority of the therapist is an important part of the Process Work paradigm, and is, I think, one of the core benefits and implications of the edge concept.

As noted, my research involved analysing and refining the concept as represented in existing Process Work publications. The 'edge' is a fundamental concept in Process Work theory and practice, and as a result is discussed in the majority of Process Work research and publications. There is not however any one text with an explicit focus on edges in their own right.

Naturally, Arnold Mindell's books are a key source for tracking the edge concept. Mindell's published work over three decades presents different aspects of the edge concept through the ongoing development of Process Work and I will draw on different texts to illustrate. *River's Way* (1985) and *Quantum Mind* (2000b) are particularly useful because of their focus on conceptual exposition.

In addition, three key books for understanding the significance of the edge in therapeutic practice are *The Dreambody Toolkit* (Goodbread, 1997b), *A path made by walking* (Diamond and Spark Jones, 2004) and *Alternative to therapy* (Mindell, 2006). In these works, Diamond and Spark Jones, Amy Mindell and Joe Goodbread describe the edge from the perspective of a therapist. Another important contribution is made by Diamond's (1995) article 'Encounters with the Spirit: Developing Second Attention at the Edge' which explores the idea of chronic or long term edges and their relationship to addictions and life myth. Goodbread's *Living on the edge* (2009) takes on the social and political consequences of group edges. Goodbread's (1997a) *Radical Intercourse* explores the powerful effects of individual and shared edges on the therapeutic relationship and other relationships, however I was not able to include an analysis of this work.

I also reviewed Process Work dissertations available through the Process Work Institute[2], and articles in *The Journal of Process-Oriented Psychology* though I found I had reached conceptual saturation with the material in the published books and a small number of unpublished dissertations.

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[2] Unpublished manuscripts are available at http://www.processwork.org/media/faculty-and-student-manuscripts/ Accessed 5 January 2013

Levels of experience

There is one more important aspect of the Process Work paradigm that I need to define here in the introduction. I think Process Work is a powerful paradigm in part because it attempts to generalise principles and techniques that work across different scales and across different levels of our experience—scales which include individual (intrapsychic), between people (relationships) and within group or cultural processes.

The framework for thinking about levels of experience will be important in this paper, so I will briefly define it here. Process Work draws attention to three equally important, simultaneous levels of our experience.[3] These levels are:

1. Consensus Reality

The Consensus Reality level of experience can be confirmed by others, i.e. a consensus can be reached about it. This includes facts and figures.

2. Dreamland

Dreamland refers to the subjective level of experience including feelings, dreams and persistent, disturbing signals like body symptoms that cannot be confirmed by an outside observer.

3. Essence

The Essence level refers to subtle, intangible aspects of our experience. This includes flickering perceptions which catch our attention for a moment but are easily dismissed as they are brief and their meaning is not clear.

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[3] Mindell's research has refined and developed these categories over time. In *Quantum Mind* Mindell refers more simply to two kinds of experience: Consensus Reality and Non-consensus reality (2000b). For a discussion of the development of the concept and practice of *levels*, see (Mindell, Amy, 2004).

In a 2012 seminar, Max Schupbach described these levels as three dimensions in what is at stake for an organisation.

1. Results - factual stakes, money, power, number of widgets.
2. Emotional stakes - the feeling atmosphere and relationships.
3. Spiritual stakes - a fundamental outlook on the world; the deep beliefs and values of the organisation.

Our ordinary commonsense tends to define reality as exclusively those aspects of our experience that we can measure and confirm with each other. Mindell's genius was to define this as merely one level of experience: Consensus Reality, the reality we can reach a consensus about. Process Work sees that excluding information from any level of awareness leads to trouble, suffering and inefficiency.

With the framework of these levels of experience, Mindell avoids reducing the concept of the real world to that which can be scientifically known. Instead, using the perspective of experiential levels, we can say that there are different kinds of real experiences some of which are measurable, repeatable, confirmable, some of which are subjective and others which are ineffable and perhaps impossible to communicate, yet nonetheless unique and impactful.

Chapter outline

The first chapter *Getting to know the edge* defines the concept of an 'edge' by synthesising existing Process Work literature and analysing this material to identify the underlying conceptual architecture. Through this analysis I propose a central conclusion of this project: that we think about the edge as not just a barrier but as an essential and generative phenomenon which creates the condition for diversity. It is not simply an obstacle, or merely the dividing line between this and that. Edges constitute our sense of identity *and* paradoxically bring us into contact with what

we think we are not. I discuss how the edge concept gives us new ways of thinking about the experience of finitude (our sense of limits) and relationship. I also analyse the spatial metaphor of the edge and show that the concept has both horizontal and vertical dimensions, with implications for the paradigm of psychological growth.

The first chapter introduces the idea of *working out at the edge gym,* which is my phrase for highlighting the benefit of consciously working with edges. I briefly describe edgework techniques and principles developed by Process Work, and link this work to the findings of neuroscience. I also introduce my idea for a further research project, *Edgework in public places* since Process Work is not the only modality to develop edgework techniques. I suspect that many successful and sustainable approaches to personal and group change are examples of effective edgework. The chapter concludes with the possibility of an edge aware, process-oriented model for psychological and social growth.

In the second chapter, *The passion of the edge*, I enrich the conceptual analysis begun in the first chapter by exploring some of the drama, the stakes and risks of an edge from the perspective of an ordinary self. This is about the drama of approaching and negotiating the edge of our known world, of leaving our comfort zone, and also of really inhabiting our finitude, our limits and mortality. I call these the difficulties of growing, dying and relating. By referencing the Christian story of Easter it illustrates that an edge always involves a kind of dying, a surrender into the unknown which calls out a crisis of faith, as dramatised in the great story of Jesus Christ's Passion.

I present two aspects of this drama that I feel are important. The first is the threat of losing yourself; growing at the edge involves a kind of dying, at very least dying to your attachment to

who you know yourself to be. The second involves relating and the impact of the social and cultural aspects of our edges, it highlights the agony of not-belonging, of exclusion and how this creates the pressure for social change. In this chapter I go more deeply into what is for me, the most interesting part of edge theory and edgework: the interaction between individual and group edges. Edge theory, I find, creates a powerful model for the two-way relationship between individual change and social change.

In the final chapter, *The uncertainty at the center of reality,* I engage with a key debate in contemporary philosophy, called poststructuralism,[4] and show how it can help Process Work deepen the edge concept beyond a therapeutic and psychological frame. I examine particularly the work of Jacques Derrida and Martin Heidegger. In this chapter I make an analogy between what poststructuralism calls the 'metaphysics of presence' and what Process Work might call the dominance of state-oriented thinking. In brief, the metaphysics of presence is the viewpoint that underlies our ordinary sense of the world in Consensus Reality. It includes the assumption that what is *present* is what exists. And as a result it loses touch with what *presents* the present, the presencing behind presence, or what Process Work might call the process.

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[4] The third chapter will define poststructuralism in more detail. in brief I am referring to late twentieth century cultural theories which explore decenterd, political and ethical social development alongside a globalised economic system. See Ingram (2010) for an overview.

Chapter one: Getting to know the edge

When you walk to the edge of all the light you have
and take that first step into the darkness of the unknown,
you must believe that one of two things will happen:

There will be something solid for you to stand upon,
or, you will be taught how to fly.

Patrick Overton

This chapter presents the Process Work concept of the edge in its psychological, therapeutic context, using a synthesis of Process Work literature and knowledge from my training in Process Work. It describes how to recognise an edge by outlining how the edge appears as a phenomena for both the person or group with the edge, and for an observer. We see the way edges appear in different channels of experience, across different levels of our experience and within individuals, in relationships and in groups.

Through my analysis in this chapter, I find that the edge is the experience of a limit or constraint that is related to our sense of ourselves, to what we know about ourselves. It is connected to ideas about consciousness and to identity. The edge defines the behaviour and experiences that

we associate with our familiar identity. *This* side of the edge is me and *that* side of the edge is not-me. The not-me side of the edge is what disturbs or attracts me.

I discuss the spatial metaphor of the edge as the limit or constraint of our identity and show that the concept has both horizontal and vertical dimensions. I begin to argue that the edge should not only be thought of as a limit but as a generative phenomenon that *creates* identity and *holds* us. And I suggest that the edge is not a thing or a quality *in itself*; yet it refers to a phenomenon with the properties of both a place and an event. In the most abstract sense, I conclude that we can define all edges by two characteristics: 1. a boundary that stops behaviour or limits perception; and 2. a contact surface with less known experiences or perceptions.

Finally, I suggest that the Process Work concept of the edge gives us new ways of thinking about two core experiences, finitude (our sense of limits) and relationship, and a different paradigm for thinking about psychological growth.

What is an edge?

The process work concept of the 'edge' can be defined as a subjective boundary between the experience of familiar and lesser known perceptions or behaviours. The 'edge' appears to block the full expression of those lesser known experiences or actions, for an individual or group, in a particular moment.

In *Quantum Mind: The edge between physics and psychology*, Mindell (2000b) defines the term 'edge' as a fundamental perceptual experience of a barrier in our flow of awareness and activity. He writes:

> I use the term 'edges' to describe the borders or barriers that exist to the eternal and continual flow of inner processes. In speaking, when we can no longer say something, we have reached a communication edge. An edge is a kind of threshold (Mindell, 2000b, p. 57).

For example, I find myself 'at an edge' when I feel shy to share what I feel in a specific moment. My known and familiar world does not include communicating that feeling – to express myself would mean going into the territory of an unknown interaction. Process Work would describe that as having an edge in relationship. The edge delimits what is popularly known as a 'comfort zone.' When I reach one of my edges in behaviour, expression or inner feeling, I am at the limit of what is comfortable for me and I may experience a range of uncomfortable sensations and reactions including fear, confusion, anger or blanking out and freezing. These reactions are often what an observer will see as a signal of an edge. As Mindell says above, the edge is a kind of threshold. It is the threshold of the known and the acceptable at a given moment and for a given individual or group.

Mindell goes on to explain that the edge should not be considered a barrier in its negative connotation, but rather as a formative and structuring phenomenon:

> Just as logs or rocks in a river give form to the river, edges give form to your inner processes. Edges are neither good nor bad; they simply divide us into different worlds. We know this because at one point or another, we feel we cannot go more deeply into an experience, insight, thought, or feeling. We have reached an edge (Mindell, 2000b, p. 57).

In this passage, Mindell describes the edge as a neutral boundary structure that gives a shape to psychological experience. Indeed, he further speculates, the edge is so fundamental that it may structure reality more generally.

In this initial discussion we have seen the idea of the edge as a barrier in the flow of our experience and perceptions that gives form to our inner life and outer behaviours. In the next section I will look more closely at how the idea of a barrier is particularly used to represent the

edge as a limit to our viewpoint or identity. This meaning of the edge has implications for thinking about our model of consciousness, an intentional self and psychological growth.

Edge as limit

In one of his earliest publications, Mindell defines the edge as a limit or constraint that can be observed in a client's behaviour:

> The point at which the client says, "that I cannot do, or will not do," is the point where he has reached an edge. He may not be able to look at something, hear a certain voice or noise, make a certain movement, or feel a specific feeling like sex. He may not want to pay attention to a particular person in his environment, or deal with the world. The borders, the limits, the boundary of his personal ability tells you where his growing edge lies (Mindell, 1985, p.25).

Mindell's concrete, observational definition demonstrates the empirical grounding of the concept in therapeutic practice. By referring to a 'growing edge,' Mindell also affirms the metaphor of psychological growth as an expansion beyond our known, familiar territory.

Dworkin generalises this limiting function by describing the edge as a spatial constraint on our awareness generally:

> The edge represents the limits of our awareness (Dworkin, 1984, p. 37).

Amy Mindell explains that for Process Work, *awareness* means 'the ever-increasing ability to notice and follow what is arising in a given moment' (Mindell, Amy, 2006, p.139). Diamond and Spark Jones (2004) write that an edge is 'the boundary between the everyday identity and unknown experience' (p. 125). This implies that the limit of awareness is where my familiar sense of myself ends and I am challenged to track what is happening.

Like Mindell, Dworkin describes the edge using the metaphor of growth as an expansion of our sense of ourselves, as a doing of things that had previously seemed impossible, or as extending our 'reach':

> As our awareness grows we cross our edges; we expand our identities and what was once impossible for us to do becomes possible. But soon there appears a new edge to cross, a new and impossible challenge […]. There is always something that is just one step beyond our reach and we must constantly create new awareness to try and grasp its essence (Dworkin, 1984, p. 37).

She also introduces another dimension to the metaphor for growth and an imperative: 'we *must* constantly create new awareness to try and grasp its *essence*.' By referring to an essence she introduces a dimension of depth to the metaphor of horizontal expansion, while the imperative conveys a sense of an inherent, natural dynamic. We encounter our limits, she suggests, and our limits keep receding, drawing us ever onward and deeper into our experience. I am particularly interested in highlighting what I read as two dimensions of growth: outward, horizontal growth across our edges and the possibility of going down into the essence of our experience. I will return to these ideas towards the end of the chapter because I believe that these dimensions might hold a key for thinking about the challenge of sustainability: how can we negotiate the tension between our desire for growth and the reality of our finite, mortal nature in a way that does not denigrate either?

Goodbread (1997b) affirms the aspect of the edge as the limit to awareness, and also describes the edge as *what happens* when a person arrives at the limit of their awareness (pp. 222-226). Goodbread presents the edge as an event and as a zone of conflict between different parts of ourselves. Goodbread describes these parts as 'two conflicting representations of reality, one of which he more or less identifies himself with, and another from which he largely distances himself' (Goodbread, 1997b, p. 223). Perhaps like all conflictual interactions, the edge has particular disorienting and disturbing experiences associated with it. Goodbread describes the feeling of being with someone at the limit of their awareness:

> if you look at the total response of the client when she is experiencing the conflict of the edge, you cannot escape the feeling she is really standing before a sort of a cliff, or barrier that she

> must make a conscious decision to cross. She hesitates, retreats a bit, goes forward again, perhaps draws a deep breath and then… jumps and does something really new (Goodbread 1997b, p. 231).

We will see later that 'jumping over an edge' is only one possible option at an edge, but for now, it suffices to notice the tension in that risky and exciting moment of encountering the limit of your own or another's awareness.

Similarly highlighting the dynamic of the edge, but using a more abstract and generalised definition, Diamond and Spark Jones write:

> An edge is a point of contact between the ordinary identity and an unknown, or dreaming, experience (Diamond & Spark Jones, 2004, p. 126).

They go on to explain that the edge is:

> the boundary between the primary process (everyday identity) and the secondary identity (emergent identity). Edges are also dynamic moments of transition, in which a known way of understanding oneself is disrupted and transformed by something new (Diamond & Spark Jones, 2004, p. 126).

As a spatial concept, the edge is used to describe the limits of what others might call the ego or the Self,[5] and what Process Work calls the ordinary identity or *primary process* (I will explain this term in more detail below). This focus on the identity and our ability to identify with some aspects of our experience while excluding others is the key to understanding the edge phenomenon.

These different articulations of the Process Work concept demonstrate the therapeutic origin of the edge concept and also signal its theoretical depth and potential. These definitions demonstrate the complexity and power of the edge concept: the edge has simultaneously spatial,

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[5] I will say more about these concepts shortly. There is another piece of work to rigorously connect the term primary process to the psychological literature, but it is beyond the scope of the current project.

temporal and force-related characteristics. It is both a place and an event. It is both a constraint and an activity.

In these definitions and descriptions, we notice how the concept of the edge defines our sense of self as a dynamic and growing entity, with a momentary constellation in psychological space delineated by familiarity to the conscious personality. The edge is generative and functional. We can see the edge as the product of an activity (marginalisation) which generates our everyday identity or conversely that the function of an edge is to marginalise perceptions, behaviours, experiences which do not go along with your identity. It is also a place of meeting the 'not-me.' The edge is 'the boundary' and 'a point of contact'. The edge delimits what it is possible to do, feel and imagine about yourself, on your own and in relationship to others.

Edges create identity

While as we will see below, there are different kinds of edges, there is one function of an edge which is so important that it must form the core of edge theory. This is the role of the edge in constituting our sense of identity.

I think the 'identity-creation function' is a core psychological and social function of the edge. It is built on the more general function of marking the boundary between the known and the unknown, but personalises it with reference to a particular viewpoint. The edge creates my identity by marking the boundary between what is familiar and comfortable for my sense of myself and other experiences. Mindell explains:

> If we feel that certain events should not be happening or are too unfamiliar, a barrier to them arises so that they appear to us as 'not me,' or as 'other.' This is where edges arise. When we reach an edge, we know that our 'internal' processes become blocked and repeat themselves. At the edge we may feel uncomfortable, events seem to be against us, and they may frighten or even, shock us (Mindell, 2000b, p. 66)

From a psychological viewpoint we could say that an edge is what allows us to disavow, ignore, dismiss, deny, forget, repress, marginalise, distance, abject, reject, devalue, trivialise or otherwise exclude an experience from having validity or relevance to our individual or group's intentional viewpoint. That long list of verbs provides a sense of the continuum of edge processes - from disavowal to forgetting (Mindell 2000a, p. 50 −56; Mindell 2000b p. 66-71).

These processes are very different, yet with the edge concept, Process Work identifies a common and underlying set of challenges that can consequently be managed using edge theory and edgework techniques. The value and power of using one concept to describe and generalise these diverse experiences as edge phenomenon is that it enables Process Work to abstract out overarching principles for working with the difficulties and challenges of the edge phenomenon.

In a more abstract formulation, we could say that the edge is the name Process Work gives to the psychological and social phenomenon that enables an individual or group to distinguish an experience or perception from their identity or sense of self. Taking this further, I think we can say that the edge and the identity it supports are entangled and co-created. This means that the edge is constitutive of the viewpoint for which the edge makes sense. The ordinary identity does not create the edge because there cannot be an identity without an edge — the identity is maintained by the edge.

Redefining consciousness

Process Work defines the edge as the boundary and contact zone between more and lesser known parts of a person's perception and experience, between what Mindell termed the *primary* and *secondary* processes (Mindell, 1985 p. 12-14).[6]

The primary process, also called the ordinary identity, is related to other psychological concepts like the self, the ego and the personality but offers a distinct alternative. I think that with edge theory, Process Work offers a robust way of thinking about and working with the contentious territory of ego, self, identity, subjectivity, agency and personality.[7]

Mindell introduced the terminology of primary and secondary process to move beyond and complicate the distinction between conscious and unconscious and make it more empirically useful (Mindell, 1985, p. 13). Mindell writes:

> Process work […] deals with the living unconscious, that is dreaming phenomena occurring at the edge of the client's awareness (Mindell, 1985, p. 9).

In this comment, Mindell describes the edge as the zone where we encounter the unconscious or 'dreaming phenomena' which occur at the limit of conscious awareness. However Mindell differentiates the concept of a primary process from the distinction between conscious and unconsciousness because we can be conscious of something disturbing, for example a painful body symptom, while being unable to identify with the quality of that disturbance, unable to own it and use it with choice and control (Mindell, 1985, p. 13). Similarly, Menken explains:

> we may be aware of identifying ourselves in a particular way, but we often are not aware of how we do it and actually feel little control over it (Menken, 1989, p. 24)

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[6] Diamond and Spark Jones note that Mindell's use of these terms is opposite to Freud's use. For Freud, primary meant closer to the unconscious, instinctual processes of the Id while secondary meant psychic material which was closer to the ego and acceptable to consciousness. (Diamond & Spark Jones, p. 19)
[7] For a comprehensive overview of psychological theories of personality, see Sollod, Wilson, & Monte (2009).

The difference between the concept of the primary process and consciousness is that the primary process is not necessarily completely conscious, nor intentional. Conversely, the secondary process may be something I am conscious of, like a recurring fantasy, but which I dismiss as meaningless.

Primary and secondary are defined by their relative 'distance' from my identity, using a spatial metaphor again. Diamond and Spark Jones explain:

> Primary process refers to those experiences that are better known and closer to a person's sense of identity. Secondary process refers to those experiences which are further from a person's identity (Diamond & Spark Jones, 2004, p. 20).

I can be more or less aware of either one of these processes; in other words there may be secondary aspects of my primary process. Thus Process Work defines the primary process in a relative way by reference to what is more familiar to a person's conscious identity:

> People identify themselves with their intentions or primary processes. Secondary processes are experienced as being foreign or distant [… and as] something which happens to you. (Mindell, 1985, p. 13)

As a result, Mindell's formulation is a temporary and dynamic construct rather than a structural or functional hypothesis like the Jungian Self (Jung, 1950) or Erikson's concept of Identity (Erikson, 1963). The conceptuality of the edge and the *primary process* does not posit a fixed entity, and is an empirical construct that can be identified by an observer. Thus primary and secondary are distinguished in any given moment through a series of tests: does the person feel they create the experience? do they identify with it? Does the experience happen to the person and/or is it disturbing? Is it familiar?

The disturbing experiences which signal the edge are disturbing because the secondary process is being experienced from the viewpoint of one part of the system — namely our ordinary identity,

the part of ourselves or our group with which we happily align. Mindell comments: 'every secondary process presents us with a sort of identity crisis' (Mindell, 1985, p. 13). This is because our identity is created by excluding the secondary process; growing beyond our edges means letting go of our current sense of ourselves. It seems that growing requires a kind of dying: the death of our old identity and a rebirth with an expanded or deepened identity. In the next chapter I will go further to describe this mix of growing and dying as *the passion of the edge*. Process Work has developed techniques to help a person or group navigate the disturbing territory and event of the edge. This is called 'edgework' and I'll describe it in the last section, *working out at the edge gym*.

So, to reiterate, Process Work defines the edge as the boundary between primary and secondary processes, and identifies the dual aspects of the edge as both limit (finitude) and contact point (relationship):

> Primary and secondary processes are separated by an "edge." The edge represents the limit of
> the known identity as well as a point of contact with unknown experiences or identities.
> (Diamond & Spark Jones, 2004 p. 20)

And it is critical to emphasise that these are relative terms which describe a dynamic as it is constellated in any given moment. The secondary process is less known, it is marginalised by the primary process, while the edge is the boundary and potential interaction zone between these two parts. Process Workers observe carefully and assess what is 'more primary' and what is 'more secondary' at each moment of the work, and make working hypotheses about where an edge might lie.

The framework of primary, secondary and the edge all together define what is called the *process structure*. The process structure is a dynamic hypothesis about a person or group's direction of awareness growth:

> Process structure is a self-generating, fluid framework that enables a facilitator to unfold a
> process by identifying its various emergent parts (Diamond and Sparks, 2004, p. 39).

The process structure is defined by a viewpoint and by the relationship of different parts to a person or group's awareness.

The Process Work framework of process structure reflects some aspects of the basic metaphoric structure of the concept of self provided by Lakoff and Johnson (1999, pp. 267-289). Through an analysis of natural language,[8] Lakoff and Johnson analyse how particular metaphors are used to describe our sense of Self and our inner life (pp. 270-284). The most important point for us is that they identify a basic conceptual structure of a split within our inner experience, and various forms of relationship between inner parts that arise as a consequence.

The highest conceptual level of the Self metaphor, explain Lakoff and Johnson, includes a fundamental splitting of inner experience which they call the bifurcation between the Subject and the Self (or Selves):

> The Subject is the locus of consciousness, subjective experience, reason, will, and our
> "essence," everything that makes us uniquely who we are. […] The Selves consist of
> everything else about us—our bodies, our social roles, our histories, and so on (Lakoff &
> Johnson, 1999, p. 268).

The Subject and its Selves then have various forms of relationship to represent aspects of our inner lives. Metaphors used to describe the relationship between Subject and Selves include:

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[8] Lakoff and Johnson's work is built on an analysis of English language metaphors and they note the lack of cross-cultural research which limits any generalisations about the universality of this metaphoric system. However, they do present intriguing evidence from the Japanese language demonstrating the very same metaphorical conception of inner life (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999, p. 284- 287).

Adversaries, Parent and child, Friends, Interlocuters, Subject as Caretaker of Self, Master and servant. A final point relevant to our discussion of edge theory is the idea that each person has an essential nature. They call this a "Folk Theory," or treasured idea about human experience. It is expressed in the metaphoric system by the idea that one Self will be compatible with the Essence that resides in the Subject; this is referred to as 'the "real" or "true" Self (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999, p. 269).

Lakoff and Johnson show that our metaphoric conceptuality implies that there are many selves but only one subject. In Process Work terms, the subject might be thought of as a metacommunicator with the potential to develop a deeply democratic relationship to the multiple viewpoints or identities that exist as apparently separate selves within our experience (Diamond & Spark Jones, 2004, p. 28-29). The metacommunicator is the part of ourselves that can talk about our experience. Diamond and Spark-Jones define the metacommunicator as 'a self-reflective capacity to notice, organize, and report on one's experiences' and describe the important of being aware of and developing the metacommunicator, which often manifests as an negative, critical voice patterned on social or parental models. Process Work thus refines Lakoff and Johnson's concept of the subject by showing that it also has an identity and an ability to grow.

I think that edge theory and the framework of process structure can take us further than Lakoff and Johnson's analysis by introducing a more dynamic model for inner life. In particular, the relative and evolving conceptuality provided by the process structure is a critical part of how process work avoids constructing a normalising paradigm. Diamond and Spark Jones emphasise the dynamic nature of process structure:

> This framework is constructed out of the interaction between the facilitator and client. […] As a process unfolds, this relationship changes. Marginalized experience is made more focal and explored in greater detail and depth, opening up new worlds of experience. (Diamond and Sparks, 2004, p. 39-40).

Amy Mindell (2006) uses the metaphor of process as a river to emphasise that process is 'something that is fluid and changeable' and to show how primary and secondary processes are not opposing entities, but coexisting elements within a single flow of experience:

> practicing process work means learning to notice its two streams, the intended current (primary process) *and* the flow of the unexpected current (the secondary process), and to join both (Mindell, Amy, 2006, p. 52).

She describes how primary and secondary processes 'are not entirely separable but intermingle and coexist' although the difference is that 'we notice the signals from the main current far more often than those from the unexpected current (Mindell, Amy, 2006, p. 52).

She defines the edge as the interaction of two different currents within the same river, imagining that the river's crosscurrents are the turbulence of the edge. Creating an imaginative scenario of riding in a boat on this river and noticing a strengthening of the second current, Amy Mindell has her protagonists describe the experience of encountering an edge:

> She told Mary to imagine that this current was gaining momentum and was beginning to pull the boat off its set course. She asked Mary what it felt like to feel that second stream tugging at the boat. Mary said she felt tiny shudders running up and down her spine. She also began to feel a bit disoriented and afraid and wanted to paddle harder to return to their original course. […] Mary said she had all sorts of spontaneous fantasies about that new current. […] She also giggled slightly and said that it raised her curiosity and excitement at the same time (Mindell, Amy, 2006, p. 55).

Amy Mindell calls the edge 'a magical and confusing spot' and also notes that our 'natural tendency at the edge is to try and ignore this new stream and continue on your original path (Mindell, Amy, 2006, p. 55). Amy Mindell draws attention to the experience of the edge, and the affects that arise in the encounter with unknown and unfamiliar experiences.

In summary, we have seen how the process structure of primary process, secondary process and the edge provides a dynamic map of psychological experience from known to less known, from elements included within the 'me,' to those which are disturbing and alien. Process structure describes how the total field of experience and perception is organised by the relationship to the ordinary identity in a given moment. We have seen how the edge is both the boundary of the primary process and the contact surface with the secondary process, therefore creating a dynamic model of the conscious self in which interaction and change are key characteristics.

Edges in relationship

Process Work theory suggests that the edge creates *double signals* that disturb our relationships (Mindell, 1985 p. 26-28; Goodbread, 1997b, p. 215-221). The signal is double because our communication arises both from our conscious identity (we signal because we intend to communicate something) *and* from secondary parts of our experience (that we do not identify with). Our communication messages therefore are (at least) double because they contain information from both sides of our edges.

Double signals are the source of typical relationship problems, often described as communication difficulties. These difficulties occur because there are messages being exchanged that the parties do not identify with (Diamond, n.d.; Watzlawick et al, 1967). Edges mean that some of the information being communicated is not intended and therefore not directly available to the individuals (either sender or receiver of the message), however it still exists as 'noise' disturbing the atmosphere and creating relationship trouble. For example, if I am feeling intimated by someone, but believe I should not express weakness, my voice might shake or be very low and quiet. Mindell explains how this affects relationships:

> If you felt free, if there were no "edges," you would simply be angry when you were angry, rather than smiling. Edges are neither good nor bad; they are simply the reason signals are driven underground. […] For example, if you are afraid of me, you will not be able to express certain things and will have to keep them secret. But processes do not disappear; they simply become less apparent. "Secret" feelings emerge through unintended signals such as fear or anger (Mindell, 2000a, p. 151).

Sometimes I think of the edge as a way that the ordinary identity believes it can hide an experience, perception, activity. My identity acts as if this other experience is not mine, and that no-one can see it or feel it. I don't want to reveal a part of my experience or thoughts or reactions; I am 'edged out' by the experience, meaning I will not allow it. And the irony is that by disavowing the experience it becomes more disturbing to other people. Depending on the nature of the process, the impact may be irritating, seductive, aggressive or even dangerous to others.

Max Schupbach illustrates this idea with a story about having an angry dog (QLF seminar, Sydney, 2008). He said, imagine if you have a vicious guard dog and you know that it belongs to you. Then you invest in training and care of it, you put a warning sign on the door, and when you take it out in public, you put it a leash and keep an eye on it. On the other hand, if you are unaware that your dog has a vicious streak, then you take your dog out without a leash and when it attacks people you feel terrible, defensive and confused.

Double-signals are one way that edges can be seen in relationship communication. A lack of awareness of your own or other's edges can create trouble in relationship because the signals from secondary processes over the edge are unintended but nonetheless still part of the interaction. These double-signals are what mean, often, when we talk about 'body language.' Schupbach's story and Process Work theory suggests that negotiating the edge and developing greater awareness of the secondary process gives you greater control and choice about your communication and relationship interactions. However, Process Work also importantly

emphasises that double-signals are not bad; they are a valuable, natural doorway to secondary

processes, not the result of poor control on the part of the identity.

Thinking philosophically about the edge

In the preceding section, I explored Process Work's definition of the edge and described how it

shows up in our behaviour and experience. I identified an important psychological function of

the edge, which is its role in creating and maintaining our identity, our sense of self. I also

briefly described an effect of edges, which is to create double-signals in our relationships and

communication. I now want to step back a little and think about the edge as a concept. My hope

is that these reflections help us to understand more about the edge as it appears in our everyday

experience.

What's in a word?

To introduce a more abstract discussion in this section, I will first present the dictionary

definition of the English word 'edge.' It gives us a useful sense of the complexity of the term,

and supports the richness of the Process Work concept. The word 'edge' is both a noun and a

verb and captures a dynamic set of meanings.[9] It is significant to note that as a noun, the word

names both a position and a state of mind and as a verb it describes a movement and the activity

of boundary making.

As a noun, an 'edge' is defined as a boundary, border or limit, but can also be the connection of

two surfaces (edge of a box, or of a knife). The sense of two surfaces connecting suggests the

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[9] Definitional sources consulted:
http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/edge Accessed 24 October 2012
http://www.thefreedictionary.com/edge Accessed 24 October 2012
http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/edge Accessed 24 October 2012
http://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/edge#edge_14 Accessed 24 October 2012
http://www.etymonline.com/ Accessed 24 October 2012

possibility of sharpness, which is both a literal definition and appears in the word's metaphoric meaning. For example, the word edge also conveys a strained affect or state of mind including nervousness, expectation or irritation (there was an edge to her voice; they were on edge waiting for the results) and a sense of risk and tension (it set his teeth on edge). As a verb, 'edge' can describe a gradual movement toward or away from something or it can mean the reinforcement of a boundary or of two surfaces meeting (to add a border or to sharpen a knife).

The Process Work concept of the edge clearly draws on the definition of an 'edge' as a boundary, border or limit. But it also resonates with and explains the dynamic richness of the word's other meanings. The sense of a gradual, cautious movement is a suggestion of the risk or tension associated with the Process Work concept of the edge - you might edge toward something that is a little bit dangerous or unpredictable. Conversely, the reinforcement of a boundary suggests the activity of the edge - it is an event, a site of active boundary creation and maintenance.

Bare bones of the edge

We have seen that the edge is a unique phenomenon with the properties of being both a limit and a container. It is also generative; it is a place and an event. Thinking of the edge in the most abstract way, I find that all edges can be defined by two characteristics:

1. A boundary that stops behaviour or limits perception; and
2. A contact surface with less known experiences or perceptions.

Thinking about the edge concept has helped me find a new way to understand the ideas of finitude and relationship. Finitude in the simplest sense means having limits and it is the essence of being mortal and embodied. Having limits, in other words, not being infinite, has the

consequence that you are a part rather than the whole and therefore experience relationship with other parts, or with the whole. I call these experiences, finitude and relationship, the twin gifts of the edge. Here and in the following chapters, I will explore how the function of the edge is to *create and link* these two apparently opposed experiences, that of separation and connection.

This formulation supports and extends Mindell's physics based conceptualisation. In Mindell's writing, Process Work is framed in relationship to theoretical physics (Mindell, 2000), and the edge in this context can be seen as what distinguishes the particle from the wave nature of light. Waves are continuous and do not have defined boundaries, while particles are contained and localised in space and time. Quantum theory establishes that the basis of physical reality has these two co-existing yet incompatible kinds of physical properties: particle nature and wave nature (Gribbin, 1984). In quantum theory we see therefore the same partnering of finitude (particles) and relationship (wave) characteristics at the core of the physical description of reality.

I also want to suggest that we think about the edge as not some*thing* in itself. I think it is a focus on the not-something-in-itself edge that is precisely what creates the radical opportunity of a shift to a process-oriented paradigm.

The edge, I am arguing, is what allows us to distinguish the *this* from the *that;* even if the *this* is almost impossible to name and perhaps can only be communicated in a gesture, or even if it cannot be communicated at all but can only be felt inside. Even the most intangible quality, even an ineffable flicker of an experience, has already the quality of a particular, individual, specific something. Thinking philosophically, this suggests that the essence of the edge is difference -

that which separates and connects - and then the edge cannot be, a 'thing'[10] in itself. It cannot be anything itself because it is that which allows any particular thing to exist.

I am suggesting that my boundaries, my edges in space and time, my particular, unique bounded existence, these edges themselves do not have a 'proper' existence of their own. The edge is a relationship, a meeting point, a contact surface. My edges are where I meet the world: physically, emotionally, intellectually, practically. But what is this edge? It cannot be itself something because it is that which makes it possible to *be something* at all.

And one reason I think this is important is because our ordinary commonsense, our consensus reality, is dominated by things and thingness. By focusing on what is not a thing itself, by focusing on the edge, I think we open ourselves up to a wonderful, rich experience of uncertainty embedded deep in the heart of our most everyday lives. This encounter with the unknown is terrifying and confusing! And sometimes I really hate it! I do not want to leave my comfort zone. Yet traversing this uncomfortable boundary zone may be our only access to the most powerful resource that we have: the unknown, the secondary process, the living unconscious, that which is numinous and may be the divine, the 'other', that which is beyond my individual viewpoint and appears to threaten it.

The edge and process-orientation

The Process Work formulations we have discussed define the *edge* as a limit to awareness and show how it is a dynamic encounter between known and unknown aspects of a person's experience. Process Work identifies how this awareness limit has a constraining effect on my

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[10] In philosophy there is an important debate about the difference between things and personhood. When a person becomes defined as a thing it seems that ethical violations can more easily occur; thus for example, in contemporary war discourse civilians have become defined as 'collateral damage' to disguise the human reality of casualties. However, I am not using 'thingness' here to distinguish between matter and personhood, but simply any identifiable entity or experience, an object or subject that can be named and differentiated from something else.

behaviour and experience; we have seen how the edge delimits my possibilities of being in a particular moment.

I think there is a radical implication of this conceptuality. By focusing on the edge rather than on the entity created by the edge, Process Work enables the thinking of a non-prescriptive model of consciousness and identity. This model is one of interaction, encounter and transformation at the edge. In other words, it is a process-oriented model of psychology.

For example, Process Work focuses on how edges make it possible to have a particular identity by differentiating what we are from what we are not. In this sense, I think we can frame the edge as a condition of possibility for identity. What is very interesting for me and I will come back to it in the last chapter, is that the edge-focus demonstrates a disturbing logic: identity is defined as distinct and separate, unique and differentiated yet it is created by a border that necessarily contaminates the identity with that which it is not (meant to be). The boundary is a zone of contamination with the other and it is therefore an opportunity for interaction and change. The edge is a phenomena which separates, (it creates a finite, limited entity) but in so doing it creates the possibility of relationship between parts and therefore connects and unites.

There are two main points I want to communicate from my excitement about edges. First that we can shift our paradigm to think that the edge is not the barrier to the unknown but the very reason we can access this resource. And secondly, that the value is not just in going over the edge. There are great richness to be found within our finitude, down inside the edges of our viewpoint or one-sidedness.

The edge system

We have been discussing how the edge is connected to our sense of self, to our ordinary or familiar identity - and on closer examination, it becomes apparent that this edge is not a one-dimensional or linear boundary but a multi-leveled and multi-channelled *edge system*. The edge system guides and forms both our outer physical manifestation (how we walk, talk and behave) and our inner experience (how we think and feel about ourselves). The elements of the edge system are important for understanding the passion of the edge and also the role of different edgework techniques.

There are different kinds of edges described in the literature, from minor obstacles to communication or action all the way through to deep internal splits in your personality which protect against a serious threat to your identity. The latter kind of edge occurs between the primary and secondary processes and may have a long-term stability that shapes what people call our personality. There are also many momentary edges that occur within the flow of both primary and secondary parts of our experience and may experienced as a minor hesitation or shyness.

Recognising edges

Diamond and Spark Jones note that the first step in being able to work with an edge is to be able to recognise it (2004, p.126). However recognising an edge is not a simple task. One part of the difficulty is that an edge is not a presence in itself (it is not like a cup or a tree); it is a relationship between parts and shows itself through its effects. And the second part of the difficulty is that the edge effects affect the observer!

Edges affect our state of mind, our experience of ourselves and our ability to relate. The

problem with edges is that they are an energetic maelstrom (Mindell, 2000b, p. 499-506).[11] In

the vicinity of an edge there can be strange emotional states, blankness, reactivity, attacks on

others or self, irrational yet utterly gripping fears of death or abandonment, social annihilation,

shame and ostracism. In the easiest case, the edge produces the affects associated with new

experiences:

> An edge is often felt as discomfort, nervousness, or excitement because it is an encounter with
> something new or unfamiliar. (Diamond & Spark Jones, 2004, p. 20)

Diamond and Spark Jones describe some general signs of an edge from a therapeutic context

(2004, p. 126-127):

- Unexplained changes in energy or atmosphere
  - boredom, dissociation, spaciness or withdrawal
  - burst of high energy
  - embarrassed laughter, giggling, sweating, fidgeting or holding the breath.
- Change to the intensity of the relationship between therapist and client
- Information gaps like incomplete sentences or movements
- Abrupt change to the channel in which the client is experiencing (e.g. jumping from a heavy body feeling to describing a funny image)
- Repetition of verbal or non-verbal information (Process Work calls this 'cycling')
- Missing information, absence of appropriate emotion or lack of a normal reaction
- Synchronicities, accidents and paranormal experiences.

Illustrating how this might appear in the case of working with a client, Amy Mindell explains:

> If this woman had felt too shy to explore her experience further, we would say she has got to an
> edge. This is the moment when a new aspect of a person's process arises, something outside of
> his or her identity, and the person is both excited and shy about it. *The edge is the boundary
> between primary and secondary processes.* At the edge, people frequently giggle and falter
> (Mindell, Amy, 2006, p.136).

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[11] Mindell provides a new interpretation of Jung's work on the complexes using ideas from theoretical physics.

One of the problematic consequences of edges is that we have less control over the behaviours that occur over our edges. Because the confronting reality is that just because we have an edge to a process or experience does not make it go away.

Signs of an edge can also be found in the experience of the facilitator themselves. Diamond and Spark Jones explain the following important clues that there might be an edge:

> If a facilitator finds herself losing track of the conversation, getting lost, not knowing what to do next, or feeling nervous, uncomfortable, or embarrassed—this may reflect an edge in the client's process. A facilitator who becomes over-identified with a particular outcome or part of the process, who feels pressure to achieve something, may also be picking up the presence of any edge (Diamond & Spark Jones, 2004, p. 128).

These signs of an edge suggest the difficulties that create the passion of the edge and also the intense difficulty of edgework.

Edge processes - mechanisms and channels

Diamond and Spark Jones describe how different edge signals relate to different mechanisms underlying the edge, and to the relationship of the identity to the edge:

> Some edges are created by disavowal: that is, known aspects of identity are disliked or rejected. Often this is due to family or cultural beliefs, or to prior negative experiences. This type of edge is characterized by strong opinions, feelings and behavior such as nervousness, embarrassment, giggling or freezing.
>
> Another type of edge is created by complete lack of knowledge. No experience, no model has left a footprint, as in untrammeled snow. There is no path forward, no prior experience to rely on. This type of edge is characterized by blankness, a generalized fear of the unknown, and spacey or trance-like behavior (2004, p.127).

The first mechanism is historical and related to actively maintaining the identity while the second mechanism is more like a lack of exposure. In the first case the uncomfortable experience or perception is not entirely unknown, in fact the person or group usually has a lot of judgments and opinions about the behavior or emotion. The second type of edge that Diamond and Spark Jones highlight is more like a learning challenge, than a traditional psychological concern. Working

with this second kind of edge involves the neuroscience of learning as we'll discuss in *Working out at the edge gym.*

However, even in Diamond and Spark Jones' first case of disavowal edges, where the secondary experience is familiar but rejected, the full unfolded expression of the experience over the edge is still unknown. Process Work uses the term 'dreamdoor' to indicate that the way a secondary process appears to the everyday personality is merely the 'sign on the door.' Edgework relies on the knowledge that only unfolding the experience will reveal its meaning and value; there will always be a lesser known aspect of the troubling experience.

As we have seen, edges exist with different levels of intensity. Diamond and Spark Jones also distinguish between 'micro-edges' and 'macro-edges' (p. 126). Micro-edges are temporary hesitations or resistance that can be generally observed in the unfolding of any unfamiliar experience. Macro-edges are related to the individual or group's identity and must be negotiated in order to integrate new kinds of experiences into everyday life.

Another category that is useful to distinguish are channel specific edges; i.e. a generalised difficulty in experiencing or perceiving your process in a particular way, through movement for example, or through inner body sensations. In Diamond and Spark Jones' terms, these can be either micro or macro. For example, there could be a minor hesitation to shift from talking to focusing on a disturbing body experience. However a person may also have a macro or chronic edge to experiences in a particular channel; often these kind of edges which we would call 'macro-channel edges' are maintained by a whole set of cultural norm. Thus for example, there are different allowable body movements for each gender in many cultures. I think a useful future research direction would be to assess sociological and ethnographic research for detailed

information about how social edges are expressed in the physical practices and bodily technologies of a particular culture.

A key to categorising the intensity of edges is their importance to our core sense of self (what Lakoff and Johnson referred to as our true or real self) and the connection they have to important cultural norms. Some edge processes 'cut deep' and accessing the secondary process will threaten my sense of identity (congruence with my real self) and belonging (acceptance in community). Thus for example, I may have an edge to dancing in public, but this is a short term and shallow edge because it is context specific. If, for example, there is a band playing on the street and I am with my friends, I might easily cross that edge. It is a superficial edge for me, since crossing it does not really affect my sense of identity. However remembering that edges are always in relationship to a viewpoint, and for someone else this edge could signify a radical life change. On the other hand, I could have an edge to experiencing anger at people I love, and this is deeply entrenched through childhood abandonment trauma. As a result I not only refuse to identify with this process in the dreamland level of my experience (I don't feel angry) and in consensus reality (I won't communicate my anger), but I marginalise the bodily experiences that underlie the emotion.

An example … my edge to personal power

I want to use an example of a long-term edge from my own experience to make a number of points about edge systems. Firstly, long-term edges are persistent over time and are often evident in significant childhood experiences or recurring dreams (Diamond & Spark Jones, 2004, p. 147-162). Secondly, Process Work finds that experiences and signals from over the edge are already occurring, and may be observed over time and across all levels of experiences. In other words, the edge only exists for the identity, for the viewpoint created by the edge, and does not prevent

secondary processes from emerging. Despite marginalisation, despite the edge processes which create a world of comfort, safety and familiarity, despite this powerful boundary that holds and maintains our known sense of self, our unknown wholeness is emerging, like it or not. Conversely and in other words, your secondary or emerging process is not something extra that you need to *do*; growth is not becoming someone you are not, it is about becoming conscious of what is already happening but are not identifying with. This is what I will come to call in the next chapter, the process of *growing deeper*.

Thirdly, and another point I will address further in the next chapter, I have found that deep edges connect your sense of yourself to the community of which you are part and they pose you a challenge in the connection between individual change and social change. Edge systems are the trace of the community inside.

One of my central, long-term, edges is to my own personal power. This is of course, a very common edge and many psychological treatments and self-help movements are oriented toward helping people to 'empower' themselves and to escape a victim identity; for example, Alfred Adler (Sollod, Wilson & Monte, 2009, pp. 121-146) and William Glasser's Reality Therapy (Seligman, 2010, p. 338-358).

In exploring my own edge to power and confidence I realised that I knew the bold, confident part of myself from very early in my life and that the edge was already present. I can remember a certain kind of noticing and worrying about myself as too persuasive, too confident. In one memory, I was eight years old and with my aunt; we were reading to each other and I remember that I noticed I was 'holding court.' I was speaking about something with such authority and confidence, convinced I knew the right direction, whatever it was. I remember feeling like a

salesperson and dreaming that I could sell anything to anybody. I felt I had the power to convince and persuade and I was enjoying myself. In that moment, I also felt the edge. I remember feeling a sense of danger about this confidence and the pleasure of it. In that moment I was split from my experience and felt the effects of an edge system, a commentary that cautioned against this experience.

As an adult I can recognise examples of that feeling in my body that I had as an eight year old; my voice comes out strongly and I have a sense of total commitment behind myself and what I am saying. And consistently I also feel the edge: I get scared that I am being too confident. Pride comes before a fall, warns a voice. My experience is interrupted or joined by a voice that cautions: be careful, pull back. My primary process is to be cautious and self-effacing while a secondary process of confidence happens to me, and my edge system includes a stern voice that cautions and judges. I know that part of this edge system relates to the Australian culture I grew up in where there is a strong belief system organised around egalitarian society based on 'mateship.' Having confidence is too close to thinking you might be better than someone else, and this is dangerous. But the cautionary voice is not only an obstacle; it can be useful as it helps me refine my thinking and be sensitive to how I use my persuasive power over others.

Edges at different perceptual levels

One important characteristic of edges is that they occur at different levels of our physical and psychological reality. The edge processes which might support my identity as a serious person, for example, result in me experiencing only certain qualities of movement and posture. They form my choices of profession and friends and are expressed in my feelings and judgements of myself and others. And many aspects of my edge system involve completely unconscious phenomenon. For example, I automatically marginalise my subtle bodily signals of discomfort as

I sit in my office chair working a serious 9 to 5 job. While at a party I find myself ignoring the flicker of interest I feel about the children playing rowdily in the corner.

In *Dreaming while awake*, Mindell (2000a) differentiates different kinds of edge processes using an ancient model of perception from the third century Buddhist text, the *Abhidhamma Pitaka*. Mindell uses the Buddhist framework to explain that many levels of perception are pre-consciousness. It is only after a certain point, he comments, that:

> your "I" begins to function. It likes, dislikes, or ignores events. This is the point at which you remember or reject fantasies and dreams. Your "I" is associated with resistance or "edges" to experiences. Events that seem too far away or unimportant are blocked here and do not go on to be "registered" by everyday consciousness. (Mindell, 2000a, p. 52).

In this passage, Mindell illustrates the critical point that an edge is associated with a subjective viewpoint, the 'I,' a sense of self and personal identity. This viewpoint has a reaction to external and internal events and it has the ability to block or filter based on this reaction.

Even before the clear sense of an 'I' however there are edge process that operate through the body. For example, he says, a mosquito might bother you in your sleep and you move your hand to swat it away but you do not awaken or remember later. While the example is trivial, it is precisely in this way that our ordinary identity maintains itself through unconsciously excluding information and experiences that do not align with our intended self. This level of the edge system is deep in our bodies and reflexes:

> Because the sensations are too weak, too foreign to your mind, or too uncomfortable, they are marginalized. […] Something about you, let us call it your body, notices an event, disagrees, and has an aversion to it (Mindell, 2000a, p. 53).

This kind of edge process is rarely noticed because its meaning is very distant from the viewpoint of the ordinary identity.

Another kind of edge processes is closer to consciousness, but while there is a sense of the 'I' at this point, we are barely aware of the marginalisation process:

> You feel slight discomforts that get past the barrier of marginalization, but they are so uncomfortable or disturbing to who you are that you may choose to ignore them. [...They] just do not fit into your everyday reality, or they seem too insignificant to focus on. They are like dreams you forget. They do not reach everyday awareness because of an "edge" or barrier between who you are and these "not-you" experiences (Mindell, 2000a, p. 54).

The edge process filters experiences based on their perceived relevance to our identity but this is not a direct, conscious action. Rather the edge process supports our sense of identity by excluding certain perceptions that are (apparently) irrelevant to our intentions. A practical, therapeutic application of bringing awareness to these edge processes is mindfulness practice for emotional regulation. People learn meditative awareness in order to catch their body signals of emotional arousal (e.g. hurt) instead of marginalizing the experience until it explodes outwardly and uncontrollably.

Mindell identifies a third category of edge process that occurs at a still more conscious level of the edge system, and involves a relatively conscious action on our part. In this case, perceptions do claim our attention, however we actively exclude them, perhaps by using a substance or activity:

> Like a symptom that hurts, you are pressed to notice and remember this event but can still decide to *suppress* it. Let us say, for example, that something hurts, depresses, or upsets you. Even though you try to ignore it, you cannot help knowing about it. It hurts too much. But instead of focusing on it, you to the movies, eat or take an aspirin (Mindell, 2000a, p. 55).

Using the sophisticated awareness framework of the *Abhidhamma*, Mindell refines the edge concept by differentiating different kinds of edge processes and gives us a more nuanced understanding of the edge system that creates and maintains these perceptual, cognitive and behavioral barriers.

Beliefs at the edge

As we saw in the examples, the edge system also includes cognitive aspects including beliefs which are connected to personal history and embedded within a social context, expressing deep-seated cultural norms and values. These edge processes can be described as the belief system or philosophical viewpoint of the edge. Menken comments that:

> The edge is where our beliefs and life philosophies sound strongly (Menken, 1989, p. 25).

At the edge we discover ideas about how a person should feel and behave. These ideas and beliefs are often expressed as justifications for the barriers to our experiences and behaviours. For example, if I have an edge to experiencing fear, I may express a belief about the importance of not showing weakness. In other words, edge beliefs are constructed from an interested viewpoint, they have an agenda. Menken explains:

> The beliefs we have at the edge keep our primary process intact in an attempt to keep our
> secondary processes out (Menken, 1989, p. 26).

As Mindell suggested, traversing our edges creates an identity crisis and Menken further describes how the disturbing experiences of the edge are partly due to the challenge to our beliefs and ideas about ourselves. She explains:

> The edge is the point of philosophical crisis for the individual. It is at this point that the
> person's governing identity is threatened by something new, and the current philosophical
> viewpoint is intent on keeping the new information out (Menken, 1989, p. 42).

The philosophical viewpoint of an edge system will often be connected to personal history and emotional experiences. Accordingly, exploration of an edge will often reveal surprising connections to very deep and entangled belief systems and memories.

Like the root system of a tree, I have felt how my edge system has connections into unexpected parts of my memory and personality. These roots seem to maintain the edge and give it stability

over time. It is tempting to imagine that the root system metaphor has a literal analogy in the physiology of neural networks. The metaphor suggests thinking about identity as a tree, with the edge system like the roots which bring water and nutrients up from the soil to nourish the leaves and flowers and seeds. The roots provide an intricate surface of connections with the soil, like the network branching in the lungs that creates an exchange surface for blood and oxygen. This image makes me wonder: is it possible that edge systems drive the development of our neural networks, with their prime purpose of transferring information and creating connections between parts of the brain? We know that neural connections are determined by interactions with the environment - they are the physical manifestation of learning and creativity. They are not (only) genetically directed, but rather environmentally responsive and an open system (Gazzaniga, 2011; Solms & Turnbull, 2002).

In my Process Work training, I have been exploring how my edges have roots into really significant cultural belief systems like racism, zenophobia, sexism, hatred of women, homophobia, body hatred. It is the world expressing itself and organising my personal psychology and yet it is the personal history component which catches these belief systems and anchors them within my experience. This linking of personal and world in my own edge system is what creates the opportunity and responsibility for inner work and relationship work as the driver of social change. It is the necessity and imperative to encounter one's own inner landscape and disentangle the constraints which limit our individual potential. Process Work has found that a group can only change by individuals going over their own personal edges. It seems that the field organises our inner experience in order to express itself — the field can only be expressed through the particles — through the individual elements which make it up.

In the next chapter I will look a little more closely at how the social and cultural elements of the beliefs and ideas in our edge systems create the opportunity for social change and what Menken (1989) calls the emergence of new world views and Goodbread (2009) calls expanding the coherence of the world.

Working out at the edge gym

In this last section I want to describe briefly the kinds of techniques and principles that Process Work has developed for working with edges and introduce my phrase for describing the benefits of edgework, *working out at the edge gym.* I want to suggest that the concept of edgework may make a significant contribution to thinking about psychological growth, with implications, I speculate, for re-thinking growth in general. This includes, I hope, re-thinking the model of economic growth that currently threatens the sustainability of our planet. I want to propose an edge aware model of growth that is not simply about overcoming constraint or limitation, but about the growth of awareness through our interaction with our limits (finitude and relationship). Valuing the experience of the edge gives us a model of growth as a deepening of our contact with the diversity within and without us. I think this is an access to rich resources indeed.

I like the metaphor of *working out at the edge gym* because it suggests that edgework is something you can do with the challenging opportunity presented by the edge. It frames edgework as a practical technique for building psychological fitness, power and strength. And while developing fitness is a natural process, the gym is a place that human beings have constructed in order to develop fitness in a controlled way. *Working out at the edge gym* implies that edgework is both a natural response to the edge phenomenon, and a cultural adaptation, a

practice that you can get better at and a technology for making the most of this inherent natural opportunity.

Edges are natural phenomena and while edgework is an activity that Process Work named and defined, I think it is clear that edgework occurs in all areas of human endeavour and throughout history. In therapeutic work for example, I think that David Schnarch's pioneering integration of sex and marital therapy (2009; 1997) and his concept of the 'people-growing power of marriage' is a strong example of *working out at the edge gym*. Similarly, I think one of the goals of Minuchin's structural family systems work can be described as edgework:

> The therapist, an expander of contexts, creates a context in which exploration of the unfamiliar is possible. She confirms family members and encourages them to experiment with behavior that has previously been constrained by the family system (Minuchin & Fishman, 1981, p. 15-16).

Family systems therapy, an influence on Process Work, is a discipline that has particularly studied the effect of a group field on an individual's behaviour, and has useful insights into the relationship between individual and group edges.

I am particularly inspired by the connection between individual and group edges, and have imagined a further research project called *Edgework in public places* that would include documenting historical instances of public domain edgework and the role it played in social change. Understanding what worked and what did not could help us manage the dangers of backlash and reprisal that can occur when an individual crosses a significant cultural edge in public. I think for example of the story of Rosa Parks that has legendary status in the civil rights movement of the United States. This courageous African American woman defied the racial segregation rules on her local bus and sat down in the 'White seats,' crossing a legal and statutory edge in order to contribute to social change. In researching *Edgework in public places*, I

would hope to learn how to reduce some of the risks of social change and to harvest the resources and opportunity of the edge.

In general I think that edgework techniques are an important area for further research. This research should include the analysis of existing Process Work techniques, and an interrogation other therapeutic and change management techniques to identify different forms of edgework and further refine the edge theory and edgework principles.

Process Work Edgework

Edges have the potential to create trouble and therefore I think that edge theory and edgework practice is a critical and significant area for human development. As a therapeutic and facilitative modality, Process Work has developed skills and tools to work with edges in a way that supports positive change, healing, growth, conflict resolution and the search for meaning and solutions in the most difficult and troublesome of human problems. I consider the ability to work with edges to be the core skill of the Process Worker and the most difficult to develop.

Edgework is considered the technique of working with the resistance of the identity to a new and unknown, or rejected, experience. As we noted, the edge is particularly significant in its role creating what we think of as our ordinary identity - our ego, sense of self, which process work calls the primary process. But we also saw that edges occur at different levels and in different channels. Edges have different kinds of intensity and importance and we need different kinds of edgework to match. I do not have the scope to provide comprehensive descriptions of edgework techniques but I want to provide an overview and then some discussion.

As an overview I consider that Process Work has four different kinds of edgework:

- accessing the experience over the edge, unfolding the secondary process and making it friendly and meaningful to the ordinary identity

- exploring the edge system itself - uncovering edge figures, interacting with cultural belief systems, processing personal history

- going deeper into the experience of the primary process, the experience on this side of the edge and finding its essence and/or completing something

- developing fluidity between the two experiences by supporting a detached metaposition, for example through processmind meditative practice.

All kinds of edgework involves bringing awareness to the experience around the edge and following the direction of the individual's process to determine what kind of edgework is most appropriate in the moment. I explain below how Process Work relies on a practice of 'feedback awareness' to guide the direction of the work.

Edgework facilitates the relationship between parts

In many cases, edgework involves unfolding and completing interactions that are both generated by and simultaneously blocked by the edge. Dworkin explains using Jung's reading of alchemy that the confrontation between two split parts of the personality results in a stale-mate, a seemingly insoluble conflict where each part is rigid and stuck. This confrontation she writes, seems to be an inherent part of human life: '[a]pparently, the individual has no choice but to begin by being split. That's why most people come to therapy to begin with' (Dworkin, 1984, p. 38). She describes this confrontation as the alchemical *nigredo,* a phase in the alchemical process of transformation which is chaos and darkness:

> It is in the territory of the edge that a person approaches the alchemical nigredo. Imagine for a moment the situation. One meets an unwanted inner personality: Jung would call it a 'shadow.' This personality is in direct opposition to the person's identity and is a threat to his or her stable existence. The personality does not greet the individual directly and ask politely to be known, but rather it plagues the person, perhaps in a dream or in a somatic symptom.' (Dworkin, 1984, p. 37-38)

The process worker, she continues, 'trusts that the splitting process will finally help to unify the individual, and amplifies the splits which are happening.' (p. 38). She recognises the challenge of living with the experience of internal conflict and tension but concludes: 'Ironically, becoming whole may have more to do with living with the inner opposites than it does with getting rid of them' (p. 39). Dworkin implies that the purpose of edgework is not to dissolve or remove edges but to develop the relationship between parts, between familiar and less familiar parts of ourselves. And as we saw in the discussion above, Dworkin notes that the process of encountering and negotiating with edges is an endless one:

> There is always something that is just one step beyond our reach and we must constantly create new awareness to try and grasp its essence (Dworkin, 1984, p. 37).

This confrontation between inner parts is only possible because of the boundary between one identity, personality or process and the other - and here we see the generative power of the edge's dual characteristic of boundary and contact point. The edge is generative of relationship and the point is not to dissolve the edge but to recognise the way in which the edge allows us to explore and deepen experience.

Another technique for facilitating these interactions comes from Mindell's most recent teaching: a meditative movement practice that accesses what he calls the 'light altered state,' of the 'processmind' in order to facilitate the relationship between energies that are troubling or disturbing.

Edgework is learning

Process Work defines the edge as the site of learning: it is the encounter between the known and less known. Thus all edgework demonstrates the plasticity of the brain, and connects to recent findings of neuroscience and earlier findings of the behaviourists. The edge aware model of

growth therefore emphasises learning and this provides a clear link between edgework and the emerging neuroscientific evidence base about the brain's capacity to learn. It was beyond my scope to go deeply into this area, but I think it is worth remarking on the potential use of this body of evidence to develop our understanding of the efficacy of edgework.

Our brain is an interactive learning organ with a very well developed capacity to encounter, exploit and adapt to previously unknown circumstances. And this may be why the edge phenomena is so important. Humans, it seems from a neuroscience perspective, are the quintessential social, learning animal - with a brain that is exquisitely prepared to deal with the unknown and adapt to our environment. The neuroscientist Gazzaniga explains that one of the few distinctions that has been found between human and animals is the human ability to generalise our learning. While many other species have particular adapted abilities that they teach, e.g. Scrub jays plan for future food; crows make tools, and meerkats teach their young how to catch scorpions however 'none can take their skill and adapt it across many domains':

> Humans […] teach everything to their young, and what is taught usually generalizes to other skills. In short, teaching and learning have been generalized (Gazzaniga, 2011, p. 29).

Similarly, Ramachandran (2011) claims that ' lifelong plasticity (not just genes) is one of the central players in the evolution of human uniqueness' (p. 38). Neuroscience is demonstrating that the core contribution of our brain is the ability to learn from our environment, to adapt to specific circumstances, to teach our young these skills and to generalise and innovate from our learning. Ramachandran concludes with some humour, 'We might as well call ourselves Homo plasticus' (Ramachandran, 2011 p. 38).

Further research on edgework could consider the neuroscientific findings on neural plasticity and also the impact of mindfulness activities on the brain (Schore, 2012; Davidson & Begley, 2012;

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Schwartz & Begley, 2003). In my survey of neuroscientific research I also found promising material in the role of 'mirror neurons' (Iacoboni, 2008) and the 'polyvagal theory' (Porges, 2011) for understanding the function of particular edgework techniques.

An edge aware model for growth

This was just a brief overview of edgework techniques, and my main point is to celebrate and promote the value of *working out at the edge gym.* What I mean is that there is value in the edge experience and that growth can be modelled as more than a linear trajectory of 'getting over' the edge.

I think that edgework give us some powerful contributions for thinking about psychological growth, and that these ideas have the potential to help us rethink the concept of growth in general. The first idea is simply to value the edge experience and not reduce it to merely an obstacle. The second that we have already discussed is that growth has both horizontal and vertical dimensions. A third idea is that the direction for growth can be derived from a perspective that values both sides of the edge instead of simply the perspective of the identity or program of an individual or group. And I believe and hope these ideas may be generalised to help us imagine an alternative to the endless, colonising growth demanded by our economic system, with its destructive impact on people and nature. While I do not have the scope here to develop the implications for economic growth and environmental sustainability, I would like to offer these ideas and some speculation about rethinking growth from an edge aware perspective.

The key idea of valuing the edge is an important point for edge theory and practice. It means that we avoid reducing the concept of the edge to a limit or constraining boundary because such a collapsed understanding of the term 'edge' supports an implicit growth narrative of constant

expansion outward. A narrow understanding of the edge as simply a barrier supports thinking about personal and social development as linear progression and an endless expansion. It risks promoting a growth trajectory that pushes people beyond their limits without sensitivity to the consequences, and without valuing the experience of negotiating with and inhabiting our limits (Diamond, 1995).

I feel that understanding the value of the edge is important to counter an accidental slide into a therapeutic program of overcoming limits. It is clear that crossing edges can easily be framed as a heroic adventure for powerful and brave individual, the mythical narrative of a hero's journey (Campbell, 2009)[12] but if we stop there then there is a risk that edges are pathologised, and endless growth becomes a norm or even a moral imperative. An implicit one-dimensional and linear expansionist narrative cannot support the complexity of the edge experience, and particularly fails to engage with the concept of finitude.

A linear growth-orientation can be problematic when it reinforces a single viewpoint (that of the *grower*) rather than valuing the whole system. For example, global economic growth challenges environmental and social sustainability. This is not to imply that expansive growth is bad, but that a process-orientation to growth values the *interaction* between the part that is (apparently) growing and the environment around them. The following two diagrams illustrate the difference between a linear and an edge aware growth model.

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[12] Some web resources for the hero's journey:
http://www.mcli.dist.maricopa.edu/smc/journey/ref/summary.html
http://www.readwritethink.org/files/resources/interactives/herosjourney/
Accessed 2 October 2012.

Linear growth
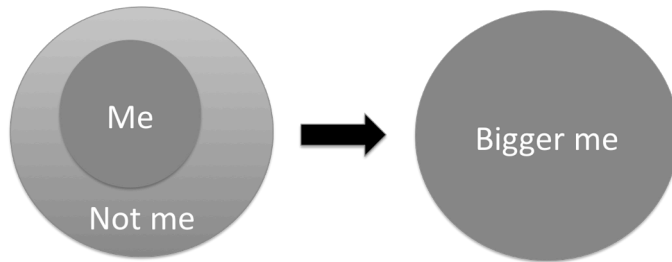
Edge aware growth model
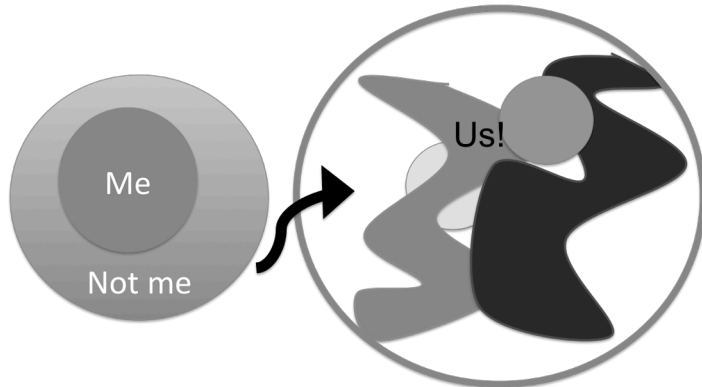
In addition to the first linear, expansive understanding, the concept of the edge offers us a more complex model of growth: the growing edge is a relationship between parts in which both sides are significant *and* it is a special kind of relationship that carries risks and excitement because it marks the limit of familiar territory from the perspective of one side of the edge. An edge aware growth model can bring attention to the rich resources and the challenges of diversity.

This point leads to the important practice of finding a process-oriented direction for growth. Process Work in general, and edgework in particular, shows that it is possible to uncover a direction for growth that will be meaningful to the ordinary identity but could not have been derived from within it. This direction, which comes from the interaction between primary and

secondary processes, is not contained within our familiar, known territory of solutions. And it is crucial to note that this way forward could not have been found from within the intentional sphere, but is nonetheless good for the whole, including the intention, even if this ordinary identity has to change to accommodate the new information - thinking outside of the box, venturing beyond the comfort zone, leads to a connection to a meaningful sequence of events, behaviour, choices, activities - and this is what is called 'the process.'

Mindell's investigation into what he calls process science, presses us to face very deep questions about the meaning of events, about nature and free will. If there is something other than our identified intentions that orders the flow of experience then firstly, are we simply automatons? what happens to free will and responsibility? And secondly, how is it that we suffer and feel stuck, and try to do better and believe there is a way to facilitate change? If change is inherent and natural, if the flow of process (a divine will) reveals itself in apparent manifestation, why do we struggle so? Why need we work on ourselves (in order to align with that divine order)? Or to put it another way, how is it even possible that we can disrupt the ordered flow of process (turn away from the Tao or the divine)?

In Mindell's definition of process cited earlier, he writes: 'The observer follows the signals … as they reveal life to him,' (Mindell, 1985, p. 11) and with this formulation demonstrates the de-centerd subjectivity that is central to the Process Work paradigm. The process worker follows and has things revealed. For Mindell, the transcendent agency which reveals life is sometimes called Nature, the Tao, process, the Dream-maker, or most recently Processmind or the mind of God. Mindell comes close to a spiritual discourse, and indeed he defines Processmind using Einstein's famous wish 'to know God's thoughts.'

Mindell's work here becomes challengingly close to a religious or spiritual discourse, yet his consistent argument is not toward mysticism but toward practice and everyday experience:

> The processmind is the palpable, intelligent, organizing "force field" present behind our personal and large group processes and, like other deep quantum patterns, behind processes of the universe. *Processmind* is an attempt to extend and deepen our quest to know this field and these patterns as they are understood today in physics by connecting them to experiences studied and recorded in psychology and mysticism (Mindell, 2010, p. xi-xii).

Mystical experience, he is at pains to establish, is very ordinary, very accessible, and yet consistently distanced from our ordinary state of consciousness.

Dworkin (1984) explains Mindell's concept of 'process' as

> an underlying principle or pattern, a very special, unpredictable energy which runs like a river through the myriad of an individual's dreams, relationship crises, body problems, parapsychological happenings and outer world situations (p.8).

The process 'river' is a flow of experience and perceptions - an unfolding movement, with its own inevitability and enduring patterns - except it is not a fixed static product or state, it is not a personality type, it is a process of interaction and change (Mindell, 1985). This 'river' has its own empirical stability and repeatability - it is the same river, wherever you get into it - yet the observer cannot predict in advance how the flow of change will unfold.

So how does one know if the flow is flowing in the right direction? The perspective of Taoism behind Process Work implies a belief that there is a meaningful unfolding of events which is beyond what we might intend or want. But Process Work is not simply a passive observation of the mysterious yet ordered flow of signals; Dworkin comments that Process Work does not only observe nature, but like an alchemist, it 'turns up the heat' on what is happening (Dworkin, 1984). When trouble or disturbance occurs for the person's ordinary identity, Process Work demonstrates that attending and unfolding the unintentioned signals can provide a way forward and this direction can be tested through checking the *feedback*.

Process Work relies on an intrinsic guidance system, through the concept and practice of *feedback*. Amy Mindell explains:

> Feedback is a cornerstone of process work and determines which current to ride on the river (Mindell, Amy, 2006, p. 137).

Feedback is a systems theory concept, adapted by Process Work to describe the response of the whole person to an intervention, not simply the reaction of their ordinary identity (Diamond & Spark Jones, 2004 p. 25-7)). Feedback is the system's response to an intervention: positive feedback is an energetic response in which the system picks up the intervention and goes further in that direction, while negative feedback is flat or no response. Process Work also adds the category of 'mixed' or 'edge' feedback which describes a confusing mix of signals which are energetic but not coherent. Diamond and Spark Jones explain:

> "Positive feedback" refers to the strengthening of a signal in response to an intervention. "Negative feedback" refers to a lack of noticeable increase in the strength of a signal in response to an intervention (2004, p. 26).

They describe how feedback is used to test and modify a therapist's understanding of process structure (p. 40-1). For example, in response to an intervention like a therapist's instruction to move spontaneously, a person may say with great vehemence, *No way! I can't do that!* This would most likely be edge feedback, suggesting that the instruction took the person closer to their edge.

The focus on feedback awareness reflects process work's empirical, de-programatised approach to therapy. In other words, Process Work embeds free will (intention, agency and ownership) at the core of its theory and practice while simultaneously decentring it by promoting a larger viewpoint in which the important thing is the interaction between experiences which are known and aligned with our intention and experiences which are less known, often disturbing and

distant from our sense of self. By identifying and working with the edge phenomenon, process work achieves a de-centring of the 'I'. Crucially, in so doing, it avoids reinstating another totalising concept like the Jungian 'Self.' The 'I' is decenterd but not denigrated or lost; it no longer becomes the sole guiding direction. It is precisely the unsettling of the 'I' without losing it that enables Process Work to have a chance of exceeding a one-sided perspective (and there is only ever a chance, because certainty would create a program). This chance, I think, is what Goodbread calls 'flicker ethics' (Goodbread, 2009, p. 159) and in general it is what Process Work signals with the phrase, 'process-oriented.'

This paradigm has implications not only for therapeutic work, but also for a different approach to social diversity as Amy Mindell indicates in her description of Process Work:

> Process work is based on the idea of respecting and supporting the *whole* process. This means bringing awareness to those parts of ourselves that we disavow, to the parts that are more known and closer to our identities, and to the relationship between them. The unknown parts rarely receive equal attention and therefore often are experienced as disturbing to our primary processes. Opening up to all of our experiences is a kind of inner **deep democracy**— [Arnold Mindell's] term for the metaskill of having an open and inclusive attitude toward all of the various parts inside and outside ourselves (Mindell, Amy, 2006, p. 137).

For me, sustainability requires such a deeply democratic model of growth: a growth model that embraces our finitude and our relationships. And it is exactly this, I think, that an edge aware model for growth can offer. I think that valuing the interaction at the edge, rather than a simple paradigm of growth as crossing edges has implications for conflict resolution and social change, for the creation of sustainable, and safer models of community and economic development.

Conclusion

I began this chapter by describing how Process Work identifies 'the edge' as a barrier in the flow of experience and behaviour. I explained how this barrier can be part of a system with a particular organisation and purpose—an edge system which creates and maintains our ordinary

identity or normal sense of self. *I* don't do this or say that or feel this other thing. While affirming the edge as a *limit* to our sense of self, our ordinary identity, a conceptual move I tried to make was to recognise that this limit is generative and not merely constraining. In other words, the edge as limit can also be seen as *that which holds us*. The edge limits what 'I' can do or experience, but before this constraint, as a prior requirement, the edge brings into being that very 'I.' It is a condition of possibility for my sense of self. We saw that not only can our idea of ourselves change through exploring the edge, but that the edge also exposes the interaction and inextricability of personal and social realms. The next chapter will explore this interaction more deeply.

We see therefore that the edge has a critical role in the psychological and social question of *who am I?* I also began a more philosophical discussion, because I find that the edge opens up the existential question of *what am I?* What does it mean that I exist? What is the nature of reality? I will deepen this discussion in the following chapters, but in this chapter I highlighted how the edge provides a way of thinking about the ideas of finitude and relationship. I suggested that we might think of the essence of the edge as difference – as that which makes it possible to identify unique, distinct, particular things. And in performing this function of creating the experience of a finite, separate something or someone, they simultaneously connect me to the world. The edge is a relationship, a meeting point, a contact surface. This suggests that the nature of reality might not be a choice between a world of parts and a world of unified wholeness – but that the parts and the connectedness need each other to exist.

Finally, I introduced the phrase, *working out at the edge gym* to highlight the role of techniques for navigating and harvesting the value of the edge experience. Discussing the idea of edgework, I suggested that the edge gives us new ways of understanding psychological growth. I see it as an

engagement with the importance of finitude (our sense of limits) and recognising how this brings us into relationship with the unknown aspects of our experience. An edge aware model of growth, I suggested, one that values the edge experience, may have implications for creating a sustainable model of economic growth because sustainability depends on our attitude to finitude.

An edge aware model of growth sees our limits as generative phenomena that create and maintain our identity, and resource our process of change. Edges allow me to know that *I am this and not that*. Simultaneously a study of edge experience shows that being finite necessarily means I am in relationship to what I am not. This is the opportunity and the challenge of diversity.

Chapter two: The passion of the edge

Don't push me because I'm close to the edge
I'm trying not to lose my head.

The Message, Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five

The last chapter finished with the idea of *working out at the edge gym* and the possibility of an edge aware, process-oriented model for growth. In this chapter's more personal and phenomenological account, I go more deeply into the difficulties and benefits of negotiating the edge territory. I am calling these the difficulties of growing, dying and relating. In this chapter, I focus on what an edge feels like from the viewpoint of the identity, on what it feels like *for the me which has the edge*, not for the facilitator, nor even for other parts of myself that may be more detached and fluid. This is about the drama of approaching and negotiating the edge of our known world, of leaving our comfort zone, and also of really inhabiting our finitude, our limits and mortality.

I will present two aspects of this drama that I feel are really important. The first is the threat of losing yourself; growing at the edge involves a kind of dying, at very least dying to your attachment to who you know yourself to be. The second involves relating and the impact of the

social and cultural aspects of our edges, it highlights the agony of belonging or not-belonging, of exclusion and how this creates the pressure for social change.

Something of this personal and political drama is expressed for me in the famous rap, *The Message*, by Grandmaster Flash from which I took the opening quote. This rap describes the struggle of living within the constraints of racism and economic inequality. And my point is that edges can be agonising, and they are both personal and social.

In this chapter I want to emphasise that edges are challenging not only because they are an obstacle in our way like a high fence to go over. Edges confront us with the nature of our existence, a nature that includes a vulnerability that we generally like to push aside. Yet in that confrontation is a sacred passion and an ethical opportunity. The edge is not simply to be overcome, but it is a deep structure of reality and by confronting it, negotiating it we uncover a rich world of interaction that has both meaning and resources. It is, in other words, worth the trouble.

Beyond here lie dragons

> *Do not go gentle into that good night,*
> *Old age should burn and rave at close of day;*
> *Rage, rage against the dying of the light.*
>
> *Dylan Thomas[13]*

The edge is a powerful concept because it does not only refer to a boundary between known and unknown but also to the experience of this boundary. As I have suggested, the edge is both a

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[13] http://www.poets.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/15377 Accessed 1 November 2012

place and an event. And as we saw in the previous chapter, the event of encountering the unknown and the limits of our identity can evoke strong passions and emotions - fear, disgust, aversion, terror or anger. In my own navigation of the territory around edges, I kept thinking of the cartographical trope, 'Beyond here lie dragons!' I love how this evocative phrase captures a certain deep panic that can accompany an edge experience: Go no further! Danger! Abort mission! Turn back if you want to live!

This phrase has entered the popular imagination as the way medieval map-makers indicated the edge of the known universe, and the potential dangers which lay beyond.[14] Similarly, Menken explains:

> An edge is that point on the frontier where the terrain suddenly changes, and the land looks different; we feel we do not know how to step onto it. We feel we cannot, or should not, or we are afraid (Menken, 1989, p. 14).

Referring to the way this trope inspires spiritual questions, a Christian scholar writes:

> These words, found on every map more than five hundred years ago, are what the mapmakers wrote at the place where their worlds stopped. It is the place beyond that lures every adventurer, every dreamer who lives out the lure, every missioner, everyone who searches for God (McKenna 1992, p. 62).

Edges force us into relationship with the unknown, or the less known. And there are some big Unknowns, of course, one of which we call death. I think our experience at little edges is always shadowed and threatened by the big E Edge, our mortality, the boundary between life and death. To put it in spiritual terms, edges pose the question and a crisis of faith: will there be something after death? And in every moment, as we step into the future, can we trust what is coming? If I die will I be reborn, resurrected into a better life? Can I give up what I have, my known,

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[14] It turns out that this much-loved phrase is built on an urban myth. There is in fact only one known existing medieval map which actually has the words *Beyond here lie dragons!* It is a bronze globe to be precise, property of the New York Public Library. However many medieval maps did indeed illustrate sea monsters, or other dangerous creatures as a way to indicate what was beyond the mapper's purview. See http://www.maphist.nl/extra/herebedragons.html Accessed 10 October 2012.

comfortable safety, for the possibility but not certainty of greener pastures. Why take the risk? They do say that a bird in the hand is worth two in a bush. These warnings are often part of the edge experience, particularly where the edges are cultural and tied into deep beliefs of a particularly community, family or subgroup (Menken, 1989).

The embarrassing truth is that standing at the border of my own familiar comfort zone, I generally don't feel like an adventurer. A part of me rants in a tantrum: I hate edges and I hate edgework. I hate my own edges; they make me miserable. They make me feel stuck and small and frustrated and furious and terrified. I hate the sense of disempowerment I experience at the edge. I confront my vulnerability and weakness. So I have to ask, why on earth would we do something so reckless, so crazy, as to venture forth into dragon territory?

And the difficulty of edges also applies when I am facilitating someone else at their edge. For example, I sit with a client and they bring their problems from the viewpoint of their identity. This viewpoint structures their perception, it identifies with some parts of their experience and marginalises other parts; this viewpoint identifies with the experience of being a victim of those disturbing, *other* experiences, a victim of the not-me. And the person, from this viewpoint, does not want to open up to the disturbing experience. Their sense of self is built on keeping it out! They do not want to cross their edges; they do not want to die to their ordinary self. And part of me completely agrees! Why rock the boat, after all? Beyond there lie dragons! Most difficult of all, I myself may have an edge to the troublesome experience. Then the client and I stand together at the edge of our known worlds, both of us facing the dragons. Better to build fortifications; or perhaps try and destroy the monster on the other side! Yet the answer is that, unfortunately or fortunately, as Joe Goodbread was first to say, 'you can't keep a good process

down.' Typically, such fortification strategies lead to more misery; as Dworkin suggested, people often come to therapy because of painful inner conflicts which can no longer be ignored.

Fortunately, edge awareness can help in this moment. Menken explains that Process Work allows us to:

> see how going beyond the boundaries of our known world and discovering new ways of being creates patterns or models of behavior (Menken, 1989, p.15).

Understanding that we are at an edge, we have the opportunity to employ edgework techniques - techniques that help bring awareness to what is happening, and to recognise where edges interrupt interactions that are trying to happen. Similarly soothing the tantrum at the edge, Dworkin reminds me of our inherent ability to conquer the unknown, to make it known, to get to know to it, to create stories and maps and to exploit the resources we find in the new territory:

> In fact when our paradigms in any area of life are proved to be invalid, new ones are created. We rarely linger very long in the abyss of the unknown (Dworkin, 1984, p. 74).

So, while I am interested in the passion of the edge, there is also something to be said for not making too much of an edge, and even perhaps a certain danger in focusing too much on edges. It could be seen as a distraction on the road - as a 'red herring' or a 'straw man.' *It's just an edge*, someone might say encouragingly; don't dwell on the barrier, focus on the fruits of the other side. Diamond (pers. comm. 2012) commented that resistance or fear at the edge is at least partly about temperament - some people enjoy novelty. Indeed, it seems clear that some people are naturally explorers; they cannot help but go towards the new and unfamiliar, even and often risking their lives for this endeavour.

In any case, as I will discuss further in this chapter, it is clear that some edges are riskier than others. Some edges are fun to cross, a little frisson and excitement is their pay off. While others

challenge the very core of who we think we are, threaten our belonging in community and expose the delicate inner organisation which keeps the pain of trauma at bay.

The drama of the right and left hemispheres

The attraction and repulsion from dragon territory certainly suggests that our relationship to the new and unknown is not trivial, and not only because of its importance for learning. It may have to do with the structure of Western civilisation as Iain McGilchrist argues in his synthesis of the neuroscientific evidence on brain hemisphere differences, *The master and his emissary: the divided brain and the making of the Western world* (2009).

The personal, individual, existential struggle of each individual with their own edges can be linked to the broader cultural challenge of relating to the new and the unknown with the help of McGilchrist's thesis about the specialisation of the right and left brain hemispheres (McGilchrist, 2009). McGilchrist synthesises the findings of contemporary neuroscience and concludes that the two hemispheres specialise in different modes of attention: one of which is oriented toward a relationship with the unknown, while the other is expert at manipulating the known world. He explains:

> In general terms then, the left hemisphere yields narrow, focussed attention, mainly for the purpose of getting and feeding. The right hemisphere yields a broad, vigilant attention, the purpose of which appears to be awareness of signals from the surroundings, especially of other creatures, who are potential predators or potential mates, foes or friends; and it is involved in bonding in social animals (McGilchrist 2009, p. 27).

McGilchrist notes that his definition of hemispheric specialisation as a mode of attention has profound implications not only for the way we understand brain function but also for the world which our brain creates:

> If it turns out that the hemispheres have different ways of constructing the world, this is not just an interested fact about an efficient information-processing system; it tells us something about

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the nature of reality, about the nature of our experience of the world, and needs to be allowed
to qualify our understanding of the brain itself (McGilchrist, 2009, p. 29-30).

McGilchrist argues that the left hemisphere has gained overwhelming dominance over the right

hemisphere in contemporary Western culture, and this is having an impact on our ability to solve

problems and negotiate the world we live in. McGilchrist's conclusions may have a range of

implications for understanding effective edgework techniques, and for articulating the

philosophical and evolutionary implications of the edge phenomenon. The point I want to

emphasise here is that it seems that one hemisphere may be better suited to negotiating the edge

experience than the other. The right hemisphere seems to be designed to tolerate the uncertainty

of the edge while the left hemisphere will be able to integrate and make useful the new

information, once it is has been unfolded.

The passion of the edge

With the phrase *the passion of the edge* I want to express my sense of the sacred drama of edges.

I am highlighting a sense of the sacred because it helps me understand why an edge can involve

such challenge and difficulty. In the deepest sense, I think that encountering the edge is a

precious and constitutive moment because it exposes us to the underlying instability and

uncertainty on which our certainty, capacity and agency is built. I also want to do justice to the

feelings of agony involved with deep edges that relate to our need to belong to community.

There is a sacred passion in negotiating certain deep edges within yourself. I believe they reflect

painful outer conflicts, and may hold the keys to building a more inclusive and richer

community.

Menken's (1989) study of the relationship between edges, emerging world views and religious

experience develops the links I'm interested in between social change, the sacred and the

passionate suffering of the edge experience. Menken defines religious experience very broadly and writes:

> The qualities of numinosity, something uncanny, and something other need not only be connected with a God. Awe and solemnness, absolute surrender to something greater, and the experience of nature changing in a powerful way are the qualities of a wider definition of religious experience (1989, p. 11).

In this study she comes to understand 'religious experience as a profound change in world view or life philosophy' (p. 11). She demonstrates the links between personal edges and deep cultural belief systems and shows how edgework, social change and our experience of the divine or numinous are profoundly connected. Indeed, in the following section, I will look further at how the passion of edge entails political and social change because edge systems are composed of familial and cultural figures.

The Easter story

I want to use the Christian Easter story and the story of the Passion of Jesus Christ to illustrate what I feel is the existential and spiritual opportunity of the edge phenomenon. The Easter story is the story of the crucifixion and resurrection of a figure believed to be the mortal son of a monotheistic god (God). I choose the Christian Easter story (or rather, it chooses me) because it gives me a model for important aspects of the edge that I am trying to bring to light in this project, and because it is part of my heritage. My body carries memories of many, many Easter celebrations. As a result, I have access to the story through embodied cultural practice. I was born into an ethnically Christian family group, Greek Orthodox, and baptised, though it was largely for the benefit of my immigrant grandparents. I grew up in Australia with a secular mother, who sent me off to a Buddhist retreat when I was 16 years old. In drawing on the Easter story I am sensitive to the socio-historical context that gives Christianity a privileged centrality

in the present moment of global politics. It is not trivial that Christianity is the religion associated with European colonisation, and is the professed faith of the United States. By using the Easter story to illustrate aspects of edge theory I am not intending to elevate this particular religious tradition above others, but to use it as a window that illuminates a particular aspect of experience.

There are two aspects of the Easter story that I want to bring out and interpret. One is from the perspective of Jesus Christ, which I read as the necessary surrender to a kind of dying in order to grow into the unknown. The second is from the perspective of God, which I read as showing finitude to be the condition of possibility for love.

A public rebirth

Coincidentally or synchronistically, I was inspired in my thinking about the passion of the edge because of an Easter example I witnessed, of edgework in public.

It was Easter morning, and I was participating in a community dance event, led each week by a different community member. The dance draws upward of one hundred people, and begins with everyone standing in a large circle in a wood and glass, art deco dance hall. That Easter morning, the leader was a striking African American woman, a teacher of belly dance, and one of the core organisers of the dance community. I had many times noticed this woman and felt intimidated and inspired by her obvious air of belonging. She stood in the middle of the large circle with a microphone in her hand and introduced the intention for the dance: rebirth. What I did not expect was that she expressed her nervousness and explained it was her first time leading.

She began by saying, 'rebirth is just like me speaking into a microphone in front of you, hearing my voice as you hear it. It is a new experience. And before rebirth we have to go to the dark

places.' And then she stopped speaking for a moment. No-one was sure what was happening. After a pause, she looked up and said with disarming transparency, 'now, look at that, I've gone to a dark place inside me because I've gone completely blank.' This woman publically shared her experience of being at an edge, and gave us a rare gift by communicating her surrender to the vulnerability of that moment.

This example illustrates that we often do not see a person's edge. One of the tricky things about the not-something-in-itself, relational nature of the edge is that we often cannot recognise an edge in ourselves or in other people. This trickiness may be one reason that edges cause trouble, and why edge awareness may help reduce suffering, at very least by reducing the isolation of the experience. In general, it does not look like anything difficult is happening on the outside. In this case, all I saw was this woman's incredible presence and confidence, her born leadership. We see the emerging process, the energy of what is trying to happen - we do not usually see the edge. As she spoke I took in the gift of her public edge work, which was to share the struggle and make it visible. Even if others cannot see the edge, there is an inner struggle, and courage and passion are needed to drop our current identity, to die to ourselves in order to grow, to be reborn as a new, expanded identity. It is a stepping off the map and takes courage, especially when warnings abound: 'go no further! Beyond here lie dragons!'

Dying and growing at significant edges

As I reflected on the Easter story, I began to see the passion of Jesus Christ as a road map for significant edgework. Before rebirth, says this story, something has to die. In my mind, to go over an edge is a death of the one that was living in the boundedness of the existing identity. Each little edge crossing, and all our negotiation with long term chronic edges that structure our lives, each of these edge traversals involves a kind of sacrifice and dying. Just as a biological

cell needs an intact boundary to stay alive, all life is defined by boundedness, by the containment of finitude. Death is a sacrifice that gives us back to the infinite. We decompose, our body dissolves, and we are disseminated, distributed, dispersed back into constituent parts. The edge crossing means letting go of the me that I thought I was. I have to release my attachment to a certain finite, known self.

The Passion is for me a story about surrender. And it is surrender with no certainty. As the Biblical Gospels of Matthew and Mark explain, Jesus Christ faces an agonising moment of crisis, a crisis of faith and calls out: 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'[15]. The crisis of faith is not a lack of faith or a lack of strength or courage. The crisis is inherent and essential. The 'I' must tremble at the edge because it confronts its condition of possibility, the edge which brings it into being.

I see the Passion of Jesus Christ is the story of edgework from the perspective of an individual: the personal trial of edgework. It illustrates the suffering that can be involved in the process of negotiating an edge - the death that is required is a sacrifice and it takes huge trust: trust that there is a meaningful future, there is something bigger than this existing body, bigger than this momentary and hard-won sense of self, that there is something beyond the known. And what dies? My momentary sense of myself must die, the self that is constructed by who I am, what I do and what I do not. The self that is defined by the actions and experiences which contribute to my survival and the ones that must be rejected to secure my belonging in a particular community or family.

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[15] The Passion involves a crisis of faith illustrated with the famous phrase 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me.' This phrase is called the Word of Abandonment and is the only phrase repeated in more than one gospel: Matthew 27:46 and Mark 15:34
http://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/book.php?book=Matthew&chapter=27&verse=46
http://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/book.php?book=Mark&chapter=15&verse=24 Accessed 19 November 2012

In the Passion, I find an expression of the volatile mix of surrender, struggle and sacrifice that the edge entails. For the terrible and wonderful truth is that 'I' cannot go over my edges. Going over my edges means a change to my 'I,' it means a death and a sacrifice of at least part of my identity. Over my edge, as a self-help advertisement might say, is *a new me*. But to grow means the death of my (current) self and this is no mean feat. Goodbread explains it like this:

> When personal identity is challenged by conflict between aspects of our experience, we may say that we are 'going to pieces.' […] We experience fragmentation as a form of death. It is, experientially, a life-and-death matter to keep ourselves together, whole, coherent, and unified (Goodbread, 2009, p. 61).

Facing this existential threat can generate defensive reactions, that are in some sense natural and inevitable:

> The ego hates, abhors, and pursues with intent to destroy all objects which are for it a source of painful feelings … the true prototypes of the hate-relation are derived not from the sexual life but from the struggle of the ego for self-preservation and self-maintenance (Freud, Collected Papers vol. 5, p. 81 cited by Hillman, 1979, p. 58).

While the Process Work concept of the identity is certainly not equivalent to the Freudian ego, Freud's description here is valuable for testifying to the deep seated emotional attachments to our sense of self. Or as Dylan Thomas so eloquently put it,

> Do not go gentle into that good night.
> Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

These reactions may explain the turbulence that we saw is part of the edge experience. At the edge we encounter not just a fear of the unknown but an experience of feeling threatened on a deep, existential level. This exposure to painful feelings including the threat to survival generates both the passion and the opportunity of the edge.

Process Work and edgework particularly give us a way to frame and manage this threatening moment. As Menken explains, it is only from the perspective of the identity viewpoint that there is a threat:

> Since we do not yet have an access to other parts of ourselves, the identity needs to defend itself, unaware that anything else exists (Menken, 1989, p. 57).

It is not the whole person, she observes, that is in crisis. The emerging secondary process is simply looking for attention: 'Messages from that part are being sent in an attempt to be unraveled' (Menken, 1989, p. 58).

In the most general sense, she suggests, religious experience involves an encounter with the unknown. It is a journey beyond our comfort zone: it is, in other words, a negotiation with our edges, an adventure in the edge field:

> The main world religions show us that the most divine experience occurs through a confrontation with that which is most foreign. (Menken, 1989, p. 16)

Menken finds that the origin stories of Christianity, Islam and Buddhism all have in common 'an individual forced to go beyond his present view of the world' (Menken, 1989, p.13). She describes how each of the founding leaders, Jesus, Muhammed and the Buddha Guatama all had to 'first struggle to adapt to the religious belief of governing view of his time, and was then pressed to discover something outside of the collective view' (Menken, 1989, p. 13).

From another perspective, but tackling the same questions, Goodbread's *Living on the edge* (2009) describes something similar to what I am calling the passion of the edge as a 'flickering' between two possibilities. I see this as the flickering uncertainty of being at an edge:

> Living with the experiential flicker—the uncertainty between two clear paths—can be agonizing. It is like having a choice between two potentially satisfying solutions and choosing instead a path of tension, indecision as well as the very real possibility that the situation will get worse before it improves (Goodbread, 2009, p. 159).

To understand this agony, Goodbread draws on a Chinese creation myth, the story of Pan Ku, whose body becomes the earth and whose lice become human beings. What does it mean, asks Goodbread, that we are formed from the lice? He finds that the human condition is to be radically uncertain of our place in the world. Always wondering: are we, as the lice, part of nature or are we parasites? He explains:

> What is the experiential consequence of living in permanent uncertainty, constantly oscillating around the boundary between nature and non-nature? It means we human beings need to constantly re-assess our natures. We are caught in a continual process of having to re-establish our identities, moment by moment, year by year, lifetime by lifetime and epoch by epoch (Goodbread, 2009, p. 157).

This uncertainty underlies some very painful questions: do I belong? does my experience belong to the social world or do I stand apart, marginalized and excluded for being a threat? Am I an outsider and an exile? Or am I an outlier, holding the leading edge change? Goodbread suggests that this uncertainty is 'the engine that drives social marginality' because it forces us to consider: 'Am I part of a unified, coherent world, or am I an independent individual?' (Goodbread, 2009, p.157).

In the story of Christ's Passion I see this dilemma and also the world-making function of stepping into uncertainty, and risking or sacrificing something of our ordinary, familiar sense of self in order to be reborn with a larger viewpoint. Goodbread writes:

> What we have to gain by staying in that uncertain space is the satisfaction of a solution born of unity and completeness instead of marginalization […] —we keep an open space for the unexpected to happen, for a unique configuration to emerge that ultimately leads to a more coherent world of experience than we could ever have engineered (Goodbread, 2009, p.160).

The Process Work paradigm supports this opportunity by providing techniques and a paradigm for accessing the resources of the outlier, while respecting the mainstream.

One of the reasons for the passion and drama of dying and growing at the edge appears to be my investment in a particular version of myself. In other words, the difficulty of an edge experience depends on my attachment to my identity and my commitment to my edges. For example, I think of myself as a 'good friend' and therefore when I feel selfish, I push these feelings to the side and pretend otherwise. An edge is created which keeps my identity safe from the unwanted experiences. Unfortunately, this does not generally work over the long term and it is possible that I'll find myself making a harsh or cold remark to my friend in spite of myself, or feeling resentful for the time 'they need' from me. I have a set of beliefs that being a good friend involves unselfish behaviour and unselfish feelings and these beliefs uphold the edge but they do not destroy the experiences that do not go along with my identity. Furthermore it will probably hurt my feelings if someone points out my secondary (over the edge) behaviours, which might be because I feel unseen for the inner effort of marginalising those rejected experiences.

Edge theory provides a general account of this phenomena of attachment to some parts of ourselves coupled with rejection of other parts that has been studied in detail by Object relations psychology. Object relations provides a nuanced therapeutic account of the psychological splitting of the self into good and bad and the potentially damaging consequences for mental health.[16] Within the framework of edge theory we can understand the psychological splitting of the self into good and bad as a description of a particular kind of edge, associated with parental care and developmental processes.

Past trauma or abuse is one of the dragons that may indeed lie within the edge experience. The edge is a way to protect our sense of self from the overwhelmingly painful experiences of abuse or trauma (Mindell, 1995; Diamond, 1995). My focus here is not on the psychological treatment

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[16] See for example, the Masterson approach to treatment of personality disorders (Masterson & Lieberman, 2004).

of trauma and abuse, as this is a specialist and highly skilled area of practice in itself,[17] but on introducing the idea that the connection between edges and hurtful experiences is one reason that edgework is both challenging and important.

Diamond (1995) explores the nature of chronic edges and their relationship to keeping trauma and difficult feelings at bay. She advocates for an 'understanding [of] edges as addiction-like processes that help people avoid pain' (p. 22).

Trauma and abuse are experiences that can create and maintain an edge because as we saw the edge is a way to disavow or marginalise aspects of our experience. Over the long term, 'chronic' edges that persist over time will shape our character and personality. Diamond explains that these chronic edges may represent a conflict between our deep inner nature and our social surrounds. She explains using the concept of a 'life myth':

> A chronic edge revolves around a life myth. The life myth represents our self beyond our social role. It is an archetypal identity, a force, creativity, or energy represented in our dreams, body experiences, and transpersonal experiences. This archetypal nature is difficult to identify with for many reasons, primarily because our identities are often conditioned and enforced by social norms and consensus reality (1995, p. 15).

But even more difficult than challenging entrenched cultural norms, is the process of uncovering and processing the of traumatic or abusive experiences in our personal history:

> our resistance, or edges, against these mythic processes, or against any disavowed process, are organised around difficult experiences, painful events and traumas. In a way, it is simply easier to avoid living our true natures (Diamond, 1995, p. 16).

Diamond uses case studies to illustrate the 'addiction-like structure of edge behaviors' and suggests that our ordinary selves 'can actually be thought of as long-term edge behavior, behavior that avoids another part of ourselves (p. 15-16). Who we know ourselves to be, she

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[17] There is an extensive literature on psychological approaches to trauma and abuse. See for example Herman (1997), Briere & Scott (2006), Levine (1997), Oz & Ogiers (2006) and Haines (2007).

says, might be in fact simply 'the less difficult option (p. 16). She shows in each case how a person's sense of self, their ordinary identity, was constructed by their edges in order to keep out experiences that were threatening, either because they challenged social norms or because they triggered memories of a traumatic experience. It was not simply that a person's character was sweet or strong, for example, but that the person did not have access to other parts of themselves (Diamond, 1995. p. 17).

She suggests that the traumatic wound that generated the edge in the first place can become the driving mechanism for an addictive attachment to our ordinary identity because it protects us from difficult feelings:

> We become addicted to avoiding a sore spot; we cling to other behaviors and identities rather
> than face a painful fact (1995, p. 17).

In other words, working on edges can mean dealing with aspects of our experience that we have actively pushed to the side:

> an edge can be a negotiation with pain, personal history, ghosts and abuse. Working on the
> edge may mean deciding to deal with pain, difficulty or conflict (Diamond, 1995, p. 19).

Diamond's intention is to expand the theory and practice of edgework in order to deal with this function of the edge.

She raises an implication for the goals of therapy and edgework. Bringing awareness to the edge and 'facilitating the person's relationship to her edge' (p. 21) is more important, she suggests, than pushing someone to 'get over' an edge. Diamond (1995) brings out a crucial danger in therapeutic techniques of edgework: a therapist can often successfully use their influence to 'push' a person over an edge. Sometimes a person does need an ally, and a loving push is exactly right. However a therapeutic push, just like any kind of program, may override important details

about the individual's process. The therapeutic art is to track the person's feedback precisely and not become programmatic about edge work. The theoretical and conceptual implication is to recognise that the edge is a generative and mysterious phenomenon. It is a part of nature and not simply an obstacle.

And as I have already suggested, edgework does not necessarily mean crossing the edge, because the process-oriented model of growth can be seen as having both horizontal and vertical dimensions. Indeed, one of the benefits of *working out at the edge gym* is that edges help us go deeper into our identity or one-sidedness. I was introduced to this idea through Process Work training in the study of relationship conflicts. We learn that when a person is resolutely stuck on their own side and unable to understand the other, it usually means they have not understood their own side deeply enough (Mindell Seminars, 2012a, 2012b). Going down deep enough into the experience on this side of the edge brings us to the ground, the essence level, and there we find a feeling of relief that is quite miraculous, and creates a freedom to let go of our attachment, and be able to feel the other side. At this deepest level, it seems, the edge is not a zone of conflict, but a satisfying meeting place. Thus edge theory affirms that growth is not only a horizontal expansion but the possibility of *growing deeper.*[18]

Love and finitude

There is a second aspect of the Easter story that touches me, and comes from reading the story from the perspective of the divine. It helps me put together the twin aspects of the edge: finitude and relationship. I read this story as that in which God, as the infinite, sacrifices its infinitude to become a unique, mortal individual and as a finite part (Jesus) becomes able to experience love for other parts.

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[18] This is related to James Hillman's concept of 'growing down' (Hillman, 1996).

Growing up with the Easter story, I could never understand why God would sacrifice his son to show his love for his people. Until one day, in the wake of the death of a dear friend, I felt the connection between death and love in a profoundly meaningful way. After my friend died, I realised that while I knew I loved her dearly, it was not until she was gone that I felt the full depth of my love for her. In the aching of grief and loss, I felt the fullness of this love in a way it seems I could not feel in her presence. Then the Easter story came to me like a surprise, and from the perspective of God I could see a story of the infinite giving up its infinitude, its immortality in order to become finite in order to create relationship, in order to experience love. Love is a property of relationship. The infinite cannot love on its own; love is a force that exists between parts, thus death, finitude is a gift and a sacrifice that gives relationship and therefore the opportunity to love.

What I interpret from the story is that finitude, which looks like separation and therefore loss of connection, can also be seen as the condition which makes love possible, where love is an experience of relationship. If the infinite-everything did not break into finite parts, then these parts could not relate to each other and experience the force of attraction and connection that we call love.

Suffering and perspective

To conclude this exploration of the passion of the edge through the Easter story, I want to suggest that even beyond the psychological context, suffering is a fundamental characteristic of the edge experience. And this weakness inherent to my sense of myself is not in fact a weakness in a pejorative sense but may be the condition for freedom and creativity:

> I have to lack a certain strength, I have to lack it enough, for something to happen. If I were stronger than the other, or stronger than what happens, nothing would happen. There has to be

weakness, which is not perforce debility, imbecility, deficiency, malady or infirmity. […] This affirmation of weakness is unconditional; it is thus neither relativistic nor tolerant (Derrida & Ferraris, 2001, p. 64).

I want to relate this sense of weakness, this 'lacking a certain strength,' to a quality of suffering which is inherent to having a perspective, to having edges. In this quote, I read a call for an alternative to the conventional, heroic narrative of the self, and I find it touching. Derrida is saying that the concept of the 'I' needs to be open to the unknown, to that which is necessarily more powerful than I, before anything can happen. And this vulnerability is not a problem, or a failure. It is what makes it possible that there is choice. For, if I was in total control of what was to come, it could only be a replication of myself, a repetition of the known.

The experience of an edge is one that we suffer and that threatens us. We must experience our edges as a victim of that edge, because experience happens only from the viewpoint of an identity; my sense of myself depends on an edge, whether that is on a literal, consensus reality level in the way my finite body creates the neural foundation for consciousness (Damasio, 2000), or through psychological mechanisms of marginalisation and identification.

I have discussed how the edge is a boundary between the known and the unknown for a given point of view, for a given *perspective*. Indeed I think of the edge as that which creates a perspective. The point I want to focus on here is that the sense of perspective, a sense that there is an 'I' with a particular point of view, is both fundamental to experience *and* a source of suffering. Menken observes that 'the roots of much suffering and conflict can be traced to an individual who is trapped within the confines of a particular world view' (1989, p.14).

> What would be potentially relieving for the individual is not acceptable to the primary process which is suffering. This is hopelessness; our lack of access to something new and our complete identification with the old system (Menken, 1989, p. 58).

The edge splits you, it separates you from part of yourself. This is true in the most abstract sense in the way that our physical edges and mortality separate us from the part of our nature that is infinite.[19] And in a more everyday psychological sense, our edges create our personality through which we identify with parts of ourselves and exclude others. And while not all edges are deep, and not all edges challenge me to the core of who I think I am, of who I believe I can be, *all edges have the characteristic of occurring to us*. We never choose to have an edge. And this is one way to distinguish the concept of an edge from the practice of intentionally setting boundaries.

The aspect of suffering, of a necessary passivity before any action is also, according to Mindell, also fundamental to awareness:

> The basic structure of all observations is at first not-doing. You do not do it, you do not observe. It happens! (Mindell, 2000a)

One way to describe this moment of exposure to the passivity and suffering that necessarily precedes our sense of intentional active self, is the mind-body dilemma:[20] the dilemma posed by the relationship between an entity which appears to have volition and agency, freedom and choice, power and creativity (usually thought of as the mind) and another entity in which this first entity is trapped. This second entity is usually the body, imagined as given and constraining, a 'carnal drag' inhibiting the will in our dreams of virtual reality (Kirby, 1997, p.131). But this carnal drag has priority. Phenomenology and now neuroscience has shown that my body is there before 'me,' it exists prior to any sense of myself as a self and is the basis for my sense of self (Merleau-Ponty, 1962; Damasio, 2000, 2010). I owe my body my life, literally and so to speak;

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[19] And thus religious and spiritual practices could be framed as edgework to help expand our identity to include the divine, or to specify and manage the relationship with God.

[20] Not the mind-body problem as it is framed in philosophy and cognitive science: the question of how does the mind arise from the body.

it is that which gives me the capacity to do anything at all. Consequently, I am frighteningly dependent on my body for my ability to do or be anything (Gronda, 2005).

The point is that waking up to and encountering this vulnerability, changes us. We cannot change our paradigm without passing through this uncertainty of the edge. There is a surrender that is required. It is not complete submission (we can and must *work out* at the edge) but it is an opening up to a certain weakness, a vulnerability that is, I think, sacred.

The risk and reward of relating at the edge

In this chapter so far I have been considering the edge passion as the necessity to surrender to a kind of dying in order to grow beyond the edges of our momentary identity. There is a crisis of faith, I've suggested, which is inherent in this encounter with the edge: can I trust the unknown? Now, I want to deepen and supplement this individual narrative by focusing on the social dimensions of the passion of the edge.

I discussed in the last chapter how an edge system is embedded in and expresses a social and cultural field. At a social level, the edge is a mechanism of inclusion and belonging (Goodbread, 2009). In other words, I may have to keep out parts of myself in order to belong to the community. My edges enable me to identify with social norms and fit into the 'we' of a particular society.

I have called this section 'the risk and reward of relating' to represent the danger (and potential benefit) of edgework in a community.[21] It is a gamble for acceptance and belonging, playing with the agonising risk of social exclusion. The reward for the individual is the chance for authentic relationship, to be accepted and loved for the uniqueness that you are. For the

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[21] Schnarch (1997) develops a similar idea of the risk and benefit of being yourself in an intimate relationship.

community, the reward is the richness inherent in diversity. And the opportunity for these rewards, I suggested above in the Easter story, can be understood as a gift of the edge, a result of finitude and relationship.

Embodied finitude as unique individuality

With the following exploration, I also shift from considering the expansive processes of dying and growing at the edges of our identity, to think more about the vertical dimension of the edge experience. The model of growth that I find in edge theory, as I've mentioned before, also supports a process of *growing deeper*. Growing deeper means for me a deepening of our experience on the 'inside' of an edge. This process has the benefit of accessing the essence of a particular viewpoint and also the painful but beneficial process of uncovering trauma or abuse experiences that often maintain an edge system (Diamond, 1995). In a later section of this chapter, I will give an example of this through a study of working with my own internalised racism.

In order to think about the edge as an opportunity for growing deeper, I want to focus on a certain type of edge which I will describe using the example and metaphor of what I call our embodied finitude. In general, I think that finitude, the key gift of the edge, is the mechanism that creates unique individuality. I'm interested in embodied finitude in particular because I think it is both a metaphor for deep aspects of our nature, and a real, political site where the agony of social marginalisation is felt and organised. Indeed, contemporary political theory has shown how systems of political oppression are literally marked on the body, maintained and anchored in physical characteristics and practices (Foucault, 1990, 1991).

For me, our bodily finitude represents the opportunity of a limit to our capacity for cultural adaptation, the limit to our ability to marginalise aspects of ourselves that do not go along with the mainstream. And I call it an opportunity to emphasise what I see as the benefit and gift of having a limit: that this finitude creates possibility through its constraint. Of course, on a practical and consensus reality level, human culture is expert at overcoming these limits - so for example, medical technology allows us to replace essential parts of our body through organ transplants and surgical procedures can change our bodies to support us living as a different gender or change the appearance of racially marked features. The opportunity however that interests me is that bodily finitude provides a symbol for a bottom line aspect of our nature, any aspect that we can marginalise but ultimately cannot split off from ourselves.

I think that edgework in this context offers a unique political and ethical opportunity: the practice of living your own unique finitude in relationship to others and to the culture. Process Work defines this as an edge in the world and relationship channels, and suggests that edgework in this case is the potential mechanism for social change (Goodbread, 2009; Menken, 2001, 1989). Edgework in other words is not just a personal challenge. It links our individual natures to the collective field.

Persistent edges

In considering the phenomenon of edges as an opportunity for learning and growth, it also became clear that some edges are persistent. Not only can these be described as 'chronic' edges, related to our 'life-myth' (Diamond 1995; Diamond & Spark Jones, 2004; Goodbread, 1997), it seemed to me that some edges are fundamental somehow to this incarnation. I began to think about the body, biology and genetics as representative of edges that are necessary to create diversity, uniqueness and evolutionary specificity. Evolution, it seems, needs diversity -

evolution relies on experimenting with difference, different patterns, different shapes and forms (Gould, 1990).[22] This reflection helped me understand why not all edges are to be crossed in a simple, linear expansion model of growth.

Let me back track in order to explain a bit more slowly. I've been suggesting that we look at edges not just as an obstacle, but also see that they are generative; edges *hold* us. Edges hold us and give us the experience of being some-one, a part within a bigger field. I further noticed that we could see finitude as the condition for experiencing love. In these senses, I have been advocating for the value and benefit of the edge.

On the other hand, an edge can hold us too tight. Our identities can be rigid and restrictive, causing secondary processes to call for our attention in disturbing ways.[23] Crossing edges develops what Process Work calls fluidity, which is the experience of greater freedom, awareness and access to the full range of our perceptions and behaviours. And edgework is a set of techniques intended to facilitate the development of fluidity.

In this chapter, I've been exploring the growth process of crossing edges as a passion, a process of dying in order to grow. Crossing edges is one way to increase our fluidity but there is a delicate balance which brings me back to my advocacy about the value of edges, of being finite, of being contained.

At a literal level, my skin is an edge that maintains the integrity of my biological system. My biological edges are essential for life. Accordingly, some kinds of fluidity seem to come only with death, or near death experiences, in what many religious and mythical traditions imagine as

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[22] For a critique of the evolutionary argument in *Wonderful Life* and Gould's reply, see http://www.stephenjaygould.org/library/naturalhistory_cambrian.html Accessed 5 December, 2012.
[23] In *City Shadows*, Mindell shows that the very disturbing experiences of mental illness may be related to cultural edges.

a return to the oneness, back to the connected, infinite source. Life, on the other hand, as

opposed to death, is about being edged in; it is about being a particular, finite, some-thing, some-

one.

So I want to emphasise the value and potential gift of finitude by using the metaphor of the body

and of biology, but I do not mean to recreate a mind-body dualism or imply that we are only our

bodies and therefore only finite. Advocating about embodied finitude to friends I was reminded

that in dreams we exceed the edges of our physical body. I can fly or become a tiger without any

problem.

This point helps me clarify that by the term embodied finitude, I am describing not simply the

physical body that is available and measurable in Consensus Reality, but the totality of our given

experience across all the levels of reality. In fact, while our ordinary commonsense tends to

associate our bodies and biology with limitation, Mindell reminds me that my body is a wild,

dreaming resource, if I can open up to information beyond my intentional program:

> Most of the time you focus only on those body sensations that go along with your daily
> program. You repress everything else. You stay close to home and avoid the uncanny, natural
> environment, fearing it as if it were a wilderness area. You think the body is ill when it
> becomes troublesome, and you fail to realize that it is trying to dream, to communicate
> messages and create movements beyond your expectations (Mindell, 1993, p. 21).

Embodied finitude is a symbol for all the wildness in our natures that cannot be excluded despite

our best efforts at cultural adaptation. Inhabiting the full range of these experiences in

relationship and in the world is the opportunity for greater richness and diversity in our

community and personal lives.

Our vulnerability to the community

Above I suggested that there is an inevitable passivity in the edge experience. It must be suffered. It is inherently, and by definition, an experience of constraint for the identity's viewpoint. Even what we might call a little edge, like a small shyness about revealing how happy I am in a given moment, is nonetheless characterised by happening *to me*. I find that the idea of embodied finitude gives me another view on this characteristic of suffering, and the relationship between victimisation and edges.

I also discussed earlier how edges can perform an important function in protecting our sense of self from painful victim experiences including abuse or trauma. I want to suggest there is a general structure in the experience of being a victim that is related to certain deep edges. I think that in the most generalised sense, we protect ourselves from the painful fact of our own vulnerability in the face of our edges, the experience of being a victim of what exceeds us in a given moment.[24]

I want to suggest that the experience of victim is, in the most general sense, an experience of limitation, of being not-infinite, not-omnipotent. It is the experience of being, in other words, the finite, particular, unique embodied individual that you are in this lifetime. As finite, you are not the everything and therefore vulnerable to forces external to yourself; there is no avoiding, in other words, the experience of being a victim. In a community context, I think the essence of this victim experience is the fundamental vulnerability of being an interdependent social animal, thoroughly dependent on other people and even more deeply dependent on the ecosystem that maintains water, air, food and shelter.

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[24] Mindell defines abuse as an encounter in which power was used against you and you were unable to defend against it (1995). These two conditions define the difference between a productive conflict, the meeting of two different powers, and an abusive encounter in which there is a victim and a perpetrator.

I want to suggest that this general structure of suffering and victimisation is played out with great power and significance in a certain kinds of deep edges that split us, I would say, *right down to the bottom*. These are edges that are created by, and reproduce, the community's racism, sexism and homophobia, for example. These edges involve familial or cultural belief systems that reject or denigrate a basic aspect of our embodied nature such as our sexuality, race, gender, able-bodiedness, ethnicity, genetic health conditions, our family configuration and economic class.

These are edge systems formed of primal abandonment fears; they are maintained by the threat of exclusion and ostracism from family and tribe, which in some times and places carries a death sentence. The social system says in effect: reject this part of your nature if you want to belong. And due to our inherent dependency on the community, this social force is usually over-powering and we are victims in that moment. This kind of edge system is deep because it activates a conflict between my individuality and my belonging, and the conflict is stacked against 'me' by my need for community. There is an agony and a passion in this experience. In order to belong I am pressed to reject a part of my deepest nature. In doing so I lay the ground for self-hatred, and also the opportunity that edgework may bring change to the social foundations of the edge system.

Edgework on these deep edges means I am forced to negotiate powerful familial and cultural belief systems. These apparently external constraints occur in my own most intimate, inner experience, entangled in my very sense of myself. I think the contamination of the edge (relationship) is what ensures there is the possibility for social change, and the containment of the edge (finitude) provides the mechanism. The finite, unique individual provides the ground to hold and experience the powerful grief and rage associated with the splitting off and rejection of

certain parts of ourselves and our potential (Weller, 2012).[25] At this moment, individual edgework is a mechanism for social change in a reversal of the polarity of victim and external force. Though the individual's identity is created as a victim of the social and familial forces, edgework reveals the individual as the driver of social change.

Edgework techniques, and the very concept of the edge, I believe, provide a significant contribution toward developing what I'd call *a safer model of social change.* Goodbread (2009) articulates a similar vision in his study of social marginality. He presents a powerful case study of the Process Work he facilitated with a group of post-Chernobyl liquidators. Goodbread's participants were some of the 750,000 people who decontaminated and sealed the site of the 1986 nuclear disaster but went from being heroes to socially despised outcasts. The social marginalisation they experienced echoes a similar, well-known tragedy amongst war veterans who dominate the homeless population in many US cities. Goodbread's work inspires me in the future research project I mentioned in the last chapter, *Edgework in public places*.

Embodiment, politics and social change

My concern here with embodied finitude is the potential gift and resource of the idea of 'living in my skin,' thinking of my skin as the literal and symbolic edge of my body. I think of embodied finitude as the edge I have to live in: this body, this lifetime with all the pain and suffering and opportunities and resources. My point here is to suggest that politics and social change get constellated around embodied finitude edges. For instance, my skin has a color, and the color of skin is not trivial; it has anchored deep injustices and historical systems of oppression. And so

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[25] For an accessible overview of Weller's categories of grief, see the following interview: http://www.shrinkrapradio.com/2011/09/18/279-%E2%80%93-grief-ritual-and-the-soul-of-the-world-with-francis-weller-m-a/ Accessed 5 December 2011.

there is an opportunity and perhaps a responsibility to live fully the diversity expressed by the unique, particular individual that you are.

Inhabiting your individuality may mean negotiating cultural edges, deep seated norms and taboos; and this is why I am convinced that by increasing awareness about edges and edgework we can reduce some of the unnecessary suffering on both personal and social levels that occurs at this negotiation point between individual and culture.

Again, I need to emphasise that I am using embodied finitude is an example and a symbol for *that which we are given to live* in this lifetime. I am not saying that we cannot literally exceed our biological limitations, for clearly we can and must in some circumstances. Nor is it ever entirely clear whether parts of your embodied finitude are natural or cultural. Bourdieu, for example, in his landmark sociological study of the French middle class, showed how the things we imagine are the most personal in our likes and dislikes are predicted by the economic class to which we belong, and these 'personal' choices are the way we actively maintain cultural class identities (Bourdieu, 1984). Thus it is always up for investigation whether your edges are personal or cultural. Inhabiting or embodying your own particular, specific finitude, your individuality, is a personal and existential activity and it is also crucially an interaction between what you consider to be *yourself* and the group or culture in which you find yourself.

Indeed, I think the distinctions between nature and culture, between personal and social, is constellated precisely by the interactions that occur at our edges. For example, I know I am 'me' because I can define 'myself' using words and categories from my culturally specific language. Part of my embodied finitude is that I am a Greek-Australian woman of 40 years age. If I further describe myself as 'middle-aged,' I trigger a flood of cultural associations that add texture to this

identity and which I may accept or reject, feel hurt by or proud of. My experience of these social and biological definitions of myself provides rich resources for the evolution of community and for my individual development because the edge system that defines my identity is an event as well as a place; a site of negotiation and the ever present opportunity for growth.

Internalised oppression

Embodied finitude is created by the edges that make me who I am as an individual: my body size and shape, the movements I like to make, my temperament, my likes and dislikes. My embodied finitude is an experience that we are given. We then have responsibility and choice about how to live this embodiment but we cannot give it back. These edges make me who I am and in this sense not all edges are meant to be crossed, some edges are life affirming. Embodied finitude edges mean that we are a particular something and someone, existing in this particular time and place. And our job is to live that. Rejecting this givenness is a process that breeds self-hatred.

One aspect of internalised oppression (Menken 2001) is that in reaction to the cultural figures and belief systems of the edge system, I split off a part of myself and construct my identity as a good, normal person by excluding and marginalising unwanted experiences of perceptions. I do not inhabit my embodied finitude. I live, so to speak, shrunken inside my body, not inhabiting myself all the way to the edge of my skin, not experiencing the contact and relationship between my embodied finitude and the social field around me. Of course marginalising the parts of my being which are not culturally acceptable does not destroy those parts. Fortunately or unfortunately they simply become more troublesome to my identity, or lead to self-hatred or depression.

Here Menken (1989) describes the effects of marginalising parts of your nature in line with cultural expectations, and the relief of accessing the experiences over her edges in her first experience with Process Work:

> I had been trying to unsuccessfully change myself. The result of my inability to change was a lot of self-hatred and my belief that there must be something essentially wrong with me. […] I wanted a loose and flexible body, which was the goal of the body-oriented therapies I tried, and I was trying to be peaceful and soft, which was the goal of the talking kinds of therapy I did. I usually ended by hating myself because my body never changed, and I did not feel at peace; I just got more and more depressed. My first hour with [Mindell] ended up in wild fighting and an archaic kind of dance. I was ecstatic. All of those years I had been trying to keep the physical, strong and passionate parts of myself out of my life. I had never met anyone who supported such things. he leapt and shrieked with me and began to identify me with this new behavior as well (Menken, 1989, p. 5-6).

Similarly, I have tracked in myself the growth of a self-hating mood when I am trying to fit in and adapt to a set of physical exercises that are not movements my body enjoys. The point I want to emphasise with the idea of embodied finitude is that some edges need to be *inhabited* and this is both a personal and collective responsibility. The body I have is an opportunity, a resource, a responsibility. The living of your embodied finitude may drive edgework in relationships and in the world (Dworkin, pers. comm. 2012). In other words, inhabiting your edges, being proud of and celebrating your unique finitude may be a process of going over your edges in a social context.

I have studied my own experience of internalised racism and will present it here to provide an example of what I see as a powerful political and ethical opportunity provided by the phenomenon of edges. This is the opportunity of each person inhabiting their own unique individuality in relationship and world channels. I see this as the edgework engine that drives the satisfaction and richness of diversity and community building, while in its absence becomes the mechanism of social marginalisation, exclusion and oppression.

An example ... my edge to being Greek

Racism creates a 'spoiled identity' (Goffman, 1986). In a given social context, certain races, ethnicities, skin colours, hair type or nose shape are marked as less valuable or even despised and hated. These characteristics are part of your embodied finitude, and while people do use surgical and other interventions to eliminate the external signs of race, these very practices simply reinforce the point that there is a bodily marker of a social ranking system. Like it or not, we must inhabit our embodied finitude as part of the living of ourselves. And this means we must negotiate our relationship to any cultural edges that coincide with our uniqueness, whether we ignore the marginalising pressure, physically modify our body, or create a social movement to promote civil rights.

In my inner work and personal development, I discovered that one of my chronic or deep edge systems is the result of internalised racism. My edge system has protected me from feelings of grief, longing, sadness, and the agony of self-hatred for splitting off a part of myself because my community rejected it. Processing this edge system has included phases of revengeful fury, rejection and hatred of my community for this abuse.

I was born in Athens, Greece, but grew up from seven months old in Melbourne, Australia in a family of Greek post-war immigrants. In Process Work terms, I could say that my ordinary identity is built on marginalising signs of my ethnic background and as a result my ethnicity has become secondary. There is an edge created by the interaction between my embodied finitude, the particular, unique body that I am given to live, and the social environment in which I found myself.

My ethnic background includes characteristics that are part of my Consensus Reality identity, in other words, people around me will agree that this is my identity whether I have an inner experience of it or not. But as it is spoiled identity and I don't want to identify with these aspects of my embodiment, I marginalise the associated characteristics. On an external level this marginalisation means that I may choose clothing that is conservative and mainstream, or try to straighten my curly hair. On an inner level I put down my emotional, passionate feeling nature, traits associated with my ethnic group, and aspire toward a rational, cool, reasonable persona.

I have worked on this edge system in many ways over years, but here I want to focus on just one aspect that is how the internalised racism creates relationship and community feelings driven by a revenge cycle (a desire to hurt the ones I blame for my hurt).

One of my dreams showed me this revenge cycle. I dreamt that I was going into a boxing ring to fight a young man with red hair and white skin. Before we began, I spoke to the audience gathered around the boxing mat and said, 'oh I hate those blonde haired blue-eyed people.' I caught myself and said, 'well you can see I'm a bit screwed up about this.' Then I looked around the ring and saw friends with blonde hair and blue eyes who love and support me, who were there in the audience as supporters. And they look shocked and hurt and I realise I've done it again, I've forgotten they are humans over there.

I woke up and on remembering the dream I started crying, and was soon overwhelmed by deep wracking sobs that lasted for some hours. It felt like the crying went down right through my torso to a place deep in my lower back. It felt like inside my body was a split in the earth, like a gorge with endless rock walls going down and down. My tears were like rain washing down the sides of the gorge and penetrating to the source of this pain, to the origin of the edge, to the

starting point where racism divided me from my self at a time and in a way I could not defend against. It seems to me there is no way down to a place of wholeness except through the living experience of grief and agony. Immediately afterward I felt such an intense emotional dissolution that it took a number of hours before I could contemplate leaving my house. I had therapy clients that afternoon however and, to my surprise, rather than feeling like 'a mess,' I found that my clinical skills had improved. The fluidity I gained by expressing the emotions that held the edge in place resulted in having more access to my awareness in the therapy sessions I provided.

Growing deeper: fluidity and the essence level

Process Work suggests that at the essence level of experience there are no longer any edges, and indeed getting to the essence of an experience is an edgework method, sometimes described as 'tunnelling under the edge'. This implies, and it is sometimes said, that at the deepest level, at the essence level, there is unity. Thus for example, there is an instructional limerick for innerwork that quips - 'you are not done until you are One.' I think however, there is an even more radical idea embedded in Process Work about the deepest level of our experience. My explorations suggest that some edges go all the way to the bottom, so to speak, and what we find at the essence level is not a homogenous unity, but an experience of multiplicity, and of fluidity amidst diversity. At the 'bottom', at the essence level, is a flow of connected experiences of diverse energies.

This conclusion is aligned with Mindell's more recent techniques that identify different energies in a personal or group disturbance and use a meditative practice to facilitate fluid movement between apparently oppositional experiences (Mindell, 2010; Mindell Seminars 2012a, 2012b). It seems that in your ordinary state of consciousness, at Consensus Reality and Dreamland levels of experience, you are troubled because you have an edge to a particular energy (for example,

strong, excitable, explosive energy) and it becomes disturbing to your identity which is calm and sweet. Using what the Mindells' call a 'lightly altered state' people are able to access both the disturbing energy and the more familiar energy, becoming first this and then that, and most importantly finding in movement a natural transition between the energies, in other words, the flow of their relationship.

 In my experience as a Process Work practitioner and client, there appears to be a recognisable transition when you arrive, so to speak, at the deepest level of an experience and 'get it' completely. Somehow 'it' releases you. Your edge no longer holds you in position, and you find yourself able to contact the other side and feel it also. If you are in a relationship conflict it feels at this moment as if your one-sided attachment is completed and you wake up - you no longer need to fight the other side to assert yourself. Miraculously it seems, you find you can feel the other side's point of view and it no longer threatens you, in fact it makes sense and you understand them also.

This transition I have experienced time and again both in innerwork and in relationship or group work. It generates fluidity and improves my state of consciousness; I feel that it improves my mental health. It would be a great concept to try and instrumentalise, operationalise and measure in an outcome study. I certainly tracked the outcomes after my experience processing the grief that arose from my dream and the impacts of internalised racism. Process Work practice reliably shows that by unfolding an experience completely, the natural process of change takes over and fluidity returns. Rather than stop a disturbing experience, Process Work amplifies and unfolds and facilitates what is already trying to happen. The edge theory I am teasing out here adds to this model by emphasising the role of edges in driving the deepening process. The edge stops you and holds you in a particular experience and eventually enables you to go deeper.

In thinking about *the passion of the edge* I have focused on the difficult experience of encountering your own edges, but, as with many difficult things, there are significant benefits to be had. The grief process I just described in my innerwork on internalised racism was an example of growing deeper as type of *working out at the edge gym.*

Conclusion: images of the edge

To conclude this chapter, I would like to share a couple of images that support my thinking about the edge. The first picture illustrates how the edge of our identity, represented as jagged star, is inside a greater finitude represented by an outer form,[26] a lumpy shape, perhaps roughly in the form of a human body.

Edges hold us

Embodied finitude

NOT ME!

NOT ME!

My idea and feeling about myself

ME!

Edge system

Edge System sustained by:
• Personal history
   • Hurts
   • Habits
• Social norms
• Philosophies and beliefs

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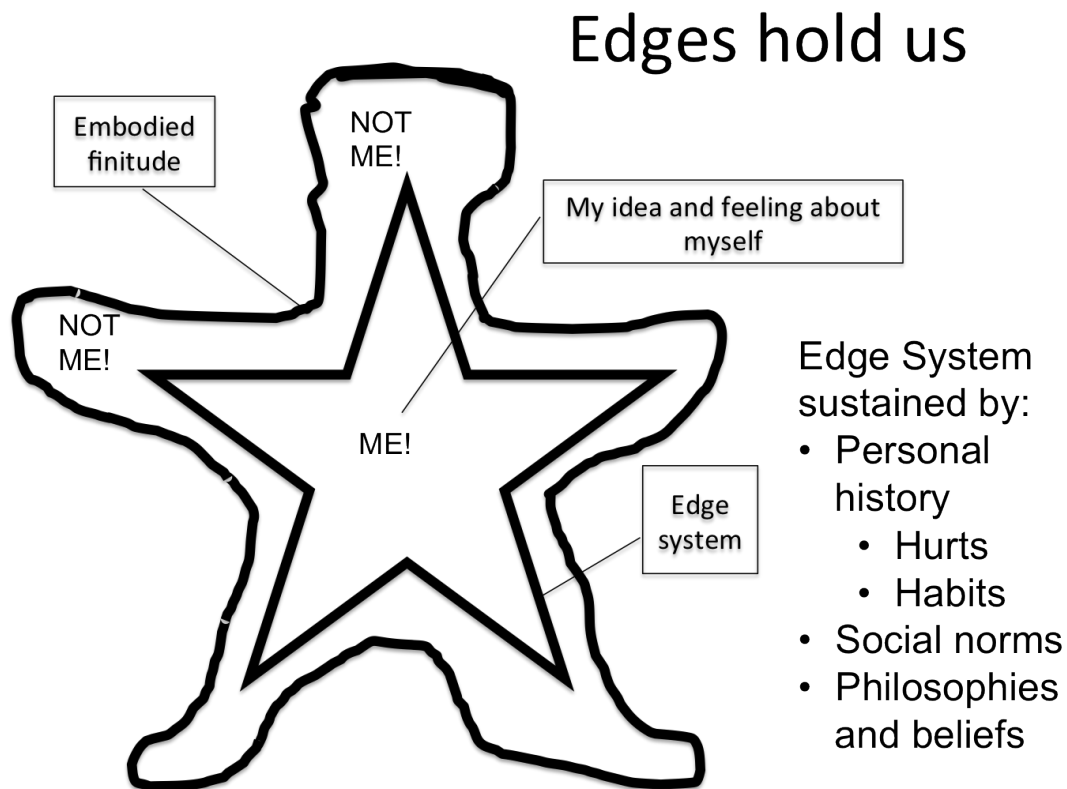
[26] I am tempted and troubled by use of a circle to represent the greater finitude since Jung developed a body of work based on using the circle mandala as a symbol of the Self. My reservation is that the perfect form of the circle tends to diminish the significance of the bumpy, lumpy shape of embodiment.

The outer form represents the unique and limited shape of our individual lives in space and time. The inner jagged star is my momentary identity, with its edges that split my wholeness into me and not-me. This image lets me see how personal development or growth can be modelled as a process of expanding our identity to include more of the total finitude which is what Jung would call our wholeness, or the Self.

And this process of interaction at the edge is not an isolated, inner experience. We discover the edges of our identity because of our contact with the outside world; relationships with people and the world provoke and wake us up to the limits of our identity. In other words, the shape I'm using to represent our total finite self does not exist in an isolated or empty space. As we saw with the belief systems of the edge, an edge system is generated by this interaction with the outer world—and it represents the trace of the other inside us. Cultural voices are found in the most intimate and deepest parts of our experience, for example guiding our behaviour around bodily needs and sexuality, often, unfortunately, through shame or humiliation.

My next image begins to illustrate this embeddedness in the world by representing our finitude, with our identity inside it, as the flow of a river through a landscape.

Two aspects of edges
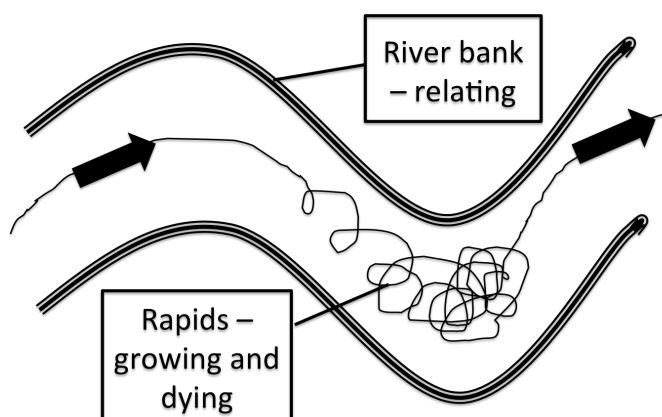
I imagine that our lives are flowing through the social and physical field as if it were the geographic territory, the landscape, the terrain through which our individual rivers (our processes) flow. The social field is comprised and expressed of the geography of earth and water: all our 'rivers,' our individual, finite lives are process flows through the territory, through the field which is the total field of social reality.

With this image, I further imagine two categories of edge. In one category, edges are like the banks of the river, which hold and guide the overall current, while in another category, edges are like the snags and rapids which disrupt the flow - giving it energy, excitement and not a little bit of chaos. Similarly, Amy Mindell used the metaphor of the cross-current turbulence in a river to describe the disturbing states that occur at edges. Process Work uses the Taoist image of a river to describe the flow of 'process,' a meaningful and patterned unfolding of events and perceptions over time. My version of the river image gives me a way to imagine how the flow of process in our individual life is connected to a bigger social field which both shapes your inner psychological experience, and provides the opportunity for individuals to transform the social field.

As the river cuts into the landscape, we find ourselves up against the edge of our personal finitude and in contact with the social field. Simultaneously, the social field as the geological landscape shapes the flow of our river - if the territory is hard rock, our river might bend and twist to find another way through. At the same time, over time the flow will cut into the landscape, changing and transforming it slowly.

The river image allows me to imagine how edges can operate at different levels of our experience to structure our social and psychological realities, and to show how, at the edge, there

is an interaction that changes this momentary and evolving field. Growth implies that edges are not an impenetrable barrier. For the experience or activity of growth, an edge is an obstacle like the rocks and narrowing of the banks that create rapids in a river; meaning that the flow continues but it gets turbulent and possibly dangerous, as well as potentially exciting. With some awareness and with a framework for understanding what is happening, the rapids can be a source of extra energy and even pleasure. Going over the edge to get up and perform in public for example can create an exhilarating, even if terrifying experience. I think that the turbulence of the edge, like the curls and snags and rapids in the river's flow, might provide the energy that we need to negotiate the threshold transitions of the edge: growing, dying or relating.

Chapter three: Edge awareness and the great human endeavour

> *...the strange negotiation that takes place with a limit, is a negotiation that I do not negotiate, that I do not calculate. It is a negotiation in which I am taken, or let us say, the subject said to be deciding is taken, and the negotiation takes place regardless of what one does, regardless of what the particular deciding subject does or does not do. The decision takes place. At that moment perhaps one should attribute the value of the decision to something other than a free and calculating subject.*
>
> *Negotiations (Derrida, 2002, p. 312)*

In this quote, the twentieth century French philosopher Jacques Derrida suggests that our ability to make a decision, a treasured aspect of free-will, may be more like an edge experience than an intentional act. Instead of a rational, informed choice at the point of decision-making, we find the experience of uncertainty that occurs at an edge. Perhaps 'we' do not make decisions at all. Perhaps decisions make us. The disturbing aspect of this idea reflects what I think of as *our cultural edge to the edge experience*. Accordingly, in this chapter, I want to discuss how the passion of the edge, the difficulty of edges, is not only a personal and psychological phenomenon but also plays out at a philosophical and cultural level.

This chapter brings my explorations of the concept and experience of the edge together with a bigger philosophical debate within Western culture about the importance of a stable individual self as the guiding force in human progress. It is a big, big topic. And while I cannot possibly do it justice, I hope to use it to develop our understanding about what is significant about a process-oriented perspective. To do so, I will introduce the ideas of poststructuralism and the work of Derrida and propose that an edge experience can be understood as a 'deconstructive encounter.'

In the first section I show how the edge aware model of growth I discussed in chapter one has relevance for a bigger cultural debate about the direction of human progress. I will present this debate through the ideas that are broadly called 'poststructuralism.' In the second section, I will go deeper through the deconstructive work of Derrida, in order to explore the way the edge allows us to think not only *who* am I, but *what* am I? What is the nature of this existence that we find ourselves in?

Questioning the direction of human progress

In the first chapter, I introduced the idea of an 'edge aware' model of psychological growth, and suggested that it had implications for how we might think about growth in general. In the second chapter, I suggested that social 'growth' relies on and is driven by edgework, by considering the relationship between individual edges, group edges and social change. Now I want to look further at how edge awareness can help us understand social and cultural growth, by considering a philosophical and cultural debate about human progress that has occurred under the umbrella of 'poststructuralism.'

I am going to suggest here that the idea of personal growth and the role of the identity on a psychological level are equivalent, at the cultural level, to the idea of human progress and the

role of 'Universal Man' in the development of Western civilisation. I propose that edge awareness and Process Work tools give us a way to re-imagine and re-create new possibilities for human progress, new ways to access the resources that lie beyond our ordinary known worlds, without merely colonising and exploiting what is different from ourselves.

Poststructuralism is …

In this section I will introduce poststructuralism. I am aiming to communicate some key ideas from poststructuralism in an accessible way, knowing there are many nuances that I must exclude, but hoping to convey an understanding of how the edge concept is central to an important cultural and historical process.

Poststructuralism is a debate, what Process Work would call a group process, in cultural studies and critical theory, over the last century. So, while I cannot do it full justice here, I want to bring out what I feel is relevant to understanding the significance of edge theory. I will sketch it through the story of a shift from structuralism to post-structuralism; a story that is inextricable from historical and social events of the twentieth century (Ingram, 2010). As a shorthand, I will refer to this whole terrain as poststructuralism.

Broadly speaking, structuralism is the attempt to understand social reality as a closed system of components (structures) underlying observed phenomena[27] (Derrida, 1978). Great classic structuralists include the anthropologist Lévi-Strauss, Freud, Marx and the linguist Saussure. Structuralism asks: what is the architecture of the way things are, and how does it all fit together as a system? Structuralists aim to understand the complete set of universal rules that guide

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[27] Structuralism is also the term used to describe what is considered the first school of psychology, under the direction of Wilhelm Wundt. http://psychology.about.com/od/historyofpsychology/a/structuralism.htm Accessed 11 December 2012.

human behaviour. So for example, Freud mapped out a complete system of psychic drives and hoped to be able to explain all of psychopathology.

Post-structuralism, broadly speaking again, was a reaction to structuralism and came with the realization that failing to recognise your own viewpoint and claiming to know universal laws could have oppressive consequences. For example, feminists disagreed with Freud's analysis of female psychology and showed how it was not a universal finding but a viewpoint that was embedded in cultural biases.

To explain a little further the academic context, the term 'post-structuralism' had its moment of prominence in European and North American literary criticism and Cultural Studies in the 80s and 90s (Harland, 1987; Agger, 1991; Peters, 2001). It was a response to structuralism's totalising ambitions, and was the intellectual and critical theory often associated with postmodernism. It drew heavily on the ideas of mid-twentieth century French philosophers for example, Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze, Lyotard, Lacan, Barthes and Irigaray. In my judgement, the essence of poststructuralism is important for articulating the significance of the Process Work paradigm and its edge theory. Putting Process Work and poststructuralism together provides the tools and a framework for understanding, encountering and working with the uncertainty at the center of our experience.

Poststructuralism is part of Western (Anglo-European) historical and intellectual development over the 20th century. A key element I want to draw attention to is the loss of faith in European ideas guiding human civilisation, as Europeans faced the impacts of colonisation including slavery, the tragic implosion of the First and Second World Wars, and the abhorrent culmination of the Holocaust. Western civilisation prided itself on the European Enlightenment, the Scientific

Revolution and the ascendance of Humanism as the guiding philosophy for human progress. Cultural theorists call these ideas the Grand Narratives of Progress, and they have been greatly delegitimized by the tragic events of the early twentieth century. One aspect of the loss of faith has been critique of the moral subject of Humanism. The moral subject of Humanism is the role that we could call 'Universal Man'. The idea of 'Man' has carried a lot of historical mainstream rank and power and it has profoundly influenced our ideas about identity ranging right across philosophical, psychological and sociological registers. The idea of 'Man' is hidden in the background of many of our concepts including identity, subject, subjectivity, self, agency, the cogito, ego, the "I", personality, persona, consciousness, individual, person, client, consumer, citizen and the reasonable man.

I will return to this critique of 'Man' in a moment, but first let me explain how Western Enlightenment ideas culminated in the structuralist ambition to understand the universal laws that structured social reality. The structural analyses of Marxism and feminism,[28] for example, identified big socio-historical forces (e.g. capital, class, gender, patriarchy) that seemed to structure our experience and reproduce oppressive social relations. Like a natural science, structuralists sought out the rules of the game in linguistics, economics, anthropology, sociology and other fields. Abandoning the Enlightenment celebration of individual human creativity, the structuralist 'turn' was like a Copernican revolution: no longer did everything revolve around the human self and its actions, but instead individuals were orbiting within a bigger system, constrained, formed and pulled by external forces. But these external forces were no longer the province of religion; these social or moral forces were to be scientifically documented.

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[28] I choose these two as what we might call a 'classical' political structuralism. Other liberatory movements like those based on race and sexuality begin the development of poststructural thinking - thus for example, women of colour challenged feminism's monolithic analysis of patriarchy as the core system of oppression by showing that race intersects gender and divides women amongst themselves.

A science of social structures, it was felt, could liberate human beings from oppression and fulfil the Enlightenment dream of human flourishing through the light of knowledge and reason. For example, feminism sought to identify patriarchal structures which kept women in their inferior place, and to document the system that supported male-domination. Marx described a system of capital accumulation, property rights and class distinctions that maintained a particular balance of power and inspired an international movement for economic justice. As he so famously declared with Engles in their Manifesto:

> Communists everywhere support every revolutionary movement against the existing social and political order of things […] The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win (Marx & Engles, 1969).

Yet the historical failure of the Marxist enlightenment project was not only a tragic betrayal for some and a triumph for others, but also in some sense a relief and a liberation from the structuralist paradigm. For if structuralism were right, if there was a complete system that could be understood, if life is totally programmatised, if we did in fact live in a Newtonian clockwork universe, then what happens to individual agency, freedom and power? Where do I fit into it all? Is my experience merely 'false consciousness' as Marx suggested? Is history just the playing out of a structural program? And if so, what hope is there for justice, for something different in the future?

At a political level, with the rise of civil rights movements and postcolonial struggles, the voices of marginalised groups - women, non-Europeans and especially Indigenous peoples, people of different sexualities - rose up to challenge the presumptions of Western thought. Until then, the Universal subject of Humanism (Man) was the reference point for Western political and ethical development but with poststructuralism came a critique of this human subjectivity. From all sides the apparently neutral and universal 'I' and 'we' of Western ethical and political thought

has been challenged to recognise its one-sidedness and the political gain it delivered for those who could claim it. This 'I' was the subject of Progress and it is now contaminated by its implication in the success and injustices of a capitalist, colonial economic system and globalisation. Feminist, postcolonial, anti-racist, queer, animal liberationists have all contributed to a more complex understanding of democracy and human civilisation.

As a result, however, in this present day postmodern, fractured and climate-changing world it feels difficult to believe in human progress and evolution. Poststructuralism grapples with this issue of the direction of progress and the question of agency: do human beings have agency or are we powerless against great social and cultural forces and systems of oppression? And deeper into that question is a self-confrontation: can we trust 'Man' (ourselves)?

So poststructuralism provides a challenging critique of humanism, and the neutral, universal 'I' and 'we' that were the leading subjects in narratives of human progress. And this is relevant to understanding the significance of edge theory because I think that Process Work provides a way to re-imagine the 'I' and to work with our sense of an intentional viewpoint while simultaneously opening up to the resources that are beyond our known, familiar territory.

The tricky thing, as we saw in the last chapter, is that there is a passion at the edge; at the edge, encountering the unknown, we face a kind of dying, at least to our ordinary sense of ourselves. This task of opening up to the unknown and recognising our inherent limitations is, for me, the poststructuralist challenge. This challenge, I am suggesting, reflects a widespread cultural edge to edges.

The edge experience shows how challenging it is to confront the loss of identity. It is a challenge to wake up to the moment I described as the passion of the edge, where the individual subject

confronts the limits of their viewpoint and ability to act, where we are confronted with our essential vulnerability to that which we are (apparently) not.

A contemporary theorist frames poststructuralism as a return to the question of 'agency' and I like the way she advocates for going deeper into the ideals of Humanism, rather than abandoning all hope:

> one way of understanding *post*-structuralism is as a renewed insistence on the role of agency - freedom, responsibility and creativity - in 'structuring' social life (Morris, 1997).

Similarly, I think of poststructuralism as a return to the questions of agency and direction after confronting the fact that the Universal Man of the European Enlightenment was also a tool in a system of oppression that diminished non-European cultures. It is a re-engagement with the dilemma of human freedom and constraint in the relation between the individual and their social-cultural-political field.

With this discussion of poststructuralism, we have moved far from the psychological terrain of the edge, but one of the most powerful aspects of edge theory is that it supports our analysis across different scales - from my inner world, to interpersonal relationships and to the complexity of the group process that we call history. And I think that the poststructuralist anxiety about agency and human progress is strongly related to the dynamic I described as the passion of the edge. Both poststructuralism and edge theory suggest that uncertainty and the unknown is not 'out there' but right here, inside and intimate. Process Work shows that negotiating and growing at the edge brings us a future which cannot be predicted from the viewpoint of the identity. But it takes a big risk. It involves dying. And 'I' cannot do it.

In my judgement, the intellectual work of Jacques Derrida, namely the conceptuality of deconstruction, remains one the most rigorous existing attempts to deepen the questions of poststructuralism, and to develop an ethical and political practice beyond a repetition or reinstatement of moral certainties. And it is to this work that we will now turn, particularly Derrida's development of Heideggerian ontology (Derrida, 1989; Derrida, 1993; Heidegger, 1996).

Resources for reimagining the 'I'... Derrida and Heidegger

In this section I will introduce and contextualise Derrida's work, and consider the core aspect of deconstruction that I feel is central to theorising the edge and understanding the significance of Process Work. This aspect is what we can call Derrida's deconstruction of the 'metaphysics of presence,' framed within Martin Heidegger's search for 'the meaning of Being' (Heidegger, 1982; Heidegger, 1984; Heidegger, 1996). I want to make a connection between the 'metaphysics of presence' and what Process Work conceives of as state-oriented thinking. I feel that Process Work can be framed as an approach that takes hold of the implications of deconstruction and re-imagines the 'I' in a poststructuralist, deeply democratic vision for human progress.

The metaphysics of presence

In the broadest sense, what Derrida and Heidegger call the 'metaphysics of presence' is the underlying system of assumptions that we use to understand reality. They are trying to get us to focus on some of the deepest ideas that underlie common sense and to question whether these ideas really stand up to our full experience. I will say more about how they define the metaphysics of presence and their critique of it later in this chapter. For now, I want to sketch

their thinking and introduce my idea that the metaphysics of presence is related to what Process Work might call a state-oriented viewpoint and the dominance of consensus reality thinking. By this I mean a viewpoint that defines reality as only those things that are present or presentable, things we can reach a consensus about, the aspects of our experience that we can share and measure and confirm.

To help explain, let me describe the meaning of the term metaphysics in both an ordinary and a philosophical sense. In ordinary language today, the term 'metaphysical' is used to describe spiritual ideas that might be outside of conventional religious frameworks. Similarly, Metaphysics was originally the branch of philosophy that sought to explain how the intangible or spiritual world worked, while its partner branch, Physics, explained the rules of the material world. With the overwhelming success of scientific and technological ways of describing and managing the world, Physics now dominates, and Metaphysics, like much religious thinking, has become marginalised.

With the term 'metaphysics of presence' Derrida and Heidegger are trying to show the common metaphysical assumptions that track through all of Western philosophy – that are in essence part of all the different versions of Metaphysics from Plato in the fifth century B.C. to Kant in the eighteenth century and beyond. They emphasise that even if we claim not to believe in a spiritual world, we nonetheless inevitably rely on assumptions that cannot be understood without referencing something beyond physical reality. In other words, we all have a metaphysics – a set of ideas in the background about the nature of reality. In general, I think that Western metaphysical assumptions are state-oriented and consensus reality dominated and this is why a process-oriented paradigm is both challenging and significant for human progress.

In his monumental work, *Being and Time* Heidegger initially challenged philosophy by accusing it of only focusing on things we can know, e.g. rules of logic or moral guidelines, while missing the main point, namely the fact that we exist at all (Heidegger, 1996). He claimed that as a result, philosophy is reduced to being merely 'metaphysics' - an ungrounded discourse which is the unfortunate result of trying to establish truth while ignoring the fact of existence itself. Heidegger brought attention to what he calls the ontological difference: the difference between things that exist (beings) and the fact of existence (Being). He claimed that the result of forgetting the ontological difference is that our understanding of existence is reduced to what is present or presentable. This is why it is called the metaphysics of presence. Heidegger hoped to go beyond metaphysics and create a deeper understanding of human existence.

Derrida took this further and found that the metaphysics of presence was not a contained set of ideas that we could simply go beyond, or choose to agree with or not. Rather, he shows that metaphysics is an essential and unavoidable part of our communication system and cannot be exceeded in a simple way. He also said, in a tricky and, for me, exciting conclusion, metaphysics is always and already being exceeded anyway. In other words he demonstrated that there is no point trying to get beyond metaphysics, but there is a point in remarking the ways in which our everyday logic can never hold up. He brings attention to what I call the deconstructive opportunity within our most everyday experience in a way which I think is analogous to edge awareness.

Who likes deconstruction?

Deconstruction, it must be said, is controversial. So much so, it is hard to define and explain Derrida's thinking without some reference to the contention and disagreement surrounding his philosophical contributions. Over the last forty years, the idea of 'deconstruction' has been the

site of intense academic and even popular activity, both positive and negative.[29] The word deconstruction has passed into common language and Derrida's death in 2004 was remarked in the global news media, including some unflattering commentary by The New York Times and The Economist (Glorierux & Hasimbegovic, 2007, p.1). Many claim Derrida is the most significant philosopher of the late twentieth century, while conversely his work has provoked scathing dismissals and attacks from both sides of the political spectrum. This controversy, which has included vehement denigration of his work, is worth remarking because I think it reflects our cultural edge to the edge experience.

I said above that Derrida shows that metaphysics is about our communication system. And this is not simply about language or our representation of reality, but really about the deep structures of understanding that allow us to communicate our experience to others and even to ourselves. In deconstructing metaphysics, Derrida shows how any system of meaning will find itself relying on a concept that it is unable to question or explain, in order to stabilise and secure its meaning system. In other words, the ground of meaning is radical uncertainty. And this uncertainty is both unavoidable *and* generative. In my terms, this is another framing of the edge experience and its fundamental role in the nature of reality.

Critics accuse Derrida of being obscure and irrelevant but I agree instead with Jones (2010) that Derrida investigates vexed questions which strike to the core of everyday life. Introducing a special issue of *Business Ethics: A European Review*, dedicated to Derrida, Jones writes:

> Derrida [is] both enormously difficult at the same time that he is one of the most straightforwardly practical thinkers. Derrida insists on taking time, of giving time to matters that are indeed vexing (Jones, 2010, p. 237).

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[29] For a sense of both the breadth of influence, and the depth of controversy, associated with Derrida's work and the term deconstruction, see Fagan, Glorieux & Suetsugu, 2007; Mitchell, 2007; Rapaport, 2001.

It is because these vexing matters are threatening to our ordinary sense of agency and control that they only plague us in the dark of the night, and we push them aside to get on with the business of the day, so to speak. Yet as Jones points out, it is precisely in the bright light of day, in the everyday bustle of practice and pragmatics that we most need to make sense of the instabilities which actually dominate our experience:

> …in the world of practice, as it is so complacently referred to, rules and formalisms disarticulate themselves; they come apart in our hands, heads and hearts and, because of the apparently more pressing demands that are put on us by time and the demands of other Others, the most proper of rules are thrown in the dustbin (Jones, 2010, p. 236).

Derrida, he writes, 'gives us ways of thinking through such difficulties' and is accordingly 'above all […] a thinking that is immanently and immediately practical' (Jones, 2010, p. 237).

I also feel and hope to make clear that Derrida's work, while difficult, is neither idealist nor obscure, and it describes something that is in fact deeply familiar and everyday, though usually marginalised. Like edge awareness, the inherently and necessarily unstable processes that Derrida describes through deconstruction do not dissolve the concrete world of this and that. They breathe life into it.

As a practical example, think of the following scene: a well-meaning, good-hearted social worker is assisting a homeless person. The social worker identifies as a helper and sees the homeless person as part of the 'not-me', while marginalising their own experiences of feeling overworked and helpless. Meanwhile the homeless person identifies as needing help and sees the social worker as a powerful gatekeeper, while marginalising their own strength and competency in living on the streets. Edge awareness would mean noticing that the experiences of helper and help-needing are shared and only part of the bigger picture of each person. This perspective does not change the concrete situation each person finds themselves in, but might deconstruct the rigid

polarity of roles and allow these two people to relate in a less known and perhaps identity-changing interaction.

Heidegger's question: the meaning of being

I want to frame Derrida's ideas of deconstruction through his engagement with Martin Heidegger's existential philosophy because I find it gives me a way into deconstruction through my own embodied experience of asking who am I, and what am I? What is the nature of my existence?

As I said briefly above, Heidegger berates the history of Western philosophy for forgetting the 'ontological difference': that is the difference between existing things (beings) and the ground of their existence (Being).[30] The difference between these two 'things' he calls the ontological difference, though to call Being a thing is precisely the problem.[31] As an example of the ontological difference in practice, consider the following: does a meditative practice bring attention to my experience in this moment of existing, or does it focus on calming and mastering my thoughts for better psychological functioning? In the first case, I have the opportunity for what many would call a spiritual experience, encountering the mysterious fact that I exist. While in the latter case there is less chance of an encounter with Being because the meditation is primarily used as a tool for managing my being.

Contemporary philosophical thought, declared Heidegger in the 1920s, had become dogmatic because it had ignored the question of the meaning of Being (Heidegger, 1996, p. 1-12). This

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[30] How is it that thousands of years of sincere philosophical activity can have avoided this central aspect of existence, namely existence itself? The complexity and scope of Heidegger's answer to this question is well beyond my argument. For the most powerful contemporary development of this epochal argument, see (Nancy, 1997).

[31] In Joan Stambaugh's translation of *Being and Time* she avoids the use of capitalisation for the word "being" because it "risks implying that it is some kind of Super Thing or transcendent being" when this is not Heidegger's intention (Translator's Preface xiv, Heidegger, 1996). As will become clearer in my discussion of Derrida, there is no safeguard against this risk and inevitably metaphysics reasserts its law.

fundamental issue, that of the uncanny confrontation with existence itself, is at the essence of

deconstruction, although Derrida shows the limits of Heidegger's question and takes us even

deeper. Heidegger continued to emphasise that humanity was failing to confront the fact of

existence, as such, while blithely going forward with colonising and exploiting the natural

environment,[32] and building global systems of government:

> Man has already begun to overwhelm the entire earth and its atmosphere, to arrogate to himself
> in forms of energy the concealed powers of nature, and to submit future history to the planning
> and ordering of a world government. This same defiant man is utterly at a loss simply to say
> what *is;* to say *what* this *is* — that a thing *is*. (original italics Heidegger, 1984, p. 57)

He implies that the triumphs of twentieth century industrialisation and technology are

undermined by this continued failure to question that there are things at all. This is for me a

critique of a model of growth that simply crosses edges without waking up to the opportunity of

noticing that our sense of ourselves is challenged in the process. In contrast, an edge aware

model emphasises the importance of the edge experience and becoming aware of the processes

of growing, dying and relating at the edge.

Heidegger's context for raising the question of the meaning of being is the phenomenological

tradition. Phenomenology drew attention to how the phenomenon (that which shows itself) is

always appearing to some consciousness, consequently discriminating between lived experience

and objective knowledge (Husserl, 1989). Heidegger's complaint with phenomenology however

is that the issue of existence itself is still ignored. Inadvertently our focus is directed, and then

limited, to what can show itself, to what becomes present to consciousness. Heidegger tries to

expand phenomenology by not defining and limiting the essence of human existence to

consciousness. Instead he defines 'the being that we are' as a being for which that being is a

problem.

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[32] For the connection between Heidegger and eco-philosophy, see (James, 2002; Foltz, 1995, McWhorter, 1992).

Human being, or *Dasein* (literally There-being), says Heidegger, is the being for whom this being is an issue. Being disturbed by your own existence, is for Heidegger, what distinguishes human beings from other forms of existence. Or as Kurt Vonnegut puts it,

> Tiger got to hunt, bird got to fly; Man got to sit and wonder, 'Why, why, why?' (Vonnegut, 1998).

The existential question is crucially not the problem of existence in general but the confrontation with one's own existence. And I think this is exactly what edge awareness offers us. Trembling at the edge of who I think I am, exposed to the vulnerability of my limits, is a moment of facing the conditions of possibility for my sense of myself. I think it is a precious encounter.

Asking Heidegger's ontological question is the most everyday experience. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger argues that the meaning of being is not to be sought "outside," but in that which is closest to ourselves; he criticizes the neglect of the everyday (Heidegger, 1996, p. 41). It is in the everyday, Heidegger suggests, that the ontological difference can be exposed in the destabilising confrontation with the groundless ground of Being.[33] On one level I see it simply as an opening up to all levels of our experience, including particularly the uncertainty of the edge. Derrida imagines this confrontation in walking naked from the shower and meeting his cat in the hallway:

> I often ask myself, just to see, *who I am*—and who I am (following) at the moment when, caught naked, in silence, by the gaze of an animal, for example the eyes of a cat, I have trouble, yes, a bad time overcoming my embarrassment (Derrida, 2002b, p. 372).

I like this example because it poses the question in everyday life and it puts together finitude (the uniqueness of me, myself) and relationship (how I meet the other, the world). Derrida goes well

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[33] Reflecting critically on Heidegger's Nazi involvement, Critchley suggests it is precisely his micro-phenomenology that deserves recuperation: 'What has to be recovered from the wreckage of Heidegger's political commitment is his phenomenology of everyday life, the sheer banality of our contact with the world and with others' (Critchley, 1999, p. 240).

beyond Heidegger because he includes our relationship to animals and also asks, who am I

following, thus invoking the sphere of ghosts. Derrida, in a process-oriented move, affirms that

his ontological questioning happens in relationship to both human and non-human parts of the

world, and it happens in relationship to the past and the future, to figures who are not present in

the moment in any simple sense.

With his focus on human being as that being for which being is a problem, Heidegger goes on to

define human being as 'being-possible' rather than any particular some-thing. Being-possible

means that our existence is not only what and who we are now, but also what we may become:

> Dasein always understands itself in terms of its existence—in terms of a possibility of itself: to
> be itself or not itself. Dasein has either chosen these possibilities itself, or got itself into them,
> or grown up in them already (Heidegger, 1962, p. 33).

As he notes, this characteristic of being-possible is why we can say things like, *I am trying to*

become myself! I understand this to describe the possibility that spans both sides of an edge.

Being-possible includes what is present to our identity, and measurable in consensus reality, and

at the same time the signals of what is emerging from our secondary processes over our edges

and from other levels of our experience.

I think that Heidegger's proposal that we define human being by the characteristic of wondering

about our own existence is a recognition of a pervasive cultural edge to edges. I think this edge

to the edge is what drives the forgetting of the ontological difference that Heidegger feels is so

characteristic of Western civilisation and defines the metaphysics of presence.

Heidegger argues that the forgetting of the ontological difference prevents thought from

confronting the most significant aspect of existence, and this reduces philosophy to mere

metaphysics: 'The differentiation of Being and beings-although taken for granted everywhere-is

the unknown and ungrounded ground of all metaphysics' (Heidegger, 1982, p. 155). In other words, he is saying that metaphysics is defined by its failure to investigate its own foundation. The result of this failure, he argues, is the exhaustion of metaphysics: its culmination and fulfilment as nihilism (a sense of meaninglessness).[34]

Nihilism is not only a philosophical problem, but relates to a general sense of modern hopelessness, politically and existentially, that many contemporary commentators have noticed. For example, a contemporary Marxist remarks on a certain kind of hopelessness and depression that arises from the apparent impossibility of an individual's actions having an effect. Rosen-Carole describes the resulting sense of the meaninglessness of our actions as a deep characteristic of modernity. It is:

> the impotence of individual initiative under conditions of social reification and fragmentation, and thus to the tragic form of modernity: we cannot avoid and cannot accept the impotence of self-assertion. The infinite right of subjectivity, though undeniable, is a profound source of suffering; call it modernity's *pharmakon* [medicine or poison] (2010, p. 277).

When Rosen-Carole refers to the 'infinite right of subjectivity' he means our treasured ideas about ourselves as free-willed, empowered individuals. He is saying that the experience of individual disempowerment in the face of global, industrialised capitalism creates a shared sense of meaninglessness. After poststructuralism, after losing trust in the subject of humanism, there is a need to create a new ground for politics and I think that a process-oriented paradigm offers hope and resources for this task. I think that Heidegger's ideas about nihilism link the need to re-imagine the 'I' and the relation between individuals and the social field, with the failure to confront the fact of existence itself.

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[34] It is beyond my scope to provide a broader analysis of nihilism. For an account of nihilism before Nietzsche, see (Gillespie, 1995). For a post-Nietzchean account see (Critchley, 1997).

Metaphysics, Heidegger argues, leads to nihilism because it attempts to understand Being on the basis of what exists (beings) and tries to ground itself in the present. It results in meaninglessness because it misses the most important question of meaning, the meaning of Being. Heidegger sees an opportunity in nihilism and does not think of it just as a 'negation that can be set to rights at once by an energetic affirmation" (Heidegger, 1982, p. 21).

Heidegger finds that western metaphysics has moved inexorably toward loss of meaning because the question of the nothing cannot be properly asked: 'the essence of nihilism consists in not taking the question of the nothing seriously' (Heidegger, 1982, p. 22). He argues that Western nihilism, rather than being a meditation on the nothing (the nihil) has actually been "the essential nonthinking of the essence of the nothing" (Heidegger, 1982, p. 22). Metaphysics, he says, is trapped by a logic that conflates the nothing with not-being: the nothing cannot be a being because then it would be something, and if it cannot be a being then it must be pure nullity. When we look for something, he says, and do not find it, we find "nothing" and thus tend to think of nothing as the not-beingness of a thing. The nothing gets defined merely as the absence of something, and consequently existence gets equated with presence. The non-thinking of the nothing has restricted metaphysics to a logic of the present or the presentable. Not being able to go deeper into the meaning of nothing is for Heidegger the same mistake as forgetting the question of Being and only focusing on existing things.

In contrast, Heidegger wants to think the nothing as something that is neither a being, nor the absence of being. He consequently directs thinking inward, to the difference between beings and Being, in other words to the fact of existence, as such. The thought of this difference is "the groundless ground" which should motivate philosophy. Being is always prior to all manner of

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existing things yet it cannot be said to be a ground prior, before or behind beings because it is not itself an entity. He writes:

> Being is what is most reliable; it never unsettles us with doubt. [...] And yet Being offers us no ground and no basis — as beings do — to which we can turn, on which we can build, and to which we can cling. Being is the rejection of the role of such grounding; it renounces all grounding, is abyssal. (Heidegger, 1982, p. 192-3)

Hence Heidegger insists that the problem of ground does not require 'an improved or more "radical" concept' of Being but simply 'to experience in it the differentiation of Being and beings' (Heidegger, 1982, p. 187). Heidegger claims that 'our' relation to Being is 'discordant'; it is structured by oppositions, confusions and paradoxes. This is not a harmonious alignment with a higher power. The dominance of metaphysical thinking means that we 'stand outside that still unexperienced discord of the relation to Being' (Heidegger, 1982, p. 194). Heidegger's critique of the 'metaphysics of presence' is a critique of our historical, cultural bias toward securing a ground rather than facing the discordant, abyssal spacing of Being.

I propose that the significance of Heidegger's 'unexperienced discord' is analogous to the opportunity available in identifying and working with the edge and adopting a process-oriented perspective. What Heidegger describes as metaphysics' culmination as nihilism gives us another way to understand the poststructuralist challenge I discussed above. Loss of meaning and purpose occurs if we do not confront the fact of our existence, if we cannot tolerate the uncertainty at the center of reality: the groundless ground of Being.

Finding deconstruction on the inside

In this section I want to explain how Derrida's ideas of deconstruction take Heidegger's questions even further, and help me understand the edge concept.

We saw that for Heidegger, the consequence of forgetting the ontological difference is the metaphysical delimitation of Being as presence. Heidegger believed that his question of the meaning of Being allows the existential analytic to escape this limiting predetermination, but Derrida's deeply respectful engagement has shown that an escape is not possible. However, the experience of the question, the opening up to the uncertainty at the center of reality, is in fact an access to what (already) exceeds metaphysics. Derrida demonstrates both Heidegger's inevitable failure to escape the metaphysics of presence and the discovery of an opening that already exists within this system.

On not escaping metaphysics

Derrida shows that deconstruction is already underway, within the system of metaphysics, just as the edge, which threatens our identity is also what generates and maintains it. In other words, deconstruction is not something to be done so the theorist can breathe a sigh of relief at having seen through the limitations of metaphysics. The subtlety of Derrida's thinking is that 'metaphysics' does not reside somewhere, hopefully elsewhere, or in fact anywhere containable. If the problem of ground, if the question of Being, is not negotiated, traversed, and constantly reinvoked, it will only be displaced onto another, unacknowledged ground. In an analogous way, I am claiming, the passion of the edge is an opening to a question which can never be mastered nor exhausted; it is a constant exposure to that which constitutes our identity, that which holds us. Accordingly, Derrida outlines a formal criterion for deconstruction which is that the resources for unpacking the coherence of a system will be found within that system itself:

> one may expect a priori, and in *the most formal* fashion, that the "critique" — or rather the denunciatory determination of a limit, the demarcation, the *de-limitation* — which at any given moment is believed to be applicable to a "past" text is to be deciphered within it (original italics, Derrida, 1982a, p. 60).

This insight that the deconstructive resources are already within the system of metaphysics is akin to Process Work's idea that the solution to disturbances is within the disturbance itself. Derrida sees this as a 'formal necessity' meaning it is not an accident or a design error. The point is not to create a better metaphysics that would be beyond the uncertainty of deconstruction. Derrida is saying that uncertainty is built into our system of securing meaning and truth *on purpose* so to speak:

> It is on the basis of this formal necessity that one must reflect upon the conditions for a discourse exceeding metaphysics (Derrida, 1982a, p. 61).

For me this is the deepest, most exciting insight. Derrida affirms that the challenge is not to install another version of ground but to look differently at how we negotiate with instability and uncertainty. As a result, deconstruction can be best understood as a practice, an ongoing responsibility to become aware of the deconstructive encounter with the uncertainty at the center of reality.

Encountering Being beyond presence

As we have seen, in Heidegger's argument the forgetting of the ontological difference restricts metaphysics to understanding existence in the realm of the present, or the presentable. This is the 'metaphysics of presence,' against which deconstruction is addressed. Derrida extends Heidegger's insight about the metaphysical predetermination of Being as presence and goes further to expose the privilege accorded to 'presence' in securing our meaning system. He uses the example of presence to show a general principle about the way we privilege stability and groundedness over uncertainty and the unknown. I think this is analogous to the privilege that state-oriented and consensus reality thinking gives to the intentional 'I,' the viewpoint from inside the edges of my identity.

Derrida's deconstructive method closely attends to a piece of literature or philosophy (a system of meaning) and shows that its power relies on referencing concepts that it cannot account for. There is always one key term on which the system of meaning relies, but cannot explain. Deconstruction names and thematizes this necessary dependency on a radically uncertain ground; it does not create it. I remember Heidegger's idea about experiencing the 'unexperienced discord of the relation to Being' to help understand this challenging idea of deconstruction. It is the passion of the edge experience. We must constantly face and suffer the uncertainty of the edge, tolerating the moment when we lose the ground of our identity. We depend on the edge to have a sense of ourselves, even as the edge experience inevitably threatens our stability and security.

An important conclusion in the deconstruction of the metaphysics of presence is analogous to the process-oriented idea that the part always contains the whole. This idea does not sit comfortably within our 'metaphysics of presence.' From our common sense we would have to say that the whole cannot be present in the part; it simply does not make logical sense. If the whole were present in the part, then we would not have a part of the whole, we would have the whole! As I will show now, Derrida deconstructs our ideas about language and representation, and shows that it is our sense of what it means to be *present* that needs to be challenged.

Derrida examines ideas about language and finds that one of the symptoms of an unexamined metaphysics of presence is that presence is always assumed to precede representation (Derrida, 1976; Bennington and Derrida, 1993 p. 42-63). There is an ordinary, unremarkable assumption that presence comes first and then we re-present it with language. Derrida also notices that we attach a value system attached to this assumed relationship between presence and representation. The sign for something stands in for an absent presence, and representation is always a second

rate version of presence, defined as a lack. Thus we often think of language as the noise that interferes with ideal communication, that which potentially distorts, defers and distances true (intelligible) presence. If we could only communicate directly, without the mediation of language, then we could have more authentic connections.

Challenging this viewpoint, Derrida shows that the word and concept 'presence' depends on the impossibility of pure presence. His argument is not easy to follow, because it is not a logical argument but a way of showing the limits of logic. I will try and give a sense of it here because I feel that Derrida is seeking to expose the same aspect of reality that we see in the edge. The edge is something that is not something present in itself; yet it is not nothing, it is not merely the absence of presence. It is an experience of process: of being not just this or that, but of experiencing the relationship between parts.

So, let us return to Derrida's deconstruction of metaphysics. He starts by affirming that as a word, the meaning of 'presence' emerges from language. Language is known to be a system of signs rather than a one-to-one correspondence between 'things' and their words (otherwise we would get a duplication of the world rather than a language). Meaning then relies on the relationship between words, i.e. we know what 'presence' means because of its relationship to the word 'absence.' To describe this interdependence, Derrida plays with the word 'text' and imagines language as an interwoven textile of words either spoken (phoneme) or written (grapheme):

> This interweaving results in each "element" — phoneme or grapheme — being constituted on the basis of the trace within it of the other elements of the chain or system. This interweaving, this textile, is the *text* produced only in the transformation of another text (Derrida, 1982b, p. 26).

Each element contains other elements inside it - as traces—and although these elements are not 'present' in any simple sense we nonetheless feel their effect in the background field that creates meaning. This is a challenge to how we define what is present and it is analogous to how Process Work draws attention to the disturbing yet marginalised signals of the secondary process and to information that is held in non-Consensus Reality levels of our experience.

Concluding his deconstruction of our ideas about language, Derrida finds that:

> Nothing, neither among the elements nor within the system is anywhere simply present or absent. There are only, everywhere, differences and traces of traces (Derrida, 1982b, p. 26).

He shows therefore that the word and concept of presence thus depends on the impossibility of what we mean by the word presence, a conclusion which is not logically acceptable and yet it is demonstrable (Bennington, & Derrida, 1993).

But Derrida's work does not imply that presence is bad, or does not exist. He does not claim that there is no experience or no reality outside of language as if deconstruction was some kind of border guard making materiality inaccessible. Thus for example, Derrida, following Heidegger, asks, first of all, 'How could one think Being and time otherwise than on the basis of the present, in the form of the present, to wit a certain now in general from which no experience, by definition, can ever depart?' (1982a, p. 38). And responds by confirming that, after all, '[t]he experience of thought and the thought of experience have never dealt with anything but presence'. To exceed metaphysics is not to get outside it, but to notice that there is nonetheless something else, something which is neither simply present nor simply absent:

> for Heidegger it is not a question of proposing that we think otherwise, if this means to think some other thing. Rather, it is *thinking that which could not have been, nor thought, otherwise.* (emphasis added, Derrida, 1982a, p. 38)

The key is, as Heidegger notes, 'not to get out of the circle, but to get in it in the right way' (Heidegger, 1996, p. 143). Derrida observes that something happens if we reside in this *thinking not otherwise* that he calls 'a certain trembling':

> There is produced in the thought of the impossibility of the otherwise, in this not otherwise, a certain difference, a certain trembling, a certain decentering that is not the position of an other center. An other center would be an other now; on the contrary, this displacement would not envisage an absence, that is an other presence: it would replace nothing. (Derrida, 1982a, p. 38)

This certain trembling is analogous to the passion of the edge experience. Derrida gains from Heidegger's thinking of Being the possibility of something which while not being something (presentable) is nonetheless not nothing. Similarly, I think, edge awareness opens us to an encounter with what is not exactly present, but certainly not nothing. Process Work attends to our ordinary assessment of any particular presenting issue, which is usually an assessment of the state of things. How are things in the moment? What is present? But Process Work is also interested in what is *presenting* itself but has not yet solidified into something available in consensus reality. Process Work's process-oriented viewpoint focuses on signals of what is not (yet) present, on what is emerging, on what is almost happening but not quite, on what is often disturbing to the ordinary viewpoint. Process Work values what is happening over the edge of someone's identity and also, most importantly, the underlying field that links both the identity and that which is not-me and disturbs me. Mindell puts it like this in a class description:

> Processwork, or process oriented psychology focuses on the everyday description of human events, and the dream-like background. Why? Most problems are due to following only one part of nature and not both. In the background of all natural events are subtle fields; powerful, gravity like forces which move us.
> Experience of this field's essence gives us the sense of the power behind dreams and observable reality (Mindell, 2012).

I think that the field that Mindell is describing is analogous to what Heidegger calls Being; and the deconstructive encounter that exists within the metaphysics of presence is analogous to how Process Work understands the relationship between consensus reality and non-consensus reality

aspects of our experience. On the one hand, consensus reality is true and unavoidable and on the other hand these facts are not everything, and certainly not where the resources for change usually lie. From a process-oriented perspective, what cannot be explained in consensus reality does not, therefore, not exist; rather non-causal or not-yet-causal connections can be unfolded from dreaming and essence level experiences.

Thinking identity differently

Edge theory and Process Work, I think, give us access to the deconstructive resources within our concept of identity. Edge awareness reveals identity as an unstable, momentary equilibrium that has power and is useful, irreplaceable in fact, but is not a stable state or solid ground. The edge can be a deconstructive encounter because the edge is not in fact some-*thing* that we can grasp hold of. 'We' are generated by the edge and therefore our relationship to the edge must always be one of dependence rather than mastery and control. The edge represents the resources within the metaphysical system of psychology (i.e. the concepts of identity, self, intention etc.) that can exceed that system. Edge awareness opens up the deconstructive opportunity within our concepts of self and identity.

I have said that deconstruction *reveals* what is already there. In other words our exposure to the deconstructive instability is inherent, impossible to avoid. It is built in; it is a *fact* and not something that a crafty deconstructionist does to spoil our nice stable reality. There is a risk, however, of interpreting deconstruction as creating yet another transcendent Truth: that is, claiming to have access to a secure ground, instead of practicing a constant opening to the uncertainty at the heart of reality. Process Work and the edge concept also faces this same risk, because it is in the nature of our common sense, the inescapable logic of the metaphysics of presence, that which we cannot do without.

To understand this risk, and how Derrida navigates it, let me first clarify the difference between the terms transcendental and transcendence. These terms are important to understand how the edge concept can avoid becoming simply metaphysical or theological. The term transcendental refers to the conditions that make something possible. Thus for example, I could say that time and space are transcendental for experience. There can be no such thing as experience without time or space. In contrast, the term transcendent refers to something that goes beyond tangible reality. These two terms can be aligned in a spiritual context, so for example we might think of the Tao or God as both transcendent (beyond material existence) and transcendental (the necessary condition for existence). In this case, a transcendent Being (the divine) is understood as the ground of all existing beings.

I commented in the first chapter that the edge could not be some*thing* as it is that which brings a something into being, and in this sense is a condition of possibility. However, I cautioned against thinking this as a straightforwardly Kantian transcendental condition. The danger of a transcendental analysis is that it establishes yet another stable ground and therefore avoids thinking the problem of stabilisation (Rosen-Carole, 2010, p.264). We risk simply repeating metaphysics by instating a new transcendental condition as the ground of meaning.

In the discussion above, I explained Derrida's deconstruction of our ideas about language. In that context, the idea of 'Presence' is both transcendent and transcendental for our understanding of language and representation. Derrida shows that the idea of presence is repeatedly mobilised to authorise and secure systems of meaning (discourses) (Hart, 1991, p. 184-6). Discursive authority is always grounded by reference to a moment of presence that never actually occurs in the text itself (Derrida, 1973). The authority of presence is the self-grounding ground which is the philosophical grail, 'the thought of thought, the pure act, the prime mover' (Derrida, 1982a,

p. 52-3), an authority self-contained in the presence of the present. Metaphysical presence is what Derrida calls a 'transcendental signified' (Derrida, 1982b, p. 19-20).

Derrida is critical of the function of the 'transcendental signified' because it appears to fix meaning from within language by asserting its connection to an outside of language: the real truth, God, the origin etc. Building on Heidegger, Derrida argues that it is not just Being, but a series of substitutes for Being that carry the authority of presence and regulate metaphysics, the philosophical *logos*, our framework for determining truth. Being and its substitutes are transcendental signifieds and they stabilize a discourse by representing its condition of possibility. Thus in our example of language, representation stands in for the authorising presence which is never presented as such, but always deferred. The transcendental signified, generalised as the condition of possibility for conceptuality, is the 'possibility of thinking *a concept signified in and of itself*, a concept simply present for thought, independent of a relationship to language' (Derrida, 1982b, p. 19). It is the assertion of a self-grounding ground.

Derrida's purpose is to show how our ordinary common sense uses the idea of presence, under the table so to speak, to assert a certainty that cannot ever, actually be secured. He is pointing out a hierarchy in the metaphysics of presence. Presence dominates our understanding of reality and negates other aspects of experience. Derrida's point is akin to noticing the rank, and the limitations, of a state-oriented, consensus reality dominated viewpoint. Consensus reality is an important part of our experience, but if reality is defined as only those perceptions that we can reach consensus about, we subjugate the value of other aspects.

Deconstruction avoids this risk because it foregrounds transcendental conditions without producing a transcendental ground. For example, it draws attention to the way that language

relies on each word having traces of other words within it, in order to convey meaning, thus complicating what we mean by the presence of a word or a meaning. It exposes a condition of possibility for language but it does not give us a new version of presence, a new, external source of meaning. In the same way, I am proposing that the edge generates and maintains identity, but it is not something in itself, like a soul or a deep essence of self.

In deconstructing our ideas about language, Derrida (1982a) thematises the 'otherwise' as 'a mode of difference which is transcendental yet incapable of forming a firm ground' because 'it must always differ from itself' (Hart, 1991 68, 187). It *is* not, because it is not *something*; yet is not nothing. Deconstruction is thus a challenge to the independence of the transcendental realm, not merely an assertion of something that we cannot put into words (Hart, 1991). Deconstruction works by 'maintaining as legible the trace of a passage through the traditional opposition, and by giving this opposition a radical uncertainty' (Bennington and Derrida, 1993 p. 279). It does not identify a new transcendent something, which could be the ground of all being, but patiently, relentlessly keeps drawing attention to the uncertainty that cannot be evaded.

Similarly, Process Work's edge theory can open us up to the uncertainty at the heart of reality when it focuses on the edge as an experience, as a phenomenon that must be each time traversed, with an outcome that can never be secured in advance because it exceeds the intentionality of the 'I' that confronts it.

Embracing the uncertainty at the center of reality

The key benefit of edge awareness is to support a shift from an identity-driven paradigm, trapped in the confines of what we know and can control, toward what Mindell has termed *deep democracy* and a process-oriented paradigm.

To make this shift means embracing the experience of uncertainty inherent in the edge, otherwise we simply put in place another identity-ruler, just like the social revolutions which create further tyranny. If for example, we abandon the 'I' for a concept of God, we risk recreating the domination of the 'I' in the shape of the divine. In this way the Scientific enlightenment was the overthrow of God and the Church followed by the elevation of Science as God. The King is dead, long live the King! For here we are again, subjected to another kind of tyranny by scientific instrumentality, the laws of economics, and the crushing, depressing rulership of individual consumerism.

In an ethical and social arena, edge awareness can take us beyond polarisation and dichotomies, and toward what I would call, after Mindell, a co-creative model of diversity. Edge theory and edgework practice provides a way to manage the relationship with something that 'you' are not, hopefully avoiding the painful escalation into stale-mate conflicts.

And the wonderful and terrifying implication of edge theory is that the thing which you are not, is right there on the other side of your edges. Alterity, a philosophical word for otherness, is holding you and making you who you are. As Derrida comments,

> "Leaving room for the other" does not mean "I have to make room for the other." The other is in me before: the ego (even the collective ego) implies alterity as its own condition. There is no "I" that ethically makes room for the other, but rather an "I" that is in itself in a state of self-deconstruction, of dislocation. (Derrida & Ferraris, 2001, p. 84)

Consequently, the ethical and moral imperative to deal well with diversity, to make room for 'the other,' is really about living with ourselves. Derrida is saying that the other is not someone or something outside that can be encountered at one's choosing, at a time and place most conducive to "ethical" behaviour. The confrontation with the other is already occurring. In my thinking of the edge, this confrontation reflects the fact that our sense of self as an 'I' requires a relationship

with what we are not. At our edges we discover who we are. We may grow and become more of ourselves through this encounter (relationship), or we deepen our experience of our own unique and particular viewpoint (finitude).

Process Work potentially exceeds the metaphysics of presence because it opens the subject to the presentation of the present, to the 'presencing' that reveals and conceals Being, as Heidegger would say. In encountering and working out at my edges, I notice that there is always more. Such an encounter exposes my essential vulnerability to what is beyond 'me,' and I hurry to master it. But I must always be too late, since I rely on my edges to have an experience of myself. Re-imagining the 'I' means not marginalising this vulnerability but embracing it. For even though I might momentarily identify with my wholeness, I am always divided again by my edges. It is inevitable that 'I' cannot ever master the full presence from which I speak (which speaks me), yet I can take responsibility for the finitude that I am, and bring this into relationship with the world.

An open paradigm that cherishes the deconstructive encounter

In the first chapter we discussed how the Process Work entails an open paradigm. As Dworkin explains, this is a defining characteristic:

> One of the most unusual aspects of a process-oriented psychology is that it is based on the philosophy of an open paradigm. The process worker needs […] a reminder that no patterns are fixed, and that even a well-trained perceptual system can do little more than serve as a tool with which to grasp a fleeting glimpse of something which may be ultimately unfathomable (Dworkin, 1984, p. 88).

But accompanying this move come two risks. First, the risk of sliding into a nihilistic relativism where nothing means anything anymore, where we are at sea, lost in a flow of this and that without any ground to secure values and truth. The goal of Process Work training is to increase an individual's fluidity - to work with edges and thereby develop more flexibility, more

experiential and behavioural range, more options. Does Process Work therefore lead to the dissolution of perspective? Is it in that sense relativism and opening the way to nihilism and moral lassitude? By not 'choosing the divine' does Process Work imply an opening up to everything and therefore condoning evil?

Similarly to Process Work, deconstruction exposes the radical and inescapable opening of all systems, all programs. Critics of Derrida then accuse him of relativism, nihilism and responsibility for the uncertainty of this radical opening. But the most interesting readings of deconstruction notice that it is not something that one does. Rather, it is bringing attention to something that is happening in any case, whether anyone likes it or not. Thus Derrida affirms that deconstruction refers to 'a certain dislocation that is in fact regularly repeated' not only in philosophical texts but also 'in experience period, in social, historical, economic, technical, military, etc., "reality"' (Derrida, 1995, p. 356). Derrida insists that deconstruction is not an individual activity; it 'is carried — and thus exceeded — by much broader, more obscure and powerful processes, between the earth and the world' (Derrida, 1995, p. 357). Derrida thus rejects the idea of a heroic critic who would deconstruct a difficult text and expose its weakness, and conversely rejects the implication that deconstruction is something that he is doing to texts, society, or moral values.

I think that Process Work has a deconstructive approach because it has an open paradigm but does not abandon the ground for groundlessness and a relativistic nihilism. Rather it is an awareness practice that insists on constantly re-encountering the shifting ground. Thus for example, as we saw in the previous chapter, Process Work highlights the opportunity of *growing deeper* at the edge as the practice of finding the essence of your one-sidedness. You find the ground of your experience, the essence of your perspective, and paradoxically this is the

mechanism for developing fluidity, for opening up to the other. This supports a profoundly optimistic philosophy that affirms the chance that the future will not be simply a repetition of the past: not "anything goes" but maybe something other than the scheduled program. What is interesting is the *process*: an ongoing encounter, described by the system of metaphysics yet not containable within it.

The second risk is that of establishing a 'transcendental signifier' (e.g. The Tao, the Self, teleology) that purports to secure a ground for meaning, while missing the opportunity to embrace the uncertainty in which we tremble and come to life. As I've been discussing in this chapter, I think Process Work manages these risks through its edge awareness. The edge aware model of growth with its emphasis on feedback, explained in the first chapter, is a critical part of how a process-oriented paradigm engages with uncertainty as a practice.

Mindell has explained that he is seeking a Grand Unified Theory (GUT) or a Theory of Everything (TOE) (Mindell, 2010-2012). And at the surface, this certainly seems the opposite of an open paradigm and the poststructuralist direction. With all the Grand Narratives like Race and Colonialism, The Story of Man, Capitalism, thoroughly exposed for their self-interested corruption, my poststructuralist side must be allergic to a GUT or a TOE. If there were anything I should have learnt, it is that universal theories do not work, and worse, they are hurtful to individuals and groups. But a process-oriented paradigm shows that it does not have to be an either/or – either an oppressive closed system or an open, relativistic free-for-all. I am inspired by Mindell's deeply democratic vision, and dream with him that a GUT or a TOE could incorporate the essential openness of any system, could respect the importance of uncertainty, of diversity, of non-linearity, of change, and still honor our need for grounding and direction - in

other words could be a unifying theory of process rather than the deadening rules of a closed system.

Conclusion

> *The openness of the future is worth more; that is the axiom of deconstruction, that on the basis of which it has always set itself in motion and which links it, as with the future itself, to otherness, to the priceless dignity of otherness, that is to say, to justice.*
> *(Derrida, 2002a, p. 105)*

At the edge, in what I have begun calling a deconstructive encounter, I discover what Derrida calls the openness of the future. The deconstructive, process-oriented idea is that what is outside the system of part and whole is not another part which is 'really outside,' but an inner disturbance which unsettles, and sets in motion, the interaction and relationship between parts. This inner disturbance, that Mindell has at one time called a 'tickle,' is not another part and cannot be understood from any one part. I see this as the gift of the edge: an inner disturbance that creates the possibility of process, even though it creates and maintains states. What is outside the system is the contact between the parts, that which is neither finite nor infinite but which allows us to know the difference between these two parts.

In the last chapter I suggested that the edge confronts us with a certain, inherent weakness. It brings a recognition that our sense of ourselves as one who can act and choose responsibly, is undermined and threatened by the very structure (the edge) which makes it possible. And it turns out that this structure of exposure and undermining has been identified and celebrated over the last few decades in the philosophical debates of poststructuralism.

In this chapter, I have brought in poststructuralist thinking to help articulate what is so mysterious and difficult about edges. Deconstruction helps me make sense of the edge phenomenon. The beauty of deconstruction is that it celebrates the porosity of every kind of distinction, every border and boundary. It shows that the whole is present in every part, showing that the distinction between part and whole is both meaningful and simultaneously impossible to secure. Like Process Work, it embraces the uncertainty at the center of reality and shows that the true *outside* is not anywhere else - it is right here, intimate and interior, available to us just on the other side of our edge.

Conclusion: A welcoming of something new and old

> *It is a welcoming of something new, a stranger that might have been in our midst all along (Jones, 2010, p. 235).*

In this paper, I hope I have shown that 'the edge' is a potent concept with implications for understanding both everyday psychological experiences, social and political issues and profound existential questions. I tried to show that the edge concept describes a difficult, yet very everyday experience. It is an encounter with the unknown and can be terrifying, yet with edge awareness, with an understanding of the concept and the ability to work with the experience, we can welcome this stranger, welcome the new that has been with us all along.

I have explored a few of these implications though I know I have barely scratched the surface of the topic. I feel that exploring the concept of edges and edgework is a research project I could do for many years. With this Final Project I feel I have made a start, and hopefully a contribution to the development of Process Work theory.

I think the power of the edge concept and the contribution of this project is to link apparently different phenomena, and move between psychological, socio-political and existential questions.

For example, I have discussed how on a physical level, our finitude, our mortality is constituted by our skin (spatial edge) and our life span (temporal edge). Embodiment is the edges of our bodies in both space and time. As a psychological and social dynamic, the edge generates and sustains our personal and group identities. The edge is an inner experience of being blocked in my behaviour or perceptions because of my identity, because of who I think I am. While at its essence or on a symbolic level, I think of the edge as simply difference; it is what allows us to distinguish between one experience or perception and another, to notice that there is a *this* and a *that*.

In the first chapter, I synthesised existing Process Work literature and found that the edge is simultaneously a descriptive term that names the spatial and temporal experience of perceptual and behavioural limits, while simultaneously foregrounding how the limit is a dynamic phenomena and a process of interaction.   The edge is a place and a moment in time and it is an event—things happen at the edge.

A core idea in the first chapter is that the edge creates identity. It is the boundary that separates us and also the container that holds us. From a psychological perspective, edges, writes Mindell, 'make life seem more comfortable' (Mindell, 2000a, p. 54). They have this effect because edges protect us from disturbing experiences by excluding certain perceptions as irrelevant or meaningless, or rejecting them because they conflict with our intentions. Unfortunately, or fortunately the experience of comfort is not usually enough for us in the long term.

In the first chapter I also introduced a more abstract philosophical discussion and proposed that a function of the edge is to create finitude. To be finite is to be separate, distinct, bounded, defined and different from everything else. With the idea of finitude, I am referring to the sense of an

edge as the boundary and limit of a particular entity. The phenomena of an 'edge' at the deepest level, the essence of the edge, is what creates the difference between the local, particular, specific some-thing (some*one*, some*body*) and the infinite, the general, the all. Having an edge allows a distinction between me and you, between this and that. It gives me a location - this body, this lifetime, this geographic place, this historical moment. And a finite, bounded entity is what is necessary for *experience*.   The finite is the condition of possibility for experience because there needs to be an 'I' that can have that experience - there needs to be a container within which experience can happen. The word experience is another way to represent what we do not understand, another way to imply the mystery of consciousness - the reality of *mind,* of subjectivity.

But the exciting and profound implication of edge theory is that in order to create the finite, we need an edge, that is a boundary between what is bounded and what is not. And this edge is not something in itself but is the relationship to what is not bounded; it is a zone of encounter with what is not *this*, not *me*, an encounter with the rest, the infinite. In other words, the very source of our separateness is also the possibility of connection and relationship. The relationship function of edges is one reason why, despite our undoubted finitude, we also experience growth and have experiences of the infinite. I feel my own infinite nature when I dream and experience things well beyond my ordinary, daily embodied self. In this sense, the edge as a limiting finitude creates the unique surface of my particular given being and is paradoxically what connects me to the infinite, to that which is beyond my limits. Because the infinite is not just outside; it is not only what is over the edge of my finitude. I can experience myself as the universe, and feel that I have within me all the possible roles and perspectives that appear in the world outside. Indeed, a

powerful edgework technique is an attitude of 'making a home' for all my diverse parts (Mindell Seminars, 2011-12).

In the second chapter, I used the Christian Easter story of the Passion to talk about the difficulties of the edge from the perspective of the experiencing 'I.' And I proposed that growing, dying and relating were three interconnected processes that occur at edges. I explored how the edge represents a primary and very basic experience of vulnerability. We are vulnerable to what is unknown and (apparently) outside us. At the extreme, this is the vulnerability represented by death - the big unknown, the unknowable – but vulnerability is also about our social dependency, our necessary contact with others. Edge awareness provides an opportunity to acknowledge and recognise this vulnerability: our essential and primary openness to the other and to the process between self and other(s), (human and non-human) that always necessarily precedes our conscious intentions. Opening up to this vulnerability is not abandoning intentionality or overthrowing the 'I'; it is not replacing the tyranny of intention with the tyranny of submission. Instead, Process Work invites us to *work out at the edge gym*.

In the third and final chapter, I showed how the passion of the edge, the difficulty of edges, is not only a personal and psychological phenomenon but also manifests at a cultural and philosophical level. I proposed that what Process Work might call a state-oriented viewpoint and the dominance of consensus reality thinking is analogous to what poststructuralist philosophy has called the metaphysics of presence. This viewpoint reduces reality to only those things that are present or presentable, things we can reach a consensus about, and marginalises the importance of other aspects of our experience including the edge and also non-consensus levels of reality. I proposed that edge awareness is a way to open up to the existential recognition that what makes 'me' possible simultaneously threatens my identity by contamination with what I am

(apparently) not. This is an opening up to the uncertainty at the center of reality and it is the passion of the edge and a deconstructive encounter.

A theme that has spanned all of the chapters has been the idea of psychological growth. In the first chapter, I introduced the idea of an 'edge aware' model of psychological growth, and suggested that it had implications for how we might think about growth in general. In the second chapter, I suggested that social 'growth' relies on and is driven by edgework, by considering the relationship between individual edges, group edges and social change. While in the third chapter I showed edge awareness can help us understand social and cultural growth, by considering a philosophical and cultural debate about human progress that has occurred under the umbrella of 'poststructuralism.' I have suggested that edge awareness and Process Work tools give us a way to re-imagine and re-create new possibilities for human progress, new ways to access the resources that lie beyond our ordinary known worlds.

I have found that Process Work and the edge theory bring together the existential and the psychological in a way that exposes psychology to its limits and grounds the existential analysis in a human, pragmatic humanist project: how can we live better with diversity? How can we flourish in the encounter with the unknown, and not simply rush to control, conquer, and colonise? Colonising relies on having greater power than the other, and history shows us the tragic consequences. On the other hand, the 'I' must grow, it wants to expand - but can this expansion be something other than submitting the unknown to the grand intentions of the 'I'?

I think that to escape psychology's potentially normalising paradigm, to open up psychology to the question of the meaning of being, means accepting the deconstructive imperative, that we *must* traverse uncertainty - not as a moral directive, but as an inescapable necessity. And a key

point I think is that there is also a technical and practical difficulty in this moment. Do we have the tools to manage the encounter in a different way?

Process Work provides some of these tools. And more importantly it provides a framework to understand why we need the tools, to assess techniques and understand why they work, and to develop new technologies as we go.

Further research would examine the tools in more detail, but I hope we have seen already the core of the framework. Process Work shifts our focus from the identity, the viewpoint of the ordinary self, which is a part of our whole self, a small you, contained and maintained by edges, to a perspective that attends to the experience on both sides of the edge. Process Work values experiences from both sides of the edge, and in particular the unfolding of less known and disturbing parts. It seeks to facilitate the interaction between the different sides, and cultivate the ability to shift fluidly between diverse experiences in an awareness practice that Mindell is most recently calling *the universe dance*. This perspective relies on a practice of edgework and, while not necessarily always about 'crossing edges,' it is a *growth* of the identity and an increase in *fluidity* (the capacity to identify with a diversity of your experience without becoming stuck).

Process Work's theory and practice of edgework is, I believe, a critical, poststructuralist contribution to unfolding the future in which sustainability, living within our finitude, is possible and not merely a constraint, but an exciting encounter with the untapped resource of diversity. I feel that the Process Work paradigm and the value it places on *fluidity*, can support a model of psychological growth and human evolution which avoids the hubris of a purely ego-focused, human-centerd intentionality while not losing an interest in agency, responsibility and choice.

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