

## **Therapeutic Theatre and Theatrical Therapy**

The Shared Dreamworld of Psycho-physical Acting and  
Process Oriented Therapy

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## Introduction

In February 2009 I spent five weeks studying Process Oriented Psychology also known as ProcessWork (PW) at 2009 Winter Intensive at the Process Work Institute in Portland, Oregon. I decided to commit to studying PW after I flirted with it in a theatrical setting where Phelim McDermott<sup>i</sup> introduced to us the work of Arnold (Army) Mindell<sup>ii</sup> at Michael Chekhov International Workshop 2006 in Windsor, Canada. There I had my first glimpse into the close relationship between my specialization which is the psycho-physical acting training mainly based in the technique of Michael Chekhov<sup>iii</sup> (Chekhov technique) and PW which is a cross disciplinary approach initially applied in psychotherapy but now an awareness discipline used in a wide variety of applications such as “dreambody work, relationship issues, large group work, conflict resolution, work with altered states of consciousness, issues of creativity, movement, aspects of quantum physics” (to name a few) (A. Mindell, Introduction to Process Work). As a part of the acting workshop, McDermott gave a brief lecture on Arnold Mindell’s opposing concepts of “consensus reality” and “non-duality,” which bear a striking resemblance to Buddhist ideas: the “consensus reality” being the agreed-upon reality and the “non-duality” being the common essence underneath them. Between these two lie Mindell’s concepts of “primary processes” as the agreed-upon facts, and “secondary processes” such as body symptoms, accidents, conflicts, dreams, synchronicities. According to Mindell, the latter are “foreign and distant” to most people but can “be used as a basis for dealing with a wide spectrum of events now separately considered by the various forms and schools of medicine, physics and psychology” (A. Mindell, *River's Way: The Process Science of the Dreambody: Information and Channels in Dream and Bodywork, Psychology and Physics, Taoism and Alchemy* 12). Mindell’s holistic approach to human body work has brought together Buddhism, chakra systems, Taoism,

dance, various mythologies, shamanism, Jungian psychology, and quantum physics.

Subsequently, I have embraced PW in my theatrical life both as a performer and a teacher. And vice-versa my PW experiences both as a performer and a facilitator have benefited from my theatrical training. In this essay I will follow this idea of the two being compatible, transposable and on occasion identical while analysing and facilitating a process of hybridization of a PW practitioner and a psycho-physical actor to whom I will refer as Process Actor. <sup>iv</sup>Process Actor can be defined as an actor who values the wisdom of the body as well as that of the mind and is interested in exploring the constant interplay between physicality and psychology. Process Actor's training may include a combination of techniques such as Chekhov technique, Viewpoints method, Grotowski's approach, Meyerhold's approach, Laban's method, Lecoc school, Butoh dance, Alexander technique (to name but a few). A unifying element to these varied modes of training is in their common interest in body-mind aspects of the art of acting and theatre.

The Process Actor's artistic credo usually includes an interest in a possibility of working in a style other than naturalism (this doesn't mean that it excludes naturalism). By naturalism I mean style of performance which values a life-like expression and in which believability is in fact interchangeable with the word realistic or "natural". Believability is often achieved by use of personal memory in naturalism in this style. An opposite style to naturalistic creates its own reality and believability through an inner logic which can use a variety of elements such as masks, ritual, puppets, song, heightened gesture, movement, speech, costume, make-up. Such performance often breaks the imaginary wall between the performance and the audience known as "the fourth wall" and plays with the notions of space and time. A heightened style is meta-

theatrical in nature in that its inner logic and outer expression acknowledge that a performance is taking place while it is taking place.

Please note: Because I will be quoting both Arnold and Amy Mindell I will call them by their first and last names. In my quoted dialogue with Mr. Mindell I will use Arny as that is how he is known to one and all.

### Deep Democracy

Here immediately I have to respond to a secondary process arising in my belly, a kind of resistance and a fear of attempting to bring these two together. When I analyze my feeling I am reminded of two extreme generalizations, two anathemas which somehow live in me: **therapy isn't acting** and **acting isn't therapy**. Taking a detour to talk about these seems very inconvenient at the moment but then I am reminded of PW's notion of *deep democracy* which has in fact been one of the most useful facets of PW in my work with actors. This notion suggests that if a negative sensation, thought, feeling or voice appears one should understand and "befriend" it as well as a positive sensation. It is there for a reason and a part of the overall process. In *Alternative to Therapy* Amy Mindell defines deep democracy as "[...] 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 relationships between them [...]. Opening up to all of our experiences is an inner deep democracy - [a] term for the metaskill of having an open and inclusive attitude toward all of the various parts inside and outside of ourselves". And then here it is! A great part of the reason for writing this essay is that I tend to disavow the fact that in my work with actors the deep democracy has helped with creative blocks, finding polarities and complexity in performance as well as dealing with group issues such as rank in the classroom.

The aspiration towards it has deepened my work and conducting a Group Process brought astonishing change to an unhealthy group situation. Similarly, I tend to disavow the notion that acting has been extremely therapeutic to me. For example during the time of the war raging in my former country of ex-Yugoslavia and for a good decade later I was obsessed with staging war plays. I did a one woman show about the siege of Sarajevo titled *Out of Spite: Tales of Survival From Sarajevo*. The text for the play was based on letters written by a Jewish-Muslim philosophy teacher who chose to stay in besieged Sarajevo. I then staged the Greek Tragedies: Aeschilus' *Agamemnon*, John Barton's adaptations of *Hecuba*, *Iphigenia in Aulis*, *Achilles*, *Helen of Troy* and Liz Lockhead's adaptation *Thebans (Antigone, Seven Against Thebes and Oedipus Rex)* all of which dealt with the topic of war. Through staging these I continuously led a group process into which I entered with an altered state of consciousness induced by this war.

Still, I can hear a loud voice repeat to me that "theatre isn't therapy! It is art!" There is a general notion that any sort of psychological treatment hasn't got a place within a rehearsal hall. This is a cut and dry rule which I have heard on many occasions during my thirty years in this milieu and have also accepted as a fact. When an actor encounters a problem or a block in creativity, or when s/he on occasion becomes deeply identified with the role so that the borders between the reality and the dreamworld somehow disappear, more than likely you will hear a whisper by a colleague "S/he should get some help" or "This director is not qualified to give therapy". And I suspect a glimmer of this commentary could have already appeared in the reader of this paper if they are from the theatre. Even though I find this statement untrue and outmoded in case of PW and psycho-physical acting, still it has a certain hold on me and in the spirit of deep democracy will come on the rest of this writing journey.

Then there is the other side of the coin: “therapy isn’t acting”. I remember two distinct moments from PW Intensive 2009 when I drew parallels to acting to surprising results. One was my comment to Arny Mindell after one of the demonstrations of his Earth Spot exercises. During the break I told him that he was “a good actor”. In my language this meant he took imaginary impulses (in this case images of waves in Yachats, Oregon), he made them real (moved with them) so that they would produce an adequate response (he improvised a wave-dance and had illuminating thoughts about his problem). This, taking imaginary impulses and making them real so that they would produce an adequate response, was my definition of good acting. Upon my complimenting his performance I was truly surprised when he first winced and then questioned: “Why do you say that?” I replied: “Because you are good, convincing, truthful. I believe you”. He stopped for a second and then concluded with a big smile: “Ah, you mean to say that I am congruent. Coming from you I think that is a compliment!” (Arny knew that I taught acting).

In another several exchanges about acting and PW there was no consensus on them being closely related, nor were we able to have a dialogue about it. Many classes at 2009 Intensive contained a great amount of role playing both on the individual and group levels. For example in Inner Work we embodied “an elder” who would help us find a better means of communication. In this case we took most of the final steps used to create an Imaginary Body in Chekhov technique. Delineating all the aspects of how an actor is trained to reach this stage of creating an Imaginary Body would in fact involve a description of all of the elements of training as this is taught in advanced stages of training. For now it will suffice to say that we made the image of that person real to us body-part by body-part and felt into various body-parts thus changed. After doing that we used our Higher Self (Big U) to synthesize the experience and imagined dialogue that this person might have with someone with whom we had a personal difficulty

communicating. As a result of this exercise I experienced a change in breathing, outlook and a dialogue became possible.

We also embodied different roles in the Worldwork component of the class. The Worldwork included several Group Processes which in theatrical jargon translates to a series of improvisations on a topic reached by the group consensus. Collective creations in theatre often start with a number of such improvisations, especially in case of creating “an issue play” but improvisations are not limited to collective creations and can be done at any stage of training or a rehearsal process. One such Group Process was done on the theme of “attraction within a group.” Roles ranged from playing oneself (so that students declared publicly their attraction to one another) to playing the mythical role of “Sex” and everything in between such as archetypal roles of the “Mother”, “Faithful One”, “Unfaithful One” and so on. Prior to this we were already given a first clear “acting” guideline which instructed that “the the individual is bigger than the role and the role is bigger than the individual” by several PW instructors. In the theatrical language this meant that we could use personal experiences to understand the role (“the individual is bigger than the role”) but that we also can go beyond our personal experience into purely imaginative, and possibly universal experiences expressed through a complex characterization (“the role is bigger than the individual”). The main difference being that in process work, the latter idea also means that a role needs many people to fill it, one person will never be enough. Typically in theatre one individual plays one role but then again one individual can play a hundred roles in a single play as well. Performances where many actors play one role are rare in theatrical but not non-existent. Just recently in Toronto I saw Aeschilus’ Agamemnon done by three actors where all three played all of the roles at some point. The notion of many people filling one role has its strong representation within the theatrical world in Augusto Boal’s

well known and established techniques known as Forum Theatre<sup>vi</sup> and Analytical theatre. Boal's methods are currently practiced in seventy countries around the world. Briefly, Analytical theatre is based on involving the audience members together with actors in unfolding of difficult issues. A participant audience member tells a story which usually involves a social issue and the actors improvise it. Each character is broken down into all the social roles they could follow and the audience members are free to jump in and replace any player or they can introduce a new role which pertains to the topic.

In our group process there were people taking on characters and people facilitating. This was observed by an audience with a vested interest which also had the right to participate. There was a requirement for unfolding and transformation of a conflict. The discussion upon completion of such group processes sounded like this. Note: This is a verbatim transcript in which several instructors speak:

“I took three pages of notes”. Then, “How valuable are the moments of what just happened? The significance of not knowing as to what just happened. [When we ask the question] ‘What did I miss?’ That moment wants to be known. We need to figure it out.” Followed by, “What is the ghost? What is the role that no one wants to play?”

And, “A role is meant to have facets. You have to experience other facets of a role. You can do that through cycling, different people can take on different facets of a role” [...]

“You are taking a role and you went like this” (Instructor demonstrates). “Then you went ‘I can’t do it anymore (Instructor demonstrates). I am just being myself and I can’t come out’. You literally, physically dropped the role. That is a de-escalation, a cool spot [...] a hurt”.

And later, “This [cool spot] is a moment when a person and a role come together. Those moments have to be facilitated [...] It gets personal. You could get hurt. [...] ‘I am having a feeling. I am hurt or disappointed’. That moment is very important. The facilitator is meant for this thing you have to facilitate your experience when you are in a role. A role is not a microphone. A role has a personal psychology it changes. It has a life, process, double signals, background. That is what you are meant to develop. ”

Finally, “When a person can’t go further with it. The other people need to come in and help. What if the person stays there and is stuck? It gets personal. It can cause an escalation. Agitation. If you are in a role and you get stuck that is ok. Dropping out [is

OK]. ‘I can’t do this’. Those are very real experiences. If you get stuck, drop it. [...] that would be an important moment for the whole group and not just you.[...] And when a facilitator is stuck they can ask for help of the group”.

Our process was followed by what I would characterize as a theatrical discussion. It begins with typical words often spoken by theatrical directors: “I took three pages of notes” and continues with a discussion of a willingly staged conflict in a controlled environment. Any dramatic work by most common definition (be it a comedy, drama or tragedy) is a staging of a conflict. Most dramatic writing shares one of its basic philosophical tenets with Worldwork which strives to go beyond a political discussion of a conflict so that it can deepen the understanding of the roles and issues. Without this impetus plays would not be written nor would Group Process be done. As in Worldwork processes in theatre our job is to learn to frame and name parts of escalation and de-escalation of a conflict. We repeat these processes in order to find out the many facets of different roles and situate the many aspects of the conflict within an individual, relationship and a group. The results can be dramatic, comedic or tragic. As in Worldwork, in the process of unfolding a conflict in a rehearsal we stop when we are stuck and discuss the problems (in metatheatrical productions this is also done in performance). And when the director doesn’t have an answer someone from the ensemble may offer a useful insight.

While to me the Worldwork jargon and situation was a very familiar one because of my theatrical experiences, several efforts to start a dialogue which could place this within a context of the art of acting led nowhere. In one instance I tried to discuss the facilitator’s taste as being an important factor in a group process. Here I likened the facilitator to an acting coach or a director. In another instance I unsuccessfully tried to discuss the idea of technique and style required in the naturalistic acting such as I have described earlier as opposed to a different style

such as in Brechtian acting because I saw both styles being required and discussed during Group Process.

I will briefly unfold this further for those unfamiliar with theatre theory. In naturalistic style of acting an actor strives not “to drop” his/her role and to relate all matters to his/her personal experiences so as to emotionally involve the audience. To put it in Worldwork terms s/he self facilitates the “hot spots” and the “cool spots”. However, in another style of acting such as the Brechtian performance s/he strives for an intellectual response from the audience rather than an emotional one and such a “dropping” of the role is encouraged and referred to as the Alienation Effect. In PW terms this serves as a built in “cool spot”. Thus the Brechtian style uses a variety of the Alienation Effects which constantly remind the performers that they are playing and the audience members that they are watching a performance (as opposed to a naturalistic style which hides that fact). Brechtian deliberate distancing from a life-like performance is basically both didactic and entertaining. Its function is to free the actor and the audience from the constant, deep identification with the role and to stimulate a desire for social change through teaching the audience and thus liberating it from sentimentality. Ideally such a performance would incite “the silent majority” into action rather than tears. Brecht’s revolutionary suggestions have then been developed further by people like Augusto Boal within the above mentioned Theatre of the Oppressed.

Then there is a variety of heightened stylistic theatrical forms where simultaneous deep identification and stylization takes place. A good such example might be found in eastern traditional theatre such as Japanese No and Kabuki style or the origin of the western theatre, namely the Greek Tragedy. Here mask, stylized movement and speech leads both the performer and the audience members into a deeper communion. These performances include elements of

ritual, religious belief and is concerned with the spiritual aspects of theatre. And the performer in such a performance is trained to do both – play and observe his/her performance – creating a dual consciousness in performance. Such approach is a part of Process Actor’s training as well. Each style results in a different psycho-physical quality and a different manner of expression.

For example I’ll imagine a theatrical scene of a woman with cancer in a hospital being visited by her mother. Let’s say I am playing the woman and want to explore the mother-daughter relationship. If I am within a naturalistic territory I can (and would) use the image of my own mother to create a relationship between myself and the other player. However, if I was in a performance that calls for some type of stylization I could reach for Chekhov’s Archetype Gesture and try to encapsulate an archetypal image of a Mother to create the same relationship by internalizing that gesture. (Chekhov’s theory suggests that only the internalized gestures will enable an actor to make a deep psycho-physical connection. In this case the connection is with a relationship archetype which has a *universal* vibration. This makes it an archetype and this is a reason that it is an archetype.) Such an archetype moves through me, the artist, in a way that it would move through only me, which makes it creative and individual and thus strengthens my Creative Individuality! Then if I were in a style that required outward physicalization I could also create a relationship through Chekhov’s Psychological Gesture (PG) by creating a Relationship PG. Here the relationship to my mother could be encapsulated by a “push”, and hers to me by an “embrace” or vice versa. Or I could be falling and she could be catching me. I could then internalize these gestures while playing that hospital scene to create impulses to create an expressive physical score.

In a heightened stylization I could use an Imaginary Centre to characterize this relationship i.e. a bomb ticking in my forehead and she a piece of glass in her heart or a warm

satisfied sensation in my belly and she a cotton ball in her forehead. The two of us could explore how the impulses from these centers influence the staging. We could then put on masks or add the overall atmosphere to this etc.

The point of the above examples is that the choices that work with centers, archetypes, masks and psychological gestures have nothing to do with my mother specifically but have probably a lot to do with my mother on a dream-body level or the level of the essence. Clearly, when using a personal image of one's mother one is much more likely "to reach a spot hot spot and get hurt" then when working with purely imaginary stimuli or when stepping out of the role to create a "cool spot". This differentiation between the use of personal vs. imaginary impulses is one of the main discussions in the art of acting since Denis Diderots *The Paradox of an Actor* written in 1773. The underlying essence of it is an examination of the notion of "self" upon a stage. It asks questions about what it means to be truthful, whether the notion of "character" exists and to what a degree an actor ought to be emotionally involved his/her performance.

Our Group Processes placed a variety of stylistic and thematic demands on PW practitioners. We had to imagine a role, defend it, make it multi-faceted (not one-dimensional), follow through on an impulse, be aware of the stepping in and out of the character and so on. All of which actors spend their lives trying to understand let alone master. Moreover this was done under a watchful eye of a facilitator i.e. a coach or a director. Our class discussion was a discussion about theatrical issues and yet the "how" of theatre could not be discussed. I wondered if it possible that the word "acting" was disconcerting in a therapeutic context because it somehow implied pretending? Or was it a given that within Process Work acting requirements our innate ability should suffice?

Here it would be useful to return once again to the question about acting and truthfulness. The acting that I refer to isn't done by the pretenders and the liars but by those who aspire to find out the truth about their process and through that gain an awareness of the human condition. Here my belief aligns with that of Polish theatrical genius Jerzy Grotowski who describes two different kind of actors: "The Holy Actor" and the "Actor Whore"<sup>vii</sup>. The former uses his body-mind in a kind of a sacrificial act through which s/he seeks a spiritual truth in a deep examination of his body, mind and spirit and the latter pretends for money. Decades before Grotowski, Michael Chekhov also discusses these two kinds of actors when he says: "Do you want to see my heart? Then I will cry in you, and you will cry in me and with me. And I will laugh with you, and in you. Then it is something – a sort of sacrifice. But without this it is not worthwhile, and, for me, it is really shameful to be an actor". (M. Chekhov and Du Prey, *The Actor Is the Theatre* July 3, 1937) Such "sacrifice" can only come through a willingness to seek truth and only truth and this is where the purpose of putting on a play is a mirror image of the purpose of therapy. And a performance is then a kind of a Worldwork in which an actor performs a healing act not for himself/herself only. A good performance must entertain, educate and enlighten not only the performer but the audience as well. Chekhov, who was a deeply spiritual man, would say that this is a "sacrifice" and the actor then feeds the soul of the spectator. While the cult of celebrity creates and worships at the feet of the "Actor Whore" our common humanity truly needs and admires the "Holy Actor". This of course does not imply that all popular actors have no higher aspirations but that there is a business mechanism which can diametrically oppose, impede and derail such aspirations.

The Worldwork was a tall order for a PW practitioner as it would be for a Process Actor. Despite thirty years in the profession I struggled with lack of truthfulness, one dimensionality,

dropping the role (in acting jargon if accompanied with laughter also known as “corpsing”) or becoming lost in the personal story rather than that of the role. Conversely, when in our very last Group Process I embodied the archetypal role of the “Killer” in what I would describe as an inspired and truthful moment of acting, this moment was also deemed as a crucial one for the process by the instructor and the participants alike. To me these were and are still performative issues. Having experienced the demands of a Group Process I am certain that the above discussion of the elements and philosophy behind the several different streams of acting training such as I briefly offered above could be helpful to a PW practitioner! Just because one can walk and talk and imagine that doesn’t mean that one can do all those three things at once as s/he is embodying someone else while being watched and in the right style. Ideally, Process Actor is able to arrive to an “edge”, recognize it and move through it while using it as fuel for further impulse and thus continue a flow. This because once a Process Actor arrives to a “hot spot” or a “cool spot” s/he will be able to find an acting tool which would enable him/her to move through it and continue the process. S/he understands the idea of no self, of going beyond the personal psychology, of channelling energy of sensations leading to complex emotions. S/he knows what it means to be dreamed up by an audience; this is what makes each performance different and unique!

If I further process this I am drawn to an unoccupied world channel where I am reminded of my native tongue which was called Serbo-Croatian before the breakup of my native Yugoslavia and then the hyphen was taken out and the languages became Serbian and Croatian. The two nations perfectly understand each other but have been warring over the differences that separate them. Indeed, there are different grammatical structures, the alphabets are different and the languages use some different words but still the fact remains Serbians and Croatians can

communicate perfectly. Similarly PW practitioner and Process Actor speak the same language. Why couldn't we think of the Process Actor as telling the dreambody's truth? Could we think of Process Work as making dream experiences visible such as we do in theatre? The answer is "yes". This opens up a possibility of Process Acting being therapeutic and Process Work very creative and artistic. (As I write this I try to slow down and amplify the painful feeling in the pit of my stomach from page four and it transforms into something dark and heavy at first and then becomes a slow, deep feeling of wisdom. The colour is blue and I feel older and heavier. I will use this as a fuel for my further writing at the moment. )

Process Work teaches us that questions and thoughts arise simultaneously within any particular field. Just a short while before I was introduced to PW in an acting training session, Chekhov technique has made way into PW literature in Amy Mindell's *The Dreaming Source of Creativity* published in 2005. One of the sub-chapters in the chapter titled "The Essence of it All" is titled "Michael Chekhov and the Psychological Gesture". Here Amy Mindell makes a parallel between a character development tool called Psychological Gesture (PG) as remarkably akin to PW notions of Essence. She quotes his description of PG as "seed from which experience arises" (36). In a parallel gesture which I already mentioned, my attraction to PW came out of the way a director has used Psychological Gesture in conjunction with PW's Earth Spot to deal with issues of creativity in rehearsal (to be discussed shortly).

Big U + Higher Self = One

PW builds its philosophical foundation (the "what") from a paradigmatic group of influences which include but are not limited to Jungian psychology, Shamanism, Taoism, Buddhism and Quantum physics. The "what" is summarized in a fundamental law of process-

oriented psychology by Joe Goodbread with: “What happens is right and should be encouraged. It looks wrong when we do not understand its context sufficiently”. Goodbread explains that this contrasts sharply with the implicit fundamental law of psychotherapy in general: “What happens is wrong and needs to be changed” (30). Meanwhile the “how” of Process Work or its tools commonly utilize an ability to differentiate between consensus and non-consensus reality signals through observing and understanding these in the course of following the process of their sound, sensation, movement, gesture, improvised dialogue in imagined relationships, thinking as imagination, storytelling and role playing (to name a few). All of these tools are a way to the individual’s “Big You”<sup>viii</sup>, a metacommunicator<sup>ix</sup> whose ability to synthesize enables him/her to gain awareness of his/her psycho-physical process and thus to integrate the two main aspects of it, which in PW are known as primary and secondary processes. The PW practices search for the most effective way to differentiate between many different signals contained within a number of communication “channels” namely auditory, verbal, visual, tactile, proprioceptive, kinaesthetic, relationship and synchronistic. The operative word and the ultimate destination in all this being “process”. PW’s “what” and the “how” as well as the “Big U” are all evocative of how Chekhov technique trains a Process Actor.

Fittingly, Michael Chekhov’s search for a new acting technique came out of his own attempts at healing himself. In PW language he was a facilitator of his own process. It was prompted by a low point in his own life: a period of mental illness<sup>x</sup> during his early successes at Moscow Art Theatre (MAT) which resulted in thoughts of suicide, paranoia, and pessimism. In 1918, at the height of his productivity, he had a nervous breakdown, for which he was treated by teams of psychiatrists. Chekhov blamed this breakdown on “his soul’s silent protest against what he was becoming as a performer: ‘a malevolent vessel of drunken egotism’” (Gordon, *The*

*Stanislavsky Technique: Russia* 124). When analyzed in PW terms it was his *secondary process* which protested silently. His equilibrium was finally restored after a course of hypnosis. Soon after, he discovered yoga and Anthroposophy; more specifically, the work of the esoteric Austrian philosopher, Rudolf Steiner. Chekhov then deciphered his “drunken egotism” by creating his own approach to the art of acting, one which treats the notion of *self* in acting differently by introducing the concept of the “Higher Self” (Higher Ego, Higher I, Higher Intellect).

In his second autobiographical work, *Life and Encounters*, written after he left Russia, and published in English in 2006 as *The Path of the Actor*, Chekhov explains that the concept of Higher Self stemmed from his preoccupation “with the question of inspiration and how to gain access to it” (145). In *The Stanislavsky Technique: Russia, a Workbook for Actors*, Mel Gordon explains this concept:

The individual performer is always limited by his past experiences and habitual way of doing things. But the actor can learn to break out of his own private patterns and choices. Appealing to the *Higher Ego*, the source of all artistic energy, allows the actor to temporarily leave his personality behind and expand his range of theatrical ideas and physical activity. From the *Higher Ego* comes the inspiration to create new and surprising characters. (237) (emphasis added)

To leave “the habitual way of doing things” means to develop a need for a kind of embodiment of characters, which uses the interrelationship between physicality and sensations, images, space, and breath in acting training. Ideally, during such an embodiment, a performer can become a witness and a narrator of his own transformation and control the lower Ego’s destructive tendency. Chekhov tells us that “[The *Higher Ego*] observes and directs the lower Ego from outside, guiding it and *empathizing* with the imagined sufferings and joys of the character. This finds expression in the fact that although the actor on stage suffers, weeps, rejoices and laughs, at the same time he remains unaffected by these feelings on a *personal*

*level*” (M. Chekhov, Kirillov and Merlin 147). This detachment also known as “double consciousness” in performance is idiosyncratic in Chekhov technique and makes for its distinguishing feature among the many valuable western schools of acting which grew out of Stanislavsky’s System<sup>xi</sup>. For our discussion it is particularly important to note that Chekhov technique grew out of his desire to conquer his psychological difficulties which blocked him from what he referred to as his Creative Individuality. He observed and followed his own creative process and in doing so postulated his guiding principles which as we will see are used in Process Work as well.

Chekhov technique is clearly rooted in the western theatrical tradition. That being said, he also incorporated an eastern<sup>xii</sup> approach in his acting and teaching philosophy. Chekhov’s new approach was influenced by such varied sources as Buddhist and Hindu ancient philosophy, Hindu yoga practices, theories of Goethe and Schopenhauer, Anthroposophy (Rudolf Steiner’s wisdom-religion inspired by Buddhism and Romanticism), the Second Generation Russian Symbolist artistic movement, and theatrical experiments of MAT. All of these vital influences are fused in a unique way, enabling the actor to free up his/her Creative Individuality. Their common belief is that we create our own reality and that the observation depends on the observer. This is a holistic view of perception as opposed to one ruled by mechanical laws and it in tune with modern physics. Such observation assumes organic inter-relationships; in other words, a unity with nature rather than a separation from nature. It also takes into account the character of the scientist.

Arnold Mindell tells us: “In a post-Einsteinian universe, where telepathy, synchronicity, dreams and somatic body trips occur, the concept of process unifies events which move from psyche to matter, imaginations into the body. This concept allows psychology and physics to

come together.” (River’s Way 70). I am by no means equipped to speak about any specifics of the scientific aspect of changes that have occurred in physics since the collapse of the Newtonian paradigm but I am aware that the father of quantum physics and Nobel laureate Werner Heisenberg stated that there need be no conflict between accepting the findings of modern physics and “following Goethe’s way of contemplating nature” <sup>xiii</sup>. For the two ways are less opposed than complementary (Naydler 23). Goethe’s perception of a whole (an organism) derived from the relation of its parts. Goethe also advocated a firm “resistance to the absurdities of a reductionist philosophy of nature which explains phenomena by denying them independent existence and a logic of their own” (Steuer 176). This philosophy is prominent in every aspect of Chekhov technique so that in current pedagogy and practice for a Process Actor the total interconnectedness of the three main elements in acting training (namely acting, voice, and movement) is emphasized and it is often suggested that this makes a psycho-physical focus unique and contemporary.

In 2006, two scholars traced this fairly subtle point, setting Chekhov technique which forms a basis for my psycho-physical training apart from other currently popular approaches. And quoting Goethe, Jonathan Pitches says, “If you seek comfort in the whole, you must learn to discover whole in the smallest part,” concluding that this makes the Chekhov technique current: “Despite its nineteenth-century roots; Chekhov’s ‘organic’ system seems all the more contemporary for this holistic organization” (16). For his part, in a lecture comparing the work of Stanislavsky and Chekhov at the University of Toronto’s Graduate Centre for Study of Drama, Charles Marowitz commented that a “New Age consciousness” makes the Chekhov technique current. Such a consciousness implies a holistic outlook and thus is in full agreement with Pitches’ deduction:

[W]hat makes Chekhov particularly unique is that while virtually every theatre-artist from the '30s to the '50s was applying the principles of Psychological or Social realism, Chekhov was propagandizing for a dynamic alternative predicated, not on the insights of Sigmund Freud and the Naturalist movement of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, but on a deeper and more elusive theatrical goal – and one which the *current* generation has much more sympathy with. The age of Joseph Campbell, Carl Gustav Jung, the Eastern philosophies – that's to say the New Age Consciousness – is the age that now embraces Michael Chekhov – and for very good reason – because he instinctively understood that art, like life, was not a matter of outer surface but of inner substance. (10 emphasis added)

### **A Performer is a Practitioner**

As early as 1936 Michael Chekhov taught that art creates its own reality through actively imagining with both body and mind:

First, we can see unseen things; and, second, we can create unreal things. The third step: if you will create something and then live with this creation. For instance, if you create a strange and interesting landscape, and if you concentrate on this beautiful and strange landscape, you will notice that this landscape changes you. This is again a great wonder. Your creation influences you, its creator, and the soul of the creator changes under the influence of his own creation. This is really the ability of an artist – to be changed because of his own creation. (M. Chekhov and Du Prey, *The Actor Is the Theatre* October 8, 1936)

Consequently, if Process Actor imagines this landscape in a theatrical setting both the audience and the performer become just as much interested in knowing the story of this landscape (“the what”) as in experiencing its progression and its manner (“the how”). There is an inherent theatricality in deconstructing the world to “the what” and “the how”. Only with a direct experience of a story we really know the story. In this phenomenological understanding of the art and of the world such a direct experience changes the performer and the audience alike because together they enter a *process*. By sharing the process with a live audience, we take the “outsiders” into our given circumstances. Together with the humanity of the actors the humanity of the “outsiders” accounts for the live performance being different each night.

In the particular example above Chekhov uses an imaginary landscape. Coincidentally this bears a striking resemblance to a group of exercises originated by Arnold Mindell and much practiced within the PW community which use can be termed the Earth Spot sequences<sup>xiv</sup>. The essential and common element in this series of exercises is in searching for a solution to a problem through landscape, thus “the Earth Spot”. Here the practitioner can start by imagining a “favourite piece of land” (A. Mindell, Lecture on Consciousness at 2009 Winter Intensive) and then allow the energy of this landscape to move him/her in order to change his/her psychophysical state. This involves visualising, invoking sensations, qualities of movement, gestures and sounds. Once a practitioner is sufficiently changed by his/her creation s/he then tries to use this new state as knowledge which will enable him/her to articulate an answer to a question, a need or problem. In a further connection Chekhov’s art was extremely ecologically conscious. This came from strong influence by Rudolf Steiner who, like Chekhov, was a follower of Goethe’s contemplative looking which assumes organic inter-relationships. For example finding a Psychological Gesture(PG) of a character Chekhov commonly asked the students to create a PG of a tree which reminded them of their character and then to internalize the energy of the PG to find the essence of the character. It would be very easy to find a parallel with Process Work exercises.

In this particular instance the experience of a Process Actor who is following a change invoked by his/her imagination and the Process Work practitioner<sup>xv</sup> overlap completely. Process Actor is also PW practitioner in that while s/he imagines the Earth Spot, as a side effect s/he is also uncovering the wisdom of this spot thereby illuminating the essence of his/her own process. On the other hand, in his/her daily routine the PW practitioner is asked to focus on the energy, colour, shape, texture, temperature or speed of an action, she visualizes figures that cause inner

sensations and symptoms and as a side effect s/he becomes a Process Actor. Both the PW practitioner and Process Actor continuously play out the actions that arise out of the awareness of one of the communication channels thereby creating some type of an event. They strive to develop a precise perception of sensations and impulses in order to recognize, imagine, create or amplify a particular *quality of an action*. They are deconstructing the world to series of simple actions and their qualities which are constantly transforming. By doing so their notion of self becomes conducive to the act of transformation as well. And this idea of transformation or change is central to both PW practitioner and Process Actor. They have both replaced the fixed notion of self with a much more fluid one. The self is not an object but an ever-changing impression, a *process* created by us through causing *events* and their qualities. This is also true for relationships, communities, the world and the universe.

There is an inherent theatricality in identifying the world as a process. This also allows for the concept of performance to shift. No longer is it contained only to the traditional performance venues but it is found anywhere so that the meaning of the word “stage” widens to include the whole world or even universe. This is in accordance with the contemporary definitions of performer and performative: “There must be an image (a representation) that functions as a signifier (audiovisual material) for a signified that is both the result and the goal of the performance, a signified that is neither fixed nor final. [...] Representation is always a recreation of something – a past event, a historical figure or a real object; hence the impression that it reveals only a secondary (sic!) reality” and “Theatre [...] is the only representational art that is “presented” to the spectator only once” (Pavis 262). Such ideas of performance align with Arnold Mindell’s suggestion in *Dreaming While Awake* that “the universe has its own spontaneous awareness process that awakens to itself” which leads to “the tendency towards self-reflection

and consciousness [as] a natural law” (92-93). Mindell also describes this idea with an image of a whale looking at his own tail and says “When the universe observes itself it co-creates itself again” (A. Mindell, Lecture on Bi-local Thinking at 2009 Winter Intensive). There is an intrinsic theatricality in that statement as well.

### **The Body and the Psychology**

An important similarity between PW practitioner and Process Actor is their focus on the connection between the psychology and the physicality or the psycho-physical. A Process Actor *must* strive for the attainment of complete harmony between the two, body and psychology. S/he needs to have extreme sensitivity of body to the psychological creative impulses, her psychology itself has to be rich and she makes every effort to achieve a complete compliance of both body and psychology.

In PW initially we are introduced to channels: auditory, verbal, visual, tactile, proprioceptive, kinaesthetic, relationship and world. The “complete harmony between body and psychology” here translates to an “awareness of all the channels” and “complete compliance of both body and psychology” translates to “fully occupying all the channels”. It is important to note that the “complete harmony” or “awareness” is never an end but it is once again a *process*. This is because (as I have already mentioned) the notion of the self is not static in either psycho-physical acting or PW, but rather it is a dynamic, ever-changing entity. The process is an active meditation which has a simple goal for a performer/practitioner: to abide in the constant state of presence. However, a disruption of this state requires the practitioner/performer to return to mining new images, ideas, sensations, voices, movements, characterizations etc. so that s/he could once again attain the ever-changing state of presence.

A Process Actor spends years of training in order to be able to continuously “switch channels” to borrow a PW term. This kind of acting is not divided into “inner/outer” or “outer/inner” techniques but rather we are seeking a continuum. This in psycho-physical technique is referred to as *lemniscating*. We are trained to follow a figure eight, which does not have a beginning or an end. This is true for acting, voice and movement aspects of training. The ideal lies in the infinity of the voice/movement connection and the interplay of the inner and outer impulses. An invisible impulse comes before the physical action from somewhere deep inside the body. In Process Work this level is called the essence. It exists on the muscular level but also arises out of an invisible intention which can invoke a sensation or an image or vice-versa. There is no prescription here and all of the elements are fully interchangeable. The only non-negotiable is the aspiration to truthfulness of impulse which in PW is known as congruence. Once we are congruent we are working from the position of the Big U in PW or the Higher Self.

### **Making the Invisible Visible**

In Process Acting the actor adds to the body-mind connection an invisible element which is concerned with the radiation of the inner movement or inner sensation. In PW this would be tapping into the level of essence also known as the third attention. When viewed from the Aristotelian conception of matter as a mechanical object moving in space, this might appear as difficult to discuss and understand. However, if the reader takes into consideration the new modern quantum mechanics s/he will quickly see that the concept is in tune with the latest discoveries in the “most rational branch of modern science, physics”. (A. Mindell, *Dreambody: the Body's Role in Revealing the Self* 10) Arnold Mindell says:

Einstein himself said that Aristotle’s conception of matter as a mechanical object moving in geometrical space inhibited the development of physics for two

thousand years. However, twentieth-century research has forced physics to reject the Greek conception of geometrical space and matter. Surprisingly enough, the new concepts of modern quantum mechanics are similar to Eastern views of matter. Today physicists see matter as fields, energies and intensities, not as isolated definite objects in space. Physics, the most rational branch of modern science, has produced a sort of subtle body view of nature. Matter is both solid and formless energy. The appearance of the body, like all matter, depends of how we look at it. If we measure temperature by putting a thermometer under the arm, then the body appears in terms of temperature. If we close our eyes and attend to inner signals, then the body appears in terms of fantasies and sensations. I would define the real body as the result of objective physiological measurements, and the dreambody as the individual experience of the body. (10)

Process Actor embraces the principle of “invisible to visible”. S/he is concerned with the individual experience of the body or as discussed above a “subtle body view of nature” in which the formless energy is transmitted. In the theatrical context, this subtle transmission can be that of the message or the Super-objective of the play but it also can be a subtle transmission of a moment-by-moment individual experience of the body. Process Actor must learn how to use his/her energy and discover how to radiate it into the space, covering the distance between him/her and his partner, and between him/her and the spectator. When placed into such a context, the notion of invisible to visible resonates equally well with both modern quantum physics and ancient Buddhist meditation practices. Mindell explains: “As far as *classical* physics is concerned, elementary quantum events look shy and otherworldly” (Dreambody: the Body's Role in Revealing the Self 12). Similarly, for a Process Actor achieving intangible objectives is referred to as tapping into the “river of energy”. While this may be difficult to understand at first simply because such objectives are invisible a Process Actor can train to create this “river” willingly.

I mention the struggles of quantum physics because such struggles mirror the problems that arise when theatrical intangibles are considered next to the concept of “real body.” Quantum theory challenged Aristotelian classical physics, forcing it to realize that not everything in nature

can be understood through mechanical explanations; and Michael Chekhov's teacher Leopold Sulerzhitsky challenged ideas born from the same philosophical base. In fact, as early as 1905, Sulerzhitsky suggested that not everything related to an actor's performance could or should be explainable within a materialistic philosophical outlook. Inspired by Sulerzhitsky, Chekhov used practices that worked with "irradiation," derived from the Hindu concept of *prana* (the energy field associated with the sustaining of the physical body, and the connecting link between the physical body and the mind). It is worth noting that in Chekhov's technique, *prana* or the "river of energy" is specifically related to action and will in that it is thought of as something accessible and trainable. Today, Process Actor works with *radiation* and considers it not as experimental but as fact through tools such as radiation and receiving, creation of atmospheres, Psychological Gesture, Imaginary Centres and Imaginary Body etc.

It is important to understand that to work with *prana* means to work consciously with breath:<sup>xvi</sup> "The Sanskrit word *prana* expresses the same reality that is also captured in the Latin term *spiritus*, which is contained in breath-related words like *inspiration* and *expiration*" (Feurestein 148; emphasis in original). Rudolf Steiner, in his educational philosophy, maintained that there are subtle connections between the breathing processes and the nerves/senses system. This harmony between these two is essential if the "soul and spiritual elements are to be satisfactorily incorporated into the physical". In fact, he declared, "education consists in teaching the child to breathe rightly" (Childs 42). The intangibles are impossible to tap into without paying attention to the subtleties of breath. A Process Actor employs the breath to tap into his/her subtle energy and achieve constant radiation. When radiated, the intangibles can be likened to the transmission of invisible waves. In order for a wave to travel, radiation needs to occur, but there also needs to be a receptor.

## Hybridization: How Process Acting Can Help a PW Practitioner

Chekhov says: “As modern actors we are easily led by action but if there is no atmosphere there is no soul.” Chekhov also refers to this soul of the performance as the “how” or the “sense of truth” (M. Chekhov and Du Prey, *The Actor Is the Theatre* November 21, 1941). One of the most popular ways in which Chekhov technique is incorporated into other methods is to use all the different ways of providing the “how” of the performance. In fact, merging Chekhov’s technique with any other by using the “how” of Chekhov’s technique has become common-place. My first practical hybridization of Chekhov technique and PW was when Chekhov technique was used in conjunction with Amy Mindell’s powerful “Critic’s Fuel Exercise” which can be found in *The Dreaming Source of Creativity*.

Amy’s exercise essentially uses the trapped energy from a blocked creative impulse to create an image of a person which is also known in PW as the Edge Figure. In the original exercise, the PW practitioner remembers a time s/he was blocked, imagines “something that is against [his/her] creativity,” sketches this image, and then steps into (embodies) the imagined figure. Finally, s/he attempts to “imagine its essence in terms of a piece of nature: a river, a cave, a rock” and is instructed to “assume a position that expresses that essence.” This can then be unfolded further in an artistic manner: “[...] let the essence express itself in a short poem, writing or in a relationship” (202-206).

To this, we added Chekhov’s concept of Atmosphere to help the actor invoke the moment of being blocked. First we named the atmosphere (i.e. fearful, dangerous, joyous, carnival, religious etc.). Then we imagined that the air is filled with the atmosphere. Once it was defined we essentially crossed an imaginary threshold into a space that is endowed with that atmosphere

and then let the atmosphere affect us through breathing it in and out and imagining that it can penetrate our skin through a sort of an invisible osmosis. We listened to it with our whole being. (I often think of responding to it as I would to a piece of music). Following that we let the impulses arising from sensations invoked through these actions move us. We aimed for our body-mind to be in harmony with that chosen atmosphere. In short, in working with the atmosphere of a space the emphasis is replacing the utilitarian function of any room with a poetic view. Ideally, the body, psychology and voice are all consistent with the atmosphere.

We then used Chekhov technique of working with an independent image of the character to help the actor personify “that which is against one’s creativity” in a figure. Here we imagined a figure living within that atmosphere and had a dialogue with it. First we sketched this figure as suggested by Amy’s exercise (coincidentally Chekhov also sketched his roles). Once this was done we “stepped into the figure.” We named Chekhov technique’s tool Imaginary Body and used it to embody the image in this particular instance. This involves breaking a figure down to parts and embodying them separately. In the Process Work sessions we would have likely just stepped into the whole figure in an intuitive way. The Process Actor embodies his/her own Edge Figure of a critic and then a colleague takes on the role of the critic as instructed by the actor. Once this is done they enter into a simple improvisation where the actor essentially witnesses the criticism s/he dreamed up and receives it but is also able to respond to it. This results in the whole group witnessing the actor’s inner dialogue.

After this interplay the actor is instructed to assume the role of the critic again. S/he starts from the embodiment of the figure and is then asked to *transform* the negative aspect of the figure into a positive essence of its pent-up energy by imagining its core and its essence in terms of a piece of nature and to express this essence in a large gesture. This is where the

Psychological Gesture (PG) is introduced. PG is a large, archetypal, continuous gesture which has a beginning, middle and an end, and which can serve many functions, such as capturing the essence of the character or several aspects of it, specifying a relationship or creating an important moment in the play etc. This gesture is executed repeatedly with strength and then refined through finding the right quality of movement. As I have mentioned earlier a PG needs to be internalized and one is ready to internalize the movement of the PG only once it has sufficiently changed his/her psychology while done externally. The repetition of the gesture's outward manifestation is important, as it trains the breathing. In the final analysis, it is the breath that is controlled in the inner movement and the sensation invoked by its quality can be felt in stillness in its full intensity through different speeds, directions and resistance in breathing as it changes the performer's energy and radiation. As we can see Chekhov technique's tools can be used to deepen the actor's psychophysical experience in Amy's exercise. The final step is suggested by Amy and it is to imagine how one could use this essence energy in one's life and creative work. This resonates well with the aim of Process Actor as well.

I did the exercise and imagined the atmosphere at an acting workshop I did in 2002 when playing the role of the Charity Commissioner in *The Government Inspector* by Nikolai Gogol I continuously felt untalented and uninspired. I breathed in that heavy and frightening atmosphere. Subsequently an image popped into my mind: a cold, enormous hog, with a satisfied mouth, which was pushing me down and strangling me. First I sketched it and then acted it out briefly so that my facilitator could embody this hog. She shouted at me the lines which I fed her: "You have no talent. You are the worst actor in this room. Look at you, trying so hard to be funny and you are not. You can *never* be funny. *You push!* You have no original ideas and all the other actors do. In fact you should get off the stage. *Get off the stage!*" This hog also had the magical

capacity to move around the space with the speed of light, so I never knew from which direction it would attack. This put me in a state of terror. I then sketched an image of the hog.

Following that I embodied the hog again by using the Imaginary Body and allowed the image of “a large, cold pig-strangler” to guide me into a PG. The PG was a downward push with a great deal of resistance. To this, I added a growling kind of sound. When asked by the facilitator what this reminded me of in nature I answered, “A waterfall.” I was guided to repeat this PG and allowed the waterfall to move through me, causing a wonderful sense of relief and joy. I felt the power of the waterfall, an astonishing force of nature, and it lived in me through the PG. My feet stomped and moved and my breathing was full and free. My arms moved up and down strongly. Finally, I internalized the PG to feel a sense of elation and clarity as well as power, sheer elemental power. This transformative process was what I could engage in the next time the critic attacks.

When we analyzed and discussed the pictures of the “critics” later, I had an epiphany! The Charity Commissioner is described as fat and is called “the pig in a wig” by several characters in the play. He is not very bright but is ruthless and corrupted. My critic hog was actually an excellent sketch for the Charity Commissioner! It was the blocked process of my transforming into the Charity Commissioner that was my critic. Similarly in using this exercise in my classroom, often times I’ve found that upon completing the words and the actions of the “critic” these are actually easily relatable to the unexpressed sensations of the character and the situation. For example a student visualized the “critic” as the huge wall that was closing in on her and was saying the word “stop”. Later on we realized that it directly relates to her character’s situation: she wants to stop her rival from taking her lover away. Over and over again I have found out that these phenomena do have a logic of their own.

When I think of the steps a performer was asked to take such as the Atmosphere, collaborating with a creative image, creating an Imaginary Body, working with image from nature and PG that which is asked of a Process Actor and a PW practitioner is truly identical. It is always about establishing a connection between a something imaginary affecting the body-mind. However, Process Actor has spent time and focus precisely on developing his/her imagination in conjunction with the body. She has practiced crossing a threshold into many different atmospheres. She has spent time collaborating with many images. S/he has had a chance to spend concentrated time on working with the effect of variety of colours or Imaginary Centers on his/her body, voice and mind. She has learned how to ask an image of a figure to collaborate with her by asking it questions such as “Will you show me how you sit down? Get up? Walk? Smile? Turn around? ” She has spent time in learning how to “make a bewitched castle transform itself into a poor hut, and vice versa; an old witch to become a beautiful young princess” (Chekhov *To the Actor* 29-30). S/he has consciously developed her imagination through psycho-physical training!

## **Unfolding and Dreaming: How PW Can Aid the Process Actor**

### **Unfolding**

One of the most important goals of Process Work is empiricism or simple observation. A therapist/facilitator observes a situation and then tries to identify unoccupied channels in order to unfold the process. I have found this unfolding a very useful addition to my acting class because it reinforces the idea of constant training or “work on the self”. Every day I begin my acting class with a warm-up which starts with Crossing the Threshold exercise. The exercise is a kind of an initiation used to encourage the actor to bring the right intention into the space and also to

immediately accept the relativity of the space and the time. The space becomes an invisible partner in an interplay where the actor is asked to endow the atmosphere beyond an imaginary line with a quality which would support his/her process. This can be but is not limited to a positive quality such as energy, safety, sensitivity, creativity, play, freedom, trust, giving, receiving etc. The actor crosses into the imagined space and allows him/her to be moved by the imagined quality. The suggested benefits of this are two-fold: it is both diagnostic and transformative. The actual crossover will quickly help the actor diagnose the level of energy, safety, sensitivity, creativity, play, freedom, trust, giving, receiving s/he carries into an imaginary space. After endowing the space with a desired quality the actor uses the interplay with the imagined space as a way of further deepening the experience of the positive quality. Then by experiencing a positive quality the actor replaces his/her obedience with a true desire to play. Instead of entering a rehearsal with “Tell me what to do and how to do it” s/he can now enter it with “I want to play, create, explore with energy, safety, sensitivity, creativity, freedom, trust, giving, receiving etc.” However, it is essential that an actor does not put on a quality (in other words pretend) that s/he is filled with energy, safety, creativity, play, freedom, trust etc. S/he has to actually feel this quality fully. This is where PW comes in.

The PW notion of primary and secondary process has helped me clarify how and why to amplify within this exercise. Although the point of Crossing the Threshold has never been to reject the thoughts and sensations which hinder the sense of energy, safety, creativity, play, freedom, trust etc. achieving the fullness of these qualities is often impeded by ignoring that which gets in the way. In PW terms an actor might want these positive qualities so much in Consensus Reality that s/he ignores the presence of the secondary processes. PW teaches us to unfold and befriend that which impedes which means this can not be ignored. And indeed in my

classroom I have found that a fullness of an actor's presence can be much aided by PW techniques of unfolding and befriending the secondary processes.

In Crossing the Threshold I now regularly go through a phase where the actor is asked to catch the subtle negative thoughts/sensations after an initial attempt to embody the positive ones. I might ask a question such as: "Is there is still a part of you that isn't energetic, creative, trusting etc. This can be a very subtle sensation or a thought." Inadvertently there is such a part and we spend anywhere from five minutes to half an hour on unfolding the sensations, movements, sounds and thoughts connected to this and then to fully embodying these. As it is common in both psycho-physical acting and PW, this phase can lead to abstract movement or to creation of an Edge Figure which inadvertently helps the actor achieve an insight into his/her psycho-physical process. The wisdom of the secondary process is then used and the actor is asked to focus on personifying that initial quality she wished for i.e. creativity, energy, trust.

I led Crossing the Threshold exercise over one hundred times in the last year (2009-2010). My experience with unfolding of the secondary process has been extremely positive in bringing the Process Actor closer to an ideal state – namely state of "desire to play" rather than of "obedient playing". There is something extremely liberating to an actor when s/he is allowed to be "disobedient" and much wisdom comes out of a myriad of figures that are behind that disobedience. The well socialized primary process which for the most part is motivated by a figure of an "obedient actor" is thus balanced.

Here is an example from the practice. A student actress had a difficult time crying on cue as Irina in *The Three Sisters* by Anton Chekhov. This was a particularly upsetting problem to her because the author calls for tears in stage directions and through the lines in the dialogue

such as: “Don’t cry”. Tears here appear to be a requirement. This young woman was capable of crying in various warm-ups and improvisations. In fact she could cry very easily and yet when it came to the actual moment in rehearsal the tears were blocked. As she is an exceptionally talented actress I was truly puzzled by her block and thought this would take care of itself eventually but it never has. Not after I tried side coaching her breathing and imagery throughout the scene (and I played Irina as a young woman so I knew the structure of the role intimately) nor when I stayed silent. Towards the end of the rehearsal process we decided to focus on that very moment in our warm-up. She Crossed the Threshold with a desire to “cry on cue”. And indeed she was soon crying. When we unfolded the process further we did find a part of her that still doubted the ability to “cry on cue”. As we unfolded this part her movements became very large, energetic and open and the figure that appeared was that of an archetypal “Actress”. The ‘actress’ described the “Actress” as fake, vain, conceited and narcissistic! The student commented how she hated her because she was a show-off. When the student tried to befriend this “Actress” she had a really hard time. She realized that she loved to act but hated the notion of being an actress. She hated the idea of the spectacle of it and of competition in the arts. We worked on her embracing and befriending the “Actress” and she found that she could only befriend the “Actress” in her desire to be great as this meant that she would do great art. As it turned out her block in that one moment in the play had a much bigger connotation. It had to do with the very core of the student’s identity and her choice of her future profession. It was vital for her to befriend the aspects of the profession she felt were shameful. Here I am reminded of Chekhov’s issues with acting I mentioned earlier as well as Grotowski’s “Actor Whore”. What is it that she needed to befriend? In the spirit of deep democracy we have to ask the question: How do we befriend the “Actor Whore”? Do we? The “Actor Whore” is fighting for survival. S/he

knows and accepts the realities of her business. Desire for survival brings up ethical questions which are not limited to show-business only and which should be discussed in a separate essay. For now it will suffice to say that I suggested she developed a habit of willingly unfolding this very secondary process, as I was sure it would reappear. It will take some time for her to integrate the two aspects of the acting profession – the very intimate and yet extremely public nature of it. Also, to understand the fact that acting is her art as well as her business. Or maybe she will not be able to integrate it ever and will make her living separately from acting. Who knows? What is certain is that seeing the vain “Actress” was a great step towards bringing her consensus reality together with her dreambody.

### **Dreaming up and being Dreamt Up**

When a Process Actor plays a part s/he knows that she will play it differently than anyone else but still the essence of the part will be recognizable. When s/he is performing in front of the audience each time she will perform it differently. Process Work’s language of dreaming can be illuminating for an actor when considering the above axioms. Let’s return to the visionary figure of Michael Chekhov once again. His approach to the audience in actor training was radical in that he asks the actor to develop love for the audience:

The actor might think whatever he likes, or say whatever he likes about his audience. He might say I’m indifferent to it, or even I hate it, it is only an illusion. The actor loves his audience, he needs his spectators, he couldn’t live without them. He knows perfectly well that he works for the audience and now, while performing, he works with the audience. The audience is part of his profession and one of the most important and he yearns, he longs for the audience, he loves the audience, otherwise he would really be only embarrassed by it and hate it (Tape 3).

In Chekhov’s Technique the development and nurturing of the love for the audience has a practical use in the development of the actor. Chekhov goes so far as to address the importance

of the audience and the need to “address an audience” at all times, even in film work. There the stage hands can be the people we are playing for. They are so familiar with the craft that they are actually a sympathetic and a discerning audience. “The best audience, really, the best audience in the world is really the stagehands. We must perform for them in movies” (Tape 4). The audience is no more that obscure group of people who we work for but strive to ignore. If the communion with the spectator is to take place we have to admit to our love for the audience while learning how to share our creation with it. It is the loving relationship to the audience that enables the actor to create the intangible connection with the audience. This can go as far as the psychic reading of the audience so that the actual performance will change influenced by the spiritual bond with the spectator.

In Process Work terms this is known as the “dreaming up and being dreamed up”. This term was developed by Arny Mindell in his book *Dreambody in Relationships*. During the Winter Intensive 2009 was defined by Lesli Mones as “[...] a process, by which experience which is disavowed winds up being experienced by someone” and “although it often looks like a causal phenomena in which one person dreams up another, it is perhaps more useful to understand dreaming up as a field phenomenon in which neglected experience in the relationship or group field makes itself known through an individual’s experience” (Mones).

A good example of this type of connection in theatre comes from Chekhov’s own experience. Chekhov played his famous Hamlet at the Moscow Art Theatre to audiences that were brought in by the Communist authorities. On most nights, the entire audience was comprised of members of a certain profession. One night he would play to the teachers; then to the workers; actors and directors and writers; then doctors, soldiers, farmers. Each night his Hamlet became different. According to his testimony he was a Hamlet and a doctor, or Hamlet

and a peasant, but always remaining Hamlet. “Who was watching my own performance and who made these wonderful nuances? It was a little tiny spark from my Higher Self, which inspired me according to the demands of the spectator. There is a deeper, finer bond between the audience and the director and it can be only established when the Higher Self sends its little spark into the creative work of an actor” (Tape 1). In Process Work terminology the collective dreams of these groups that were disavowed found their expression upon the stage.

### **Feedback and Metaskills.**

While acting upon a stage a Process Actor must ask this question: How does the acting technique free me? Does it free me? S/he is encouraged to seek freedom while unfolding a creative process. S/he is always reminded that the acting technique is only a means to an end. In reaching “freedom” s/he can use one element of her acting technique, several elements or none. There is no prescribed way to it. There are only suggestions. However, inevitably the search for freedom will include an outside eye – that of the director or a teacher/facilitator. Similarly Process Work advocates for the PW practitioner to unfold his/her process not according to the facilitator’s desires but to her own (which will inevitably include the facilitator’s input as well). Once again everything is negotiable but the final goal of freedom. And Arnold Mindell starts *Sitting in the Fire* published in 1995 with chapter titled “The Price of Liberty” and the capped words “CREATIVE FREEDOM” start the chapter (17).

In PW the concept of metaskills is inextricably connected to achieving this elusive goal of freedom. In *Alternative to Therapy* Amy Mindell assigns the effectiveness of an approach in PW to the metaskills that underlie them. She describes metaskills as : “[...] the feeling attitudes or qualities that support and bring to life our ordinary skills” (133). She goes on to say:

“Important metaskills of process work include *compassion* , the sense of openness to, and respect for, all parts of the person; a *beginner’s mind* that does not know what experiences mean but allows them to unfold with an open and curious heart; the *fluidity* to follow the unique flow of process; and the perceptual *precision* of a scientist. (133)

Chekhov did give suggestions when it came to metaskills in his book *Michael Chekhov: Lessons for Teachers of his Acting Technique*. Here teachers are encouraged to be giving, sensitive to students’ feelings, to have a light touch, and at the same time, to be responsible for order and direction in the classroom (the Sense of Form demanded by Chekhov). This is not achieved in a disciplinarian manner but through gentleness and humour. Chekhov emphasized loving-kindness in the classroom. He insisted that teachers *must* learn to find a positive way of commenting on an exercise instead of criticizing it negatively. Former students quote Chekhov: “He never said that was terrible. He rather said, ‘that was good, now let’s try it this way’” (Merlin).

While in theatre many facilitators such as teachers and directors are known for their personal metaskills there is a dearth of suggestions such as the one above that can help us develop these. This is strange when we consider that metaskills determine how one teacher differs from another, one director from another. At this juncture I will include a statement of my experience of applying the principles of metaskills. This could be described as purely anecdotal and completely individual and therefore I will be as bold as to say that theatre is a very hierarchical institution and in that hierarchy very conservative. Theatre director has a final word on how things are going to go, how the world will be created. Tyrannical directors, brutal teachers and petulant actors are often parodied but also this kind of a relationship isn’t uncommon in reality. Speaking generally then and taken from my experiences in teaching,

directing and acting, metaskills are somehow thought of as a part of an individual's talent and an innate ability rather than something that is or can be taught. If anything, one picks these skills up through different forms of apprenticeships, by observation and through the trial and error approach. Such has been my path in becoming a director and a teacher. And while I do think that my metaskills are a part and parcel of my Creative Individuality and the innate talent coupled with my experience, I have found the PW concept of metaskills as well as the idea that it can be developed very useful.

The most important aspect for me has been developing an awareness of the metaskills which includes the notion of a facilitator being in constant process as well. Thus PW appreciates moments of facilitators communicating their "not knowing" a solution to a problem to the very people who are expecting them to know. While stepping over the edge of "not knowing" has been a fun ride for me as an actor and "don't know" and "have a beginner's mind" has been a mantra I teach to my acting students the rules have been different for Cynthia the teacher. I have marginalized the possibility of "not knowing" when teaching and have in fact been at times terrified of these moments. PW suggestion to welcome these moments and to go beyond the edge of comfort has been refreshing, freeing and responsible for my personal growth. Furthermore, a part of the director's or a teacher's job is to help orchestrate the emotional score and thought process as well as the action on the stage. While this can be a wonderful task when the director and the actor understand each other it can become hellish when they don't. Process Work can help a difficult situation between a director and an actor with the following statement it encourages in facilitators in general: "Who am I to tell you how you feel or what you think?". Since I have been introduced to Process Work at the Intensive, this statement has brought me more freedom than any other. It has allowed me to communicate with the students on a higher,

more honest level. Similarly, PW's conscious exploration of rank in a classroom situation has given me the permission to metacommunicate about rank and asks a student to become a teacher. Not only does this solve a lot of relationship issues but it also can solve the actual performance issues at hand. These are interconnected! We have already seen that the audience-performer relationship determines a performance. Similarly, the facilitator-actor relationship determines the rehearsal process which leads to a performance.

While allowing the student to teach, metcommunicating about rank and "not knowing" are matters of common sense and are not new to me, the fact that PW categorizes them and insists on a constant awareness of them has helped me immensely in my teaching. I am no longer EVER called to "fix" a student but we are both called only to "find out". Metcommunicating has been a new way to develop of what I think as my strengths as a teacher such as compassion and empiricism but it has also helped my deal with some of my weaknesses such as issues of rank in general. My issues in this call for a longer discussion, but for now it suffices to say that a combination of a very unusual home life and Communist society has crippled my ability to deal with rank. Processing the issues with rank in theatrical classroom hierarchy has been healing on many levels for me: personal, relationship and group/world.

### Conclusion

I hope that the above arguments will facilitate and enable practitioners of Process Oriented therapy and those of Process Acting to enter into a discussion. While the word "acting" ought to be added to the paradigmatical group that has influenced Process Work the word "therapeutic" and "healing" must be added to the goals of psycho-physical actor or Process Acting. They both stem from the same origins, their view of the notion of self is same, their

ecological consciousness is the same and they often use the same basic tools namely elements of humanity and their various levels such as body, sensations, will, imagination and consciousness. Both Process Work practitioner and Process Actor are comfortable in working with subtle views of human nature such as levels of energy and radiation and both take intuitive knowledge for granted. Their mutual goal is state of presence which by definition is freeing. They expect this state to be invoked in conjunction with or under the watchful eye of the Big U or the Higher Self. To borrow a Process Work term which it borrows from quantum physics we could say that the Process Actor and the Process Work practitioner are fully *entangled*<sup>xviii</sup> pair. There exists a connection between the members of such a pair that defies both classical and relativistic concepts of space and time and is able to transmit information faster than the speed of light. Still, an interpretation of this phenomenon is that quantum entanglement does *not* necessarily enable the transmission of classical information faster than the speed of light because a classical information channel is required to complete the process. Thus in a classical written form of an essay I conclude with a simple equation: Process Actor is truth teller and Process Work practitioner is a creative individual. Process Actor is a creative individual and Process Work practitioner is a truth teller. Shakespeare's words "All the world is a stage" help summarize this equation. Process Work practitioner's and Process Actor's performance venues may be different but our common process consists of staging of dreams through a never-ending unfolding of the simple actions and an astonishing and ever changing myriad of their qualities. And we can stage each one of them only once!

i i McDermott who is a graduate of a previous PW Winter Intensive and a member of the *improbable theatre company* of London.

ii Arnold Mindell is a key figure in the revolutionary field of dream and body work. Originally a quantum physicist, Mindell is an analyst in private practice. President of the Research Society for Process-oriented Psychology, Zurich, and training analyst and teacher at the Jung Institute, Zurich, Mindell's current work focuses on conflict resolution. Arnold is known as Army to one and all.

iii Actor Michael "Misha" Chekhov (1891-1955), the nephew of playwright Anton Pavlovich Chekhov (1860-1904) is remembered as one of Russia's greatest theatre artists. Chekhov's career began at the Moscow Art Theatre (MAT) with which he was associated for sixteen years. A student of Konstantin Stanislavsky (1863-1938), he was considered to be a genius by his MAT contemporaries. This was not only because of his extraordinary acting, in roles such as Kobe (*Wreck of the Good Hope*, 1913), Frazer (*The Deluge*, 1915), Malvolio (*Twelfth Night*, 1920), Khlestakov (*The Government Inspector*, 1921), Erik XIV (*Erik XIV*, 1921), Hamlet (*Hamlet*, 1924), Muromsky (*The Case*, 1927) to name but a few, but also because of his contributions to the understanding of the actor's process.

More specifically, Chekhov developed Stanislavsky's system of acting by shifting the emphasis in training from the development of Stanislavsky's "sense of truth" and achievement of verisimilitude to the development of body-mind connection through the use of imagination to foster theatricality, sense of style, and form in performance. What in Stanislavsky's *An Actor Prepares* is referred to as psycho-technique (226) became psychophysical technique. Chekhov maintained that he focused on the physical in order to shift the emphasis in the actor's artistic creation from "the actor's ego to the character's ego," thus freeing his Creative Individuality from the need to use personal memories in his work (Black 14).

iv Upon writing this essay Amy Mindell brought to my attention that Arlene Audergon also uses this term. I have not had a chance to read her essay and thus do not offer a comment on how similar or different these are. I assume they are similar.

v Directed by Michael Wighton and produced by Theatre Cipher.

vi Interested reader may pursue this further in Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed* (London, Pluto Press 1979).

vii Interested reader may pursue this in Grotowski's extensive opus, particularly in *Towards the Poor Theatre*.

viii Arnold Mindell's concept. He talks about the Big You in various books, and in great depth in his upcoming book *Earth Based Psychology*. "The Big You is the part of the human being which lives equally within the three levels of reality: consensus, dream and the essence. Mindell says: The Big You is the source of your dreams, it's another name for the dreammaker. The Big You is the sentient core of everything that catches your attention as well as the things themselves. [...] When you are lucid, you sense the world through the Big You's mind and understand your dreams before you even

have them.[...]Occasionally, the Big You is personified in fantasies as a magnanimous human being, deity, goddess, or god. The Big You might appear as a nature spirit, a wise old woman or man. Some see the Big You as a God or combination of gods. As you work on yourself, The Big You takes on” (A. Mindell, *Dreaming Wile Awake: Techniques for 24-hour Lucid Dreaming* 202). The Big You is able to tap into the essence of level and therefore also essence of problems and offer solutions.

i ix Metaskill is a term which refers to the feeling with which theory, information and techniques are applied. Interested reader can further pursue the analysis of this concept in Amy Mindell’s book *Metaskills: The spiritual Art of Therapy*. (A. Mindell, *Sitting in the Fire*. Large group transformation using conflict and diversity.)

x x Mel Gordon writes in his chronology of Chekhov’s life:

1918. January–February: Chekhov is no longer able to perform Malvolio at the First Studio. Visiting American critic Oliver Saylor calls Chekhov “a gaunt, brooding soul, weighed down by Russia’s sorrows.

Spring: Chekhov develops an acute paranoia, and believes he can hear and “see” faraway conversations. He thinks constantly of suicide and his mother. Chekhov’s family life deteriorates: Olga divorces him, taking their newborn daughter, Ada. Stanislavsky sends four psychiatrists to diagnose Chekhov. Chekhov undergoes hypnotic treatments.

1919. Spring. Although Chekhov’s condition improves, he is subject to uncontrollable fits of laughter. Chekhov begins reading books on Hindu philosophy and yoga for solace.[...]

1920. August: After a great spiritual crisis, Chekhov decides to return to the theatre.

1921. December: When critics say his acting techniques will cause him to lose his mind, Chekhov develops a stammer, which Stanislavsky corrects. [...]

1922. Winter: Reading Knowledge of the Higher Worlds and Its Attainment by Rudolf Steiner, Chekhov becomes intrigued by Anthroposophy, Steiner’s spiritual science. [...]

October: In Stuttgart, Chekhov watches Steiner lecture on *Eurythmy*, “the science of visible speech.” Following him to the Netherlands, Chekhov speaks with Steiner privately. Briefly, Chekhov considers becoming a priest in his Christian Community. Mel Gordon, "Michael Chekhov's Life and Work: A Descriptive Chronology." The Drama Review Vol. 27. Fall, 1983 (1983): 8–10.

x xi These include the teaching of Richard Boleslavsky (1889- 1937) who brought the System to the United States and the later variations of Stella Adler (1901-1992), Uta Hagen (1919-2004), Sanford Meisner (1905-1982) and Lee Strasberg (1901-1982).

x xii For the purpose of this essay, the term “eastern” relates to Asian or Oriental theatre, culture and religion. It is a general term which is opposite to “western” or Occidental theatre, culture and religion. For example, western in religious terms, means Judeo-Christianity. A connection between Protestantism, Catholicism, Baptist, Russian-Orthodox religion, and Judaism is easily recognized through shared religious texts such as the Old Testament, although the specific religious practices and the beliefs are not the same. The parallel in the eastern context is a philosophical connection between three Buddhist religious teachings, *Hinayana*, *Mahayana* and *Vajrayana*, which are referred to as three vehicles for liberation. Zen, Teravadan, Dzokchen and Chen denominations developed from these three main Buddhist teachings (to name a few). Furthermore, Buddhism is philosophically similar to Hinduism in a degree comparable with Christianity and Judaism, in that Buddhism grew out of Hinduism as Christianity evolved from Judaism. The similarities between two main eastern religions are both practical and theoretical: for example several Buddhist lineages and Hinduism share Tantric practices such as work with *chakras* and visualization meditation. They also have a common purpose between their spiritual paths, namely to develop an attitude of consciousness which strives towards a spiritual liberation which is better known as *nirvana*, *moksha* or *samadhi*. For both Hindu and Buddhist practitioners, liberation occurs when the practitioner has completely transcended the causes and conditions of personal identity and identification. Ideally, all notions of self as agent or recipient of an experience will then come to an end and thus the practitioner will achieve the state of being Whole or “oneness”.

x xiii As it is commonly known, Goethe's scientific ideas stand outside the main tradition of modern science as it develops from the age of Galileo and Newton down to the present day. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe offers a Romantic scientist's relationship to nature, in that his numerous scientific writings are based on intensified, selfless observation of nature or "intuitive discernment" (Ahern 50). Such observation assumes organic inter-relationships; in other words, a unity with nature rather than a separation from nature. It also takes into account the character of the scientist so that "'method depends on character' as he noted in his Diary, 1 February 1831" (Stephenson 27). Goethe classifies Newton's character as rigid and his "obsessive fixation on abstractions to the point where he deceives himself into mistaking them for realities – is, in Goethe's eyes, a prejudice born of the rigidity of the man who committed it, one that can only be understood by character analysis. Once understood for what it is, such dogmatism can be counteracted: Newton's reductionist theory of colour was 'a part masquerading as a whole'. See R. H. Stephenson, *Goethe's Conception of Knowledge and Science*, Edinburgh Studies in European Romanticism (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995).

Throughout the nineteenth century Goethe's independent paths of scientific inquiry were by and large discredited because of its seeming subjectivity. However, in the twentieth century his scientific work has been rehabilitated. Quantum physicist and Nobel laureate Werner Heisenberg suggested that Goethe's ideas about scientific methods and observation have influenced the field of quantum physics. Also R.H. Stevenson tells us how in 1972 Goethe was being hailed for having played a significant role in the development of the technology which produced color television. Edvin Land who was inventor of the Land Camera claimed that he owed in part to Goethe his 'new theory of colour' as well. See Stephenson, *Goethe's Conception of Knowledge and Science*.

Several factors have contributed to this newly found respect for Goethe's holistic view of nature. The most important being the increased knowledge in the scientific community itself of the limitation of Newtonian mechanistic models. Goethe's method and manner of inquiry which strives to bring together reasoning and perception goes beyond the Newtonian limitations. In *Goethe and the Scientific Tradition* H.B. Nisbet has described Goethe's "scientific *oeuvre* as a striking blend of neo-Platonic and empirical attitudes" (4).

x xiv Interested reader can pursue this his new book *ProcessMind* will appear in October 2010 from Quest Books.

x xv On occasion I heard the term *self-facilitator* for what I am calling PW practitioner. I simply mean a person who is trying to become aware of his/her own process through PW. This person can be in the role of a facilitator or a client.

x xvi For instance, in Zen Buddhism, when working on attainment of the *hara* centre, the practitioner uses breathing. The work with breath is divided in three stages: first, the stage of involuntary breathing as if the breathing is something belonging only to the outer world; then the practitioner practices breathing "within himself;" and finally:

The meaning of the third stage is blissful, convincing and binding experience of participation in the *Whole*. At the third stage it is neither the one nor the other, for here a new life-impulse breaks through which has transcended the opposites and which sets a man on a new path. Karlfried Dèurckheim, *Hara : The Vital Center of Man* (Rochester, Vt.: Inner Traditions, 2004) 162. (emphasis in original).

x xvii Briefly speaking, entanglement refers to correlated behaviour of two or more particles that cannot be described classically; the properties of one particle can depend on those of another (typically distant) particle in a way that only quantum mechanics can explain (Horodecki).

n.d.

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