



Top drawing: e.d.
Bottom drawing: m.p.

A river
isn't but
a mess with a high dream

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Drawing: a.d.k.

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to eleni who has kept our revery eternal

Try all worlds. All parts.

Mindell (2013, pp. 163-164)

Thank you

So many years of training, so many different forms of training. So many teachers, supervisors, facilitators, groups. So many experiences, so many tears, so many smiles. So many kilometers; distances covered and uncovered.

Lena, Alexandra, and Lily, I don't know how to thank you for following your hearts, instincts, love and dreaming that took you to Portland to study Process Work. If you hadn't, I don't know what life would look like. And also, if you hadn't decided to keep your childhood house, Lily and Alexandra, to host Process Work there, I don't know what Process Work Athens would look like. Thank you from my heart for being there to teach me, as well as to learn and grow together. Alexandra, I just adore you. Lily, I feel honored to have grown by such a beautiful delta. Lena, my eyes and your eyes will always tell wonderful stories to each other. You are home to me.

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untitled

in the hope that
waters are yet to be met
at a delta
or
in the ocean

not made to meet
their travels were unknown
their flow unpredictable

stone to stone
pond to pond
flow shall transform
create anew

river
stone
pond
flow
create
anew

titled

m.p. august 21.

What's in here...

A nighttime dream from my childhood

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the dreamer's body, the vertigo, the bridge, the ninja, the cactus, the void, the isolated
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A nighttime dream from my childhood

I must have been around 6 or 7 years old when a night with high fever, I had this dream that I still remember very vividly.

In my dream there was an isolated mountain top on the left, a mountain range on the right and a gap, the void between the two. Over this void lies a human body, a huge one with its head touching the isolated mountain on the left side of the scenery and its feet touching the mountain range on the right. This body forms some sort of bridge over the void, while it is covered by cactus branches. These branches are super big too and they only have prickles on their external surfaces and not towards the body. On one of these branches, at around the level of the knees of the human body, stands a little ninja who holds a ninja sword in her hands and is cutting the cactus branch.

Here is a snapshot of the scene in my dream that I drew.



To make a prairie

Starting to write is a topic to study on its own. What do you want to write about? And where does what-you-want-to-write-about start? Is there a beginning? Is there an end? Or is this all just an edge¹? An inhibition to dream, to let go of, to dive into the unknown.

*To make a prairie it takes a clover and one bee,
One clover, and a bee
And revery.
The revery alone will do
If bees are few.*

To make a prairie (Emily Dickinson, 1755)

The springboard for deciding what to write about was consensus reality² itself, as life wasn't really happening. Life was impossible.

Things weren't really moving.

I was stuck.

In this state of stuckness nothing seemed to be moving. Nothing seemed to be flirting with me. I would look inside and feel aversion. I would look around and feel aversion. Same back, same forth.

¹ See Glossary of Terms, Appendix 2.

² See Glossary of Terms, Appendix 2.

At first, I thought that in this project I was going to be working on an interpersonal level, on my relationships and my relating skills. I had to work on them. But this was impossible to do no matter how much I tried.

Then I thought I was going to be working on a personal and internal level, but things weren't moving there either. Going inside was a nightmare, staying in the present was a nightmare too.

The more I stayed inside and the more I stayed in the present, the worse things would get.

What a place. What a nightmare.

Everything was surfacing in my mind and body for quite a while, but I was feeling unable to focus on anything at all. Everything had a meaning, every little thing linked into more things but there was always this something I was unable to grasp. Something which not only didn't make sense, but also made life not worth living.

When I started thinking about this project, I knew I would have to focus on something, anything, at a phase in my life when awareness wasn't often at hand and metacommunication³ was hardly ever possible. When things get really shitty, stability is hard to obtain and linear thinking or understanding often go on a trip... You and I go on a trip. So, when I was asked to start thinking about my final project, I was in this phase that I would get in undesirable altered states of consciousness⁴; that is to say, not cool and no fun places, but rather painful, draining, small/narrow psychic places. I would get into emotionally difficult and ugly places where the air was stuck, my body was stuck and reality in general was stuck. And there was literally no place to start from at the time. I was no place to start from. I was not workable material, as all my usual ways, thinking skills, understanding... they were all just leading me straight onto the same big wall. Relationships too were disastrous. Fluidity and movement seemed to be a distant reality.

³ See Glossary of Terms, Appendix 2.

⁴ See Glossary of Terms, Appendix 2.

Gradually I was drawn towards writing observations around those altered states. When I started writing different texts around this idea, I would try revisiting some of those moments but following a memory backwards in my mind was mainly almost impossible. My memory of some incidents was the weirdest part of my brain. I remembered bits and pieces that “were important”. I could only remember cracks in the moments. Cracks in time. An image or a short scene would play for some seconds in my head and that was it. And the only reason why I could recall those very few moments, those cracks, was because in those moments, or around a particular scene, something had touched me. Something had really touched me in my otherwise timeless, nonlinear, senseless space.

This was a huge realization at the time, though working on any of those moments was still not an option. One day though, something showed up, which -so to say- brought all this mess into something like a river gorge and then gradually -though really, really slowly- into a flow. And that is my childhood dream; feeling drawn by it, working on it, working with it. It seems that this dream which I had as a child somehow contains, holds a space for all my mess, my river and my gorge too. So, this is how I embarked on a journey of writing about my childhood dream, without a very clear direction at first. All I knew when I started writing down something like a long personal diary was that I was going to be writing about my childhood dream which seemed to had come to my rescue. For more information on what a childhood dream or memory is read below the section “Working on one’s life myth: making meaning, making sense”.

A naive abstract

When outer life makes no sense.

When inner life is so painful.

When memory is just nonlinear cracks in time.

When my eyes won't blink and can't get wet.

When love won't make me breathe.

Then is when my childhood dream came as a scene from a far. The most graphically accurate scene I had ever encountered.

It is in my childhood dream where I found my edges, my relationship patterns, my powers and weaknesses, my body symptoms, and addictions. Like a still picture depicting everything in it. Working with the dream, the scene and its elements made things in real life move a little, and then a little more. Created some flow. Brought some air in and a title. That is to say that I gradually started being able to name the things that were happening to me; it was self-resentment, self-hatred, and deep sadness. I started to recognize them as such; they were familiar to me. They had a name. They were part of life and life wasn't just those narrow spaces.

Soon after though, again something wasn't so right. Something was left untouched by this little movement and this little flow. Energetically my body wasn't shifting with my mind or my awareness. My somatic world of experiences was stuck in the same patterns and experiences. This is when I started experimenting with movement. As part of this work, I made some videos in which I unfold the energy of some of the figures⁵, i.e., the elements in my childhood dream, as if there was no goal to be achieved. I started exploring somatically with the energy of the dream

⁵ See Glossary of Terms, Appendix 2.

figures, the experience that the dream figures were carrying with them. In the videos that go along with my project I have attempted to explore the world of 3 of my dream figures: the cactus, the void and the mountain. My approach was to just embody the experience and let it be. Intuitively unfold the essence of those figures. Through this work, I ended up unfolding a new perspective, a new idea, a new experience different to the pre-fixed idea around the figures and symbols in my dream. This shift in understanding the elements in my dream, created a shift in me looking at the dream as well as in what the dream was telling me about myself. Shifting the perspective around my understanding of the dream, started to transform the dynamic between all the elements, as well as the story told. And this consequently started affecting my perspective of myself and brought in new material on how to work on myself too. It not only affected how I saw myself, but what my life myth was all about (see about life myth in chapter “Working on one’s life myth: making meaning, making sense”).

The Appendix 1 at the end of this work is a guide to watching the 3 videos that I made. In this guide there is information on the movement methods that I have used in my exploration, as well as information on what to watch out for in this work.

Doing a heuristic study

Before exploring the different narratives of dreamlike and mythical creatures and figures, let me just give a framework of what a heuristic study is and what I will do in this piece of work. This paper is autobiographical. I am the researcher, as I am also at the center of the research field. By this, I mean that I study myself as a living individual, acting and reacting in given fields and contexts of my life. I will not examine the field, nor its contexts; I will only look at my personal experiences using information from multiple channels. My research will be propelled by my bodily experiences and my emotional world, my social, relational, spiritual, kinesthetic and cognitive understanding and observations. The above is nicely explained by Sultan (2019) in Chapter 1:

Autobiographical: Originates within the self. Includes personal history, memory, imagination, and perception, fusing past, present, and future (Moustakas, 1994; Sultan, 2015) into here and now.

Experiential, embodied and holistic: Views subjective human experience -the-here-and-now relationship between one's body and oneself and one's body and the world- reciprocity, and perception' (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2013) as pivotal to informing the research process. Focuses on multiple facets of human experience: cognitive, emotional, sensory-kinesthetic, perceptual, spiritual, social-relational, and their integration (Sultan, 2015).

Living versus lived experience: Acknowledges all human experience as interconnected and interrelated, and thus as one continuing, enduring cycle rather than a series of discrete, disconnected historical events. Views research as the exploration of present-moment, ongoing, living human experience, even

when exploring past experiences. Resonates with the rich, textured descriptions and voices of those who have experienced the topic of inquiry.

Taking this framework into account, I will be fusing past events with current life experiences to - hopefully- bring changes in my immediate and long-term future. In this respect, I will be using my personal history and memories, joined with less linear ways of thinking, such as dreams or dreamlike experiences.

This sort of inquiry emerges from the researcher's initial engagement or first encounter of a topic of interest through autobiographical experience. This brings up a question that the researcher can't ignore but is deeply drawn to. It needs to be a topic that the researcher is personally involved with and grows as the research itself grows too.

In a manner of speaking, the general topic of inquiry chooses you [...]. This deeply felt phenomenon or experience becomes a point of encounter between your internal world and the external world in which the phenomenon is playing out and in which the research is taking place. In a way, the research question and the process of exploring it become a calling, a sort of invitation to enter the labyrinth and embrace the journey. This initial engagement is followed by immersion (patience and engagement with the process), incubation (a phase of care, cultivation, growth, insight, understanding, integration), illumination (awareness, discovery and deeper knowledge) (Douglass and Moustakas, 1985; Sultan, 2015), explication and then creative synthesis. (Sultan, 2019, p. 17)

The limitations of this form of inquiry though are several: the researcher needs to be creative and must be less objective. She, the researcher, may experience roadblocks as she tries to define or redefine the research question. She may also feel lost and never attain illumination. Her final findings or manuscript may not yield any new or definitive information. Moreover, reading the paper might perplex things even more in the eyes of the reader. Her research findings may be difficult to generalize due to the small number of research partners. And also her findings may not result in any social action or change (Sultan, 2019, p.21). But let's just hope that this won't happen... and that this work is at least going to bring change in me and my immediate surroundings.

Of course, in addition to the limitations that such a form of inquiry has on its own, there are a few more things to be considered which are specific to my work. In the following section I will look further into these more specific limitations.

Me doing a heuristic study

My personal drive to do a heuristic study is to give myself the opportunity to intentionally focus on studying myself in the present. This autobiographical work focuses on a prolonged period of crisis in my life (these past 3 or 4 years) and my efforts to understand and transform it. By looking autobiographically back, into my past experiences, and then forth, my aim is to gain self-awareness on patterns, tendencies and moods, and to hopefully improve my everyday life.

Most often, autobiographers write about "epiphanies"—remembered moments perceived to have significantly impacted the trajectory of a person's life (Bochner & Ellis, 1992; Couser, 1997; Denzin, 1989), times of existential crises that forced a person to attend to and analyze lived experience (Zaner, 2004), and events after which life does not seem quite the same. While epiphanies are self-claimed phenomena in which one person may consider an experience transformative while another may not, these epiphanies reveal ways a person could negotiate "intense situations" and "effects that linger—recollections, memories, images, feelings—long after a crucial incident is supposedly finished" (Bochner, 1984, p.595). (Ellis et al., 2010)

However, this work cannot yet be called an autoethnography, as the things that I unfold and explore are limited to some personal information and my childhood dream. I am solely focusing on how one's childhood dream or memory can guide change in his/her life and how this dream or memory can support rekindling the flow when one is completely stuck.

When researchers do autoethnography, they retrospectively and selectively write about epiphanies that stem from, or are made possible by, being part of a culture and/or by possessing a particular cultural identity. (Ellis et al., 2010)

Moreover, in the sense that this work is both heuristic and autobiographic, I want to make one more comment about the writing style that I have used. As it is already evident, I write somehow freely. Sometimes my writing is in first person, sometimes in second or third. Other times my writing format addresses the reader or nobody. Occasionally my work has a form that looks more like a poem and less like an essay. This all has to do with telling my story. Telling a personal story while also aiming at conveying the importance in this whole process as a self-research tool. In a way my writing style has both to do with my understanding of my process and a grain of wanting to give a pinch of universality to it.

Autobiographers also can make a text artful and evocative by altering authorial points of view. Sometimes autobiographers may use first-person to tell a story, typically when they personally observed or lived through an interaction and participated in an intimate and immediate "eyewitness account" (Cauley, 2008, p.442). Sometimes autobiographers may use second-person to bring readers into a scene, to actively witness, with the author, an experience, to be a part of rather than distanced from an event (e.g., Glave, 2005; McCauley, 1996; Pelias, 2000). Autobiographers also may use second-person to describe moments that are felt too difficult to claim (Glave, 2005; Pelias, 2000; McCauley, 1996). Sometimes autobiographers may use third-person to establish the context for an interaction,

report findings, and present what others do or say (Cauley, 2008). (Ellis et al., 2010)

Besides all this, though, doing a heuristic study at this phase in my life is challenging. Very challenging. My inquiry is all about observing myself, paying close attention, staying with my kinesthetic and emotional experiences. It is all about going deeper, feeling into, then taking a step back, taking a breath and some distance and metacommunicating clearly to myself. What am I taking a step back from? Very intense altered states. Very unpleasant feeling states, where my memory and recollection are foggy, non-linear, partial, incomplete. Yet mostly everything in these feeling states tends to repeat. In level, tone, tune, tension, phases, and closure. Revisiting those moments to reflect on them, noticing what I can recall and finding ways to figure out what I cannot recall, is also challenging. The key word here and also my main difficulty is revisiting; revisiting those painful and unpleasant moments.

When I refer to altered states, I mean altered states of consciousness. Think of a spectrum where some of its parts are what we call normal states of consciousness. These of course vary for each one of us, but there are some more ordinary, more common, more accepted let's say states in our everyday lives (differing depending when, where, and how one lives). There are some similarly appearing states that are common when one goes to an administrative post for work, at the cinema, at a restaurant. There are also some more common slightly altered states of consciousness when people wake up naturally, when they gradually fall asleep, when they have a morning drink, when they casually chat. And then there are more intense altered states, like feeling nervous, stressed, frustrated, angry, excited, relieved. And there are more extreme ones from ecstatic states of fully and deeply enjoying something, truly and deeply feeling into something; to states where a person is so deeply in their own space and time almost uninterruptedly.

Altered states of consciousness: Any state of consciousness that is different from the state we ordinarily identify with. Typical altered states of consciousness

include drowsiness, intense anger, or falling in love. Altered states can happen willfully, for example, through the use of drugs or high levels of exercise, or involuntarily, such as through the onset of coma. Coma is the deepest altered state of consciousness. (Glossary of Process Work Terms, compiled by Revar et al., 2020)

In my altered states my body and mind fill with frustration, negativity, gloominess, sadness, and anger. When I get triggered and get in one of these states, getting out is hard, almost unrealistic for quite some time. In my long work on those states, I have tried different things. Revisiting moments when I have been in one of these unpleasant altered states is always very hard. And this is an extra challenge for this heuristic study, given that both my altered states and my childhood dream are connected to these strong and unpleasant altered states. In my real day time life, my altered states are part of my addictions, tendencies, relationship problems and moods; in my childhood dream the altered state is what I will later explain as a feeling of vertigo.

To minimize the effect my altered states have on this inquiry, I have extended the period of self-observation, I have taken long breaks away from writing and I have also given much more space to body work than I had initially planned.

Working on one's life myth: making meaning, making sense

A person can work with a life myth consciously and creatively,
instead of being propelled by it unconsciously.

(Diamond & Jones, 2004, p. 148)

But let us just start from why we look at childhood dreams or memories and what a life myth really is. The idea of a life myth was first used by Carl Jung. I am going to use a quote from Jan Dworkin's book "Make Love Better" (2019) as she beautifully states the background through which the childhood dream -or an early childhood memory- and the life myth became meaningful terms with specific content.

In the 1930s, the Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung embarked on an investigation into the childhood dreams remembered by adults. His research led him to conclude that recurring and impactful dreams from childhood are the "richest jewel in the treasure chest of the soul". By this he meant they provide a blueprint for the dreamer's central emotional patterns and deepest life purpose – what he called a life myth. In the 1970s, Arnold Mindell's mind-body research extended Jung's findings to show that these important dreams, as well as early childhood memories, also offer clues about the dreamer's future chronic body symptoms, addictions, professional challenges, and relationship patterns.

One's life myth, one's childhood dream or memory, as well as long-term edges manifest themselves through chronic body symptoms, addictions, challenges, and relationships patterns. Therefore, paying attention to them, unfolding them and giving them space can support an individual to gain awareness on one's trajectory. In Process Work we work towards developing

awareness of ourselves, of our path in life, of our strengths and weaknesses, of our hurt and emotions, of our traumas. In so doing we gradually gain awareness of the world within us and outside us, our boundaries towards the world become clearer but also more flexible and permeable, and we as individuals we can take a step back from pressing things, breathe and - hopefully- make more informed decisions.

Resolution of problems is viewed as a by-product of developing awareness, rather than an end in itself. This approach can provide relief from problems, even when they cannot be resolved, by bringing about an expanded viewpoint. Long-term edge work makes the boundaries of identity more fluid and permeable, and encourages the development of detachment, particularly through the practice of seeing the “other” in oneself. (Dworkin, 2019, p. 148)

Here is something important to consider when looking into figures from early childhood dreams or memories. Each figure represents a part of the dreamer. Everything in the dream is you. Everything in my dream is me. It is just that in the dream, most of the dreamers’ powers and superpowers are experienced as disturbing, simply because in real life the dreamer cannot identify with these strengths.

But. There’s a fairly large problem: a magnificent, paradoxical challenge you encounter when exploring your early dreams. Often, your most profound powers are disguised as something unacceptable, unwanted, or disturbing – something that disrupts or violates your sense of identity. (Dworkin, 2019, p. 6)

However, only by exploring deeper the different figures and the dynamics can one get to fully discover what C.G. Jung called the life myth: a “patterning for life-long personal development”

(Diamond & Jones, 2004, p. 148). When going deeper into this kind of work, one's myth "frames the personal growth journey in an impersonal way, allowing for wider perspectives and new meaning to emerge. It locates personal history in the context of broader archetypical drama, and adds a spiritual dimension to self-exploration". (Diamond & Jones, 2004, p. 149) And I had to revisit these figures and this dream scene as my life was going in circles and all my problems were like creative repetitions of the same thing. As explained by Diamond & Jones (2004):

When particular problems and experiences happen over and over again, they provide repeated opportunities for examining core issues. Each time, they bring new experiences, meaning, and insight. As stopping places on the life journey, long-term edges seem more or less the same every time they are encountered. Yet, each time they come around, they bring the potential for personal change and growth. As in mythic tales the dragon does not change, but the hero does.

Since the beginning of this inner journey of mine, I have gone back to my childhood dream many, many times. Each time a little detail is new information for me. A different "Aha! moment" occurs to me. Sometimes this understanding is in consensus reality and comes through my body or my mind, sometimes it is visible with the naked eye... but other times it is just in dreamland. It may visit me in my night-time dreams or it might just have to do with dream figures and their potential. In the section below I will explore each element as a dream figure of mine and will talk about the insights I now have about all of them.

Like an astrological chart, the childhood dream was not a predetermined path,
but a picture of tendencies, represented symbolically.

(Dworkin, 2019, p. 149)

Dreamland work

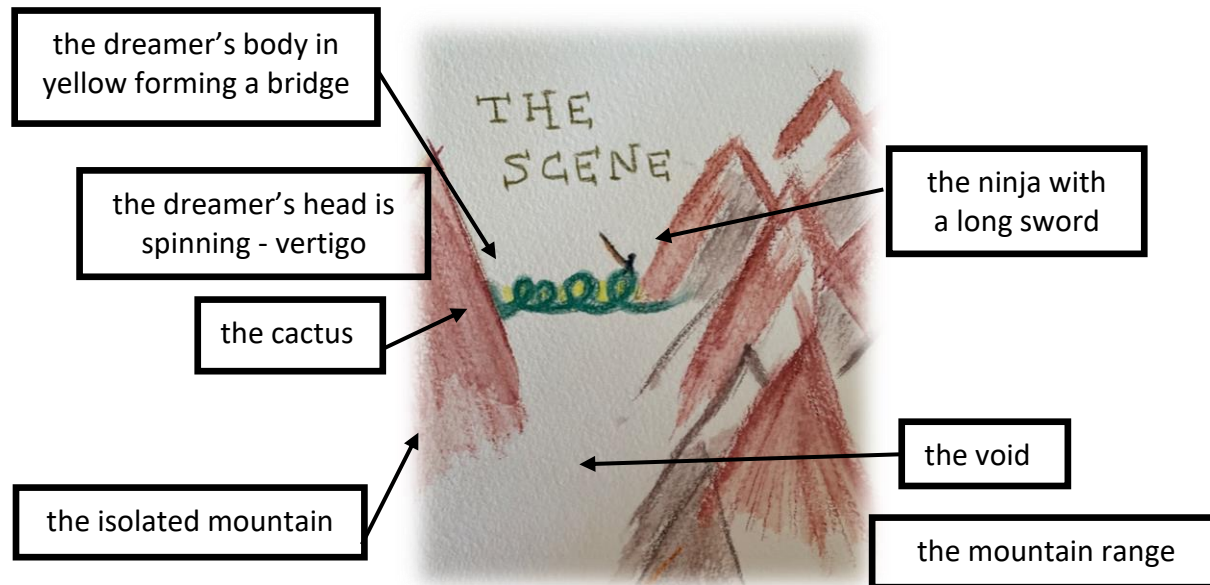
Why did I choose to work on the dreamland level⁶?

Working on the dreamland level, symbolically, for me meant that I would carry on working, as consensus reality on its own was just impossible to deal with. The only difference would be that I would work on relationships and at places from my dream! In my life I was in such a hard and stiff curve that I found it impossible to work on my relationships, my issues, my feelings, my disappointments, my mistakes, my wrongdoings... Working with real situations, real relationships, real people, real-tangible things was i-m-p-o-s-s-i-b-l-e. But working on a dream like my childhood dream provided me with the exact amount of distance from real life and all the valuable core issues and dynamics of my life.

Let me start this by going over my childhood dream with a little more detail this time, as it will help me make references as I move on. In my childhood dream there are several figures: the cactus, the prickles (only away from the dreamer's body), the ninja, the ninja's long sword, the gigantic body of the dreamer forming a bridge, this bridge, an isolated mountain top, a mountain range, a void between the two sides of mountains, the vertigo, and the dynamic relationship between different of those aspects, as well as the overall dynamic of all of them joined in one scene. All these elements add something to the dream; they come with a quality. The cactus is wrapped around the dreamer (wrapping, holding, hugging, limiting...), the prickles are spiky, but -surprisingly enough- the cactus only has prickles on its external surfaces and not the parts that touch the dreamer's body, the ninja is cutting with her long sword which is huge for the figure's size but too small for the size of the cactus it aims to cut. The void underneath is a real void. The dreamer is dizzy from the impossible mission of the ninja to cut the gigantic branch. The dreamer is a bridge. The bridge is bridging the isolated mountain top with the mountain range.

⁶ See Glossary of Terms, Appendix 2.

Here is the snapshot of the scene in the dream I used at the beginning of this work. I have added tags to all the figures that are important to me in this dream:



Dreamland in Process Work terms refers to a world of dreams, projections, emotions and fantasies, as Diamond & Jones (2004) explain it. In Dreamland you may find things that are somewhat disavowed by your everyday self and explore them more easily, with less prejudice than in your everyday life. For example, in consensus reality it was impossible for me to work on my feeling of being bound by others in relationships. Emotionally it was overwhelming to do so. However, when I would explore with becoming a cactus that binds, that was almost pleasing. Even becoming the dreamer in the dream being bound by a huge cactus (the human body in the dream), that was a different story. It was fun! It was exciting even. I was willing to become the gigantic cactus (the bounding energy, i.e., the secondary energy⁷), whereas in consensus reality I was not able to become the Other or anything secondary in any context. Picking up the annoying energy, the cactus that entrapped me was easier than trying to work on a person in my life from whom I was feeling bound. The bounding energy in consensus reality was the Other, was the Other in me; it was secondary energies which I saw as authorities and oppressors, but the cactus

⁷ See Glossary of Terms, Appendix 2.

didn't have any of the undesired connotations or feelings which would make it emotionally impossible for me to embody. In fact, I always liked cactuses! And suddenly I was interested in exploring the bounding energy of the cactus, plus the altered state of the figure bound by the cactus was more attractive to work on than my everyday self in an ugly feeling place.

Dreamland work for me turned the lights on, so to say; gave life to different figures; brought to life fragments of empathy towards myself; allowed movement at first, some flow later. It also brought about feelings other than the lowest of dreams and expectations and everything that usually comes with them. Allowed some space for me to experiment. Notions such as the bridge, the ally, the void, the cactus, the ninja were all integral parts of my life and I just didn't know. Somewhere inside me there was always a little ninja, there was always a bridge, a void, a wrapping branch and a containing energy. There was always a feeling of tireless effort, like that of the little ninja. These figures, as in energies, are both within and outside of me; in the world. They are roles in my inner psychic world, as they also express dynamics in my relationships and life events.

What is important is that through this dream I was gradually able to take distance from the actual relationships in consensus reality (internal and external) and notice things that were happening to me at given moments and were only noticeable to others. Personally, I would either not see them at all or I would just feel generally confused. My body language, the tone of my voice, the tension in my body, my breathing, my ability to think, to process, to stop, to shift, to negotiate, to love, to look ahead, to put into perspective, to remember, to connect, to disconnect, to withdraw, to take a minute, to decide the way I would in almost any other given moment... my whole self was different in those altered states. So not there... And how all these shifts and changes communicated messages almost independently; created atmospheres; shifted the air and the waters around me. And all the above observations were possible because seeing the entanglements in the dream from different angles and understanding them much deeper made the entanglements in consensus reality more visible too. Shifting the perspective of the story told in the dream had an impact on the story I was living in my real life. Especially working on the

dream figures with movement sort of revealed a life myth which was totally unknown to me before.

To summarize, this dream created the space for me to work on my altered state(s), to stay close and observe my extreme state(s), my moods, my feelings. Working on something hard is often too hard. And this was my case. I was unable to work on my problems. On the dynamics of my relationships and my feelings about them. This dream had the same dynamics between different figures. The conflicting energies in the dream and in my real life were extremely similar. Therefore, working on the dream and exploring the feelings, the figures and the landscape there, was aligned and would always lead to insights and understanding vital in my real-life situations.

Unfolding my childhood dream

When I saw what I have grown to call my childhood dream, I was about 6 or 7 years old. That night I was sick and had a fever. In consensus reality I was in an altered state; meaning that my ordinary state of consciousness was slightly altered from my illness.

Influenced by the movie “Alice in Wonderland” (1951), which I think I had seen near that time in my life, I dreamt of myself, of my body being huge; gigantic. My body in the dream was forming a bridge between an isolated mountain top on the one side (the side above my head) and an endless and beautiful mountain range (towards the side of my feet). There wasn’t a bridge; the dreamer was the bridge. Underneath the dreamer’s body there was a deep, endless and bottomless gap; a void. A gigantic cactus with prickles on the outer part of its branches was wrapped around the dreamer’s body. At about the level of my knees, there was a little figure standing on top of the cactus. I remember it as a little ninja in black clothing. This ninja had a long sword in her hands (a huge sword for the size of the ninja) and in the dream she was trying to cut the cactus to free me, the dreamer. In the dream I was feeling claustrophobic (wrapped in that cactus) and the impossible mission of this tiny ninja with the tiny -compared to the size of the cactus- sword was making me feel dizzy and like the entire world was spinning in my head...

This drawing below is on my childhood dream. I have sketched it in 6 squares as described below.

Squares 1 & 2: The most important elements in the dream:

the cactus and the ninja with the long sword.

Square 3: The scene of the dream.

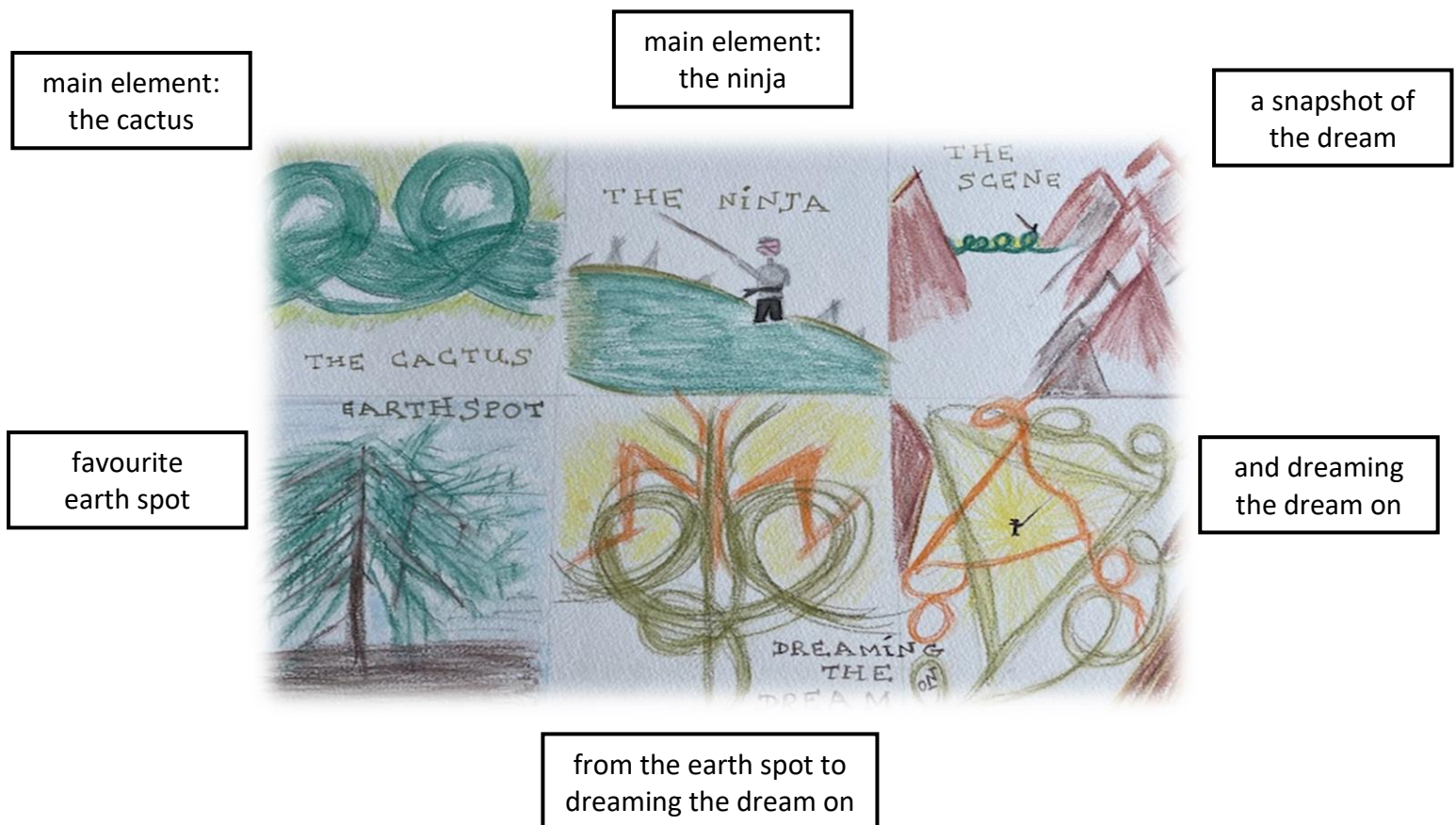
Square 4: My favourite earth spot.

Squares 5 & 6: Dreaming the dream on

(Emetchi, personal communication, 2017-2021)

Thank you Emetchi for suggesting this way of inner work on my childhood dream;

it was much fun doing and revealing in terms of my process.



My childhood dream, November 2020

Squares 1 & 2: In working on my dream in this way, I had to really focus on the main elements of the dream. To really see and notice their energy, colour, texture, flavor, light, vibrancy, thickness, posture, size, exact position. I had never noticed them as clearly before. These were the two main energies: the cactus and the little ninja with her long sword standing on a cactus branch.

Square 3: Then, by distancing myself a little, I looked at the scene. What was going on? By the time I did this drawing, I had already described this dream to people in the PW community many times already. To Arny himself even. But putting it down on paper and feeling those mountains and the void and the bridge, it gave me another perspective. I mean... look at the scene. Isn't it

great? I mean, in my eyes, this is a very powerful and strong scenery. The solid mountains; the endless gap; a ninja fighting; a gigantic cactus wrapped around a female body; a huge and yet small sword. I find it simple and yet so complex; calm and yet so tense... So many opposing forces coexist, interact and relate in this scene. Moving one aspect would change the dynamic of the whole ecosystem.

Square 4: Then the earth spot⁸. This is a memory that I have from a hike on Mainalo Mountain in Greece. I remember standing under a pine tree and looking around. It had just stopped raining, I was in the forest, it was humid, wet and forest quiet. Such a beautiful and complicated place. As I was drawing it, I had to go back to the inner work and connect with it again and notice anew. The main energy that makes this place so special is synesthesia⁹. As I was working on this earth spot and its uniqueness to me, I realized that what makes it special is the fact that in the humidity of the air under that tree in the forest, I can almost hear the water in the air. I can hear the humidity. And by listening to it and smelling it, I fully sense the place; I smell everything intensely as I also hear every little detail in those humid molecules of air.

And from that earth spot, from this place of sensitivity and synesthesia, I then allowed myself to dream the dream on.

Squares 5 & 6: These two little boxes took me quite some time. It was hard for me to leave my linear mind aside and really allow myself to dream the dream on from this earth spot. From this loved and desired atmosphere to allow myself to nonlinearly go back to the scene and move things. And one day I made it. I wrapped my legs around the main cactus branch like a grasshopper. Then I wrapped my front legs too 😊, i.e., my arms. And there I was comfortably hanging from the cactus, as if it were a string or even a whole steady tree. And from there, wow...

⁸ See Glossary of Terms, Appendix 2.

⁹ "Synesthesia or synaesthesia is a perceptual phenomenon in which stimulation of one sensory or cognitive pathway leads to involuntary experiences in a second sensory or cognitive pathway" (Wikipedia.gr). My understanding of involuntary is accidental, simultaneous experience "in a second sensory or cognitive pathway".

I just expanded in the air. Extended my body over the void and hung from the... air. Wow! I wish I could invite you there.

What makes this grasshopper-like hanging in the air place special for me is that the juicy and solid cactus from square 1 is now holding me joyfully over an endless gap. What was initially limiting and restricting (in the dream) is now a safety net!

Change needs to happen in the body too

Just before exploring each of the figure's perspective, let me frame why and how body work has been essential for me.

For a long time, I have felt helpless in front of the power of my states. What had once begun to be just moods and mood swings, eventually grew to become intense and extreme (for me) states of consciousness. The cactus was growing bigger, the ninja was fighting tirelessly, the vertigo as well as the void were deepening. Although cognitive understanding and connections were lifesaving, they were not enough. Through dreamland work some things shifted, some sharpness softened, some love was released internally and externally. Yet another part of the equation was almost intact. Mentally I could see the dynamics and the patterns. They were visible. I knew what I had to deal with; what I was dealing with. I learned to notice, to slow down, to give in, to metacommunicate. "The metacommunicator is similar to the concept of the 'detached observer' found in Buddhism. It is a self-reflective capacity to notice, organize and report on one's experiences. Sometimes it is called a 'witness', 'observer', 'narrator', or 'inner facilitator'." (Diamond & Jones, 2014, p. 28)

However, my body wasn't receptive of these mental changes. Something which would normally be a trigger would physically continue to be a trigger. My body would pick up signals and respond to them. The signals would be interpreted or read by habit and biochemically a process would be initiated besides my cognitive self - who would have wished otherwise. The trigger I would sense it in my body, at my heart. It would instantly affect my breathing. It was instantly visible to my intimate people. I later found out about the soul nerve and my second brain.

The soul nerve is the unifying organ of the entire nervous system. Health and mental health professionals call it the vagus nerve or wandering nerve [...]. It is a highly complex and extraordinary sensitive organ that communicates through

vibes and sensations. This communication occurs not only between different parts of the body, but also from one person to another. [...] The largest part of your soul nerve goes through your gut, which has about 100 million neurons, more than your spinal cord. This is why we sense so many things in our belly – and why some biologists call the gut our ‘second brain’. This second brain is where our body senses flow, coherence, and the rightness or wrongness of things. [...] Your soul nerve tells most of the muscles in your body when to constrict, when to release, when to move, and when to relax and settle. (Menakem, 2017, part II, chapter 10)

Menakem Resmaa (2017) in his amazing work suggests a whole set of body and breath exercises to support the process of settling in one’s body, of staying present and remaining connected with other people when one’s deeper wound has been touched, awakened or just triggered. I personally had to work on those exercises and revisit them many times (I still do) to bring some change into how my body “sees” or senses things; how it interprets them. Slowing down the mind was a hard task and slowing down the body an even harder one.

It is by reading Menakem’s book “My grandmother’s hands: Racialised trauma and the pathway to mending our hearts and bodies” that my idea of what trauma is and how it works shifted for good. It somehow revealed to me that I wasn’t losing it, but I had loads of work to do. Body work to do. I understood that I was being physically triggered and I had to be able to get in touch with my body too to shift the patterns. I had to notice my bodily reactions, recognise them, trust them deeply and work with them as an absolute priority. It is in this kind of work that I used the figures from my dream. I explored the energies from the dream figures to get to unfold parts of me. Experimenting with movement on the dream figures changed their qualities and therefore my understanding of the figures themselves. Each figure shifted meaning. In the section that follows, I will get into this with greater detail.

To connect with a state physically, to connect with the dreaming beyond the state was a physical reality. To feel my body and to feel with my body was of paramount importance. It was the first time I realized how I was either physically in distress or emotionally (mentally), or even both. Both mentally as well as physically, biochemically, everything would happen in seconds. Very fast. It was almost as if everything was happening in a micro-cosmos not visible to the naked eye. Sometimes I would feel that I was an eruptive volcano or just a fucking mess. My heart would beat fast and loud, right inside my ear. My body would get warm. All my muscles would wake up. My arteries would fill with blood. My eyes would become fixed, they would stay open and would not blink. My jaws would lock. I would still be breathing; very, very fast, as if I had been running or with long breaks between my breaths. My neck would become stiff. My torso, my knees would feel warm or locked. If my skin were evenly stretched on my face, I think I would look neutral. As neutral as a neutral mask. But the skin between my eyebrows would tell I was angry. I was rough and ready to fight. And my inner feeling would be congruent to this. Partly nothing could stop me from being seen there in that moment...

I remember one time when I had been triggered. I can't remember why exactly, but I was standing in a circle of friends where everyone was chatting. We were 3 or 4 friends. Somehow, I felt hurt and started going inside. Another friend, who wasn't standing in this circle but was coming closer from further away, approached us from behind my back. And instead of joining the discussion, she jumped on my back while laughing with I-don't-know-what. She sort of jumped and leaned on my back, laughing. She sort of hugged me from the back. Well, that was it. My body was soothed. I instantly felt grounded, and my moment was saved. My day even. Or maybe the whole week. The physical contact, the weight... it built a brand-new bridge with the world, internally and externally. Here is how Resmaa Menakem (2017, chapter 8) frames how important it is to start from the body before any trauma work or any other deep work can actually nourish a person:

Trauma is anything the body perceives as too much, too fast or too soon.

Whenever trauma is involved, the first step in mending any relationship -or any

emotional dysregulation- involves working through that trauma. And in order for someone to do that trauma work, he or she must first learn to slow down, observe his or her body, and allow it to settle.

And as he explains in the same book, trauma triggers get the body in a process to fight, freeze or flee within seconds. He explains how “We can have a trauma response to anything we perceive as a threat, not only to our physical safety, but to what we do, say, think, care about, believe in, or yearn for” (Menaken, 2017). “It is something that happens to someone” he says. And this is how I was convinced that I had to work with my body. And since the work that I had already started was useful and had helped me to change, I thought that it would be good to carry on in the same direction. This is how I came up with the idea of doing deep movement work with the dream figures. My aim in doing so was to shed light in something that I had already figured out for myself, which was that “Trauma can cause us to react to present events in ways that seem wildly inappropriate, overly charged, or otherwise out of proportion” (Menaken, 2017). And I was desperate to bring proportion back into my life. And therefore, I started to work on the videos that go along with this work. Overlooking the importance of trauma and trauma response just activates a whole cycle of feeling in danger, hanging off a cliff etc. “One common (and often overlooked) trauma response is what I called trauma ghosting. This is the body’s recurrent or pervasive sense that danger is just around the corner, or something terrible is going to happen any moment”. (Menaken, 2017)

The dream figure's perspective

Initially my idea was to work on the figures and look at things from their perspective. Work on their secondary energies and qualities. However, along the way I realized that it was important for me to also unfold the figures with movement, which I have done in 3 videos. Along the way I felt that movement work was essential to support a deeper understanding/shift in my perspective, but also in my physical awareness of the world around me. This video work shows how the figures as physical and emotional states, as roles in my field, in a field, unfold without preconceptions of what or how something is.

But let me just start by going over each one of the dream elements/figures and what I have struggled with and learned from each of them. Of course, working on mythic figures and energies can bring wider perspective, momentary or long-term relief and/or awareness; it may also heal. But my story is not yet a happy end story. This particular work on myself is still underway. It is hard work with intervals of happiness, happy moments, happy days. Today happy is different from happy a few years ago. Nowadays when I am relieved and when I have perspective, I can enjoy it. And when I fall off cliffs, I let myself fall and I almost love myself for falling, for crashing. In such moments, I try to remember that a part of me is still above the void hanging... In Process Work we call this picking up a little bit of your secondary process¹⁰, i.e., picking up a little bit of the energy that was previously not so known to you, not so available to you, not so at hand... and then I just follow the fall, knowing that part of me can be anchored while another part of me is falling off a cliff.

In this part of the work, I will sort of sit aside and watch how other figures (like the ones in the dream), in an otherworldly space (like in the dream) exist, co-exist, and relate. In dreamland, in a snapshot of a dream, things happen differently. And the dreamer can go back, have a look, revisit, and notice things that in everyday life, or in the flow of a river, you don't get to see as everything happens so fast. Unless you do so intentionally.

¹⁰ See Glossary of Terms, Appendix 2.

The dreamer's body

In the dream I, the dreamer, identify with the human body forming a bridge. This body is a gigantic one. It is big and long. Huge. This human figure has long hair too. Her arms are straight and aligned with the rest of her body. Her eyes are closed and her head is spinning. She is greatly impacted by the feeling of vertigo she is in; bound and wrapped by the cactus; over an endless dark void. Moreover, the dreamer knows that on the cactus stands a tiny ninja with a long sword in her hands, trying to cut the cactus and free her. The dreamer can't see the ninja as a helper, but instead is feeling helpless by the ninja's actions – thinking that this little ninja could never have an effect in freeing her from the cactus; the long sword is nothing compared to the gigantic cactus branch. She is feeling deep in herself with her eyes closed. She is in a deep inner state which makes her very sensitive to anything happening around her. She can hear the silence in the scene. She can feel the cactus, she can tell the ninja is there, she can feel the void beneath her. She feels trapped and encaged. It is almost like her vertigo is created from her synesthetic ability to sense the scene.

Her huge body is bridging two poles. An isolated mountain and a mountain range on the other side of the void.

This entrapment of the dreamer's body seems to be a more primary element in the process revealed in the scene. The body is trapped, and the dreamer feels negatively impacted by this bounding energy, the void, and the ninja. The bridging, though, is a marginalized quality for the dreamer. It is almost like it isn't happening. We wouldn't know about the bridging if there wasn't a greater perspective for the dream from a far. At the same time, this body is gigantic; another marginalized quality veiled by the entrapment. Moreover, besides these directly related qualities, there are other superpowers around her (other than bridging and size), surrounding her, impacting her, moving and arranging the scene.

This human body in the dream, I -as the dreamer- identify with it. In my everyday life I struggle a lot with feeling bound by others; by their choices, by their effect on me, by their way, style etc. I often feel bound by myself even. I feel stuck and entangled in real life situations. This is very familiar to me, as I do not only very often feel entangled, but also the way I feel it is often a life-or-death place. Doesn't that sound a lot like being bound over an endless void?

The vertigo

This feeling of extreme vertigo is very familiar in my life too... Working on it, I have gradually come to describe the feeling with a graphic scene: Think that you are walking with both feet attached on the ground. As you normally would, right? As you walk, you get to the edge of the ground, to a cliff, and you take a step further. That's the feeling in the dream. Or try imagining this time that as you have fallen off a cliff, freeze the scene during the fall... That's also very similar to the feeling in the dream. Breath-taking by all means...

The dizziness is caused mainly by the entrapment of the cactus and the efforts of the ninja who will never succeed cutting the cactus branch. Entrapped in a gigantic cactus with only help the small sword of an even smaller ninja.

Well... this vertigo was key in getting me to start working on my childhood dream. It was through this dizziness that I understood for the first time that this dream was not just a one-off experience or event in my life, but rather something a lot more important, symbolic and meaningful. This dizziness was -I realized- and still is one of my core blockages in life. My primary identity, that is my everyday self, suffers from its impact. My everyday self gets blocked by this eruptive energy that grabs my heart and won't let it go. That is to say that this state is very familiar to me. It is an inner state, an altered state of consciousness which happens to me a lot more often than I had ever realized before. Every time my life gets difficult or complicated and I get triggered this state happens to me in the weirdest way. I instantly feel upset internally; a mixture of dizziness, vertigo, claustrophobia, tension and charge...

But let me just say a few things about that first time when I realized that the state I was in not only was familiar and known to me, but I had known it for years back. Most probably my first time is in this dream, but also maybe it isn't.

Once at a session with my therapist we were working on something I can no longer recall. I was in this state of discomfort. In an altered state from which I had to come out. It was this vertigo; this dizziness; this claustrophobia. It is no doubt an unpleasant place. And no matter how much awareness I have grown to have up to today, it still is an unpleasant place to find myself into. But somehow in that session we stayed for a little while in this "place". My therapist asked me to follow it a little bit and explore it. It was just impossible to stay with it. The amount of hurt and discomfort I was feeling were making it unbearable. With persistence and a push, I stayed and started sinking in... I was a gorilla. A female wounded gorilla. I was in a cage. One side of the cage was open but the gorilla wouldn't move. Her name was Betty. Betty was just sitting there wounded in her cage and she wouldn't come out. My therapist stayed with me in the scene and asked a question. In that moment, I remember feeling that this question was important, but now I know how and why it was so important. She asked me if I wanted to make contact with the encaged and wounded Betty, how would I make it. If I were somewhere around her cage and wanted to make contact with her, how would I do it. My eyes got wet and I started crying seeing Betty. I had so many feelings for her. But at the same time, I think it was the first time I had feelings for me too. I had feelings for this part of me that was feeling wounded and encaged. So... as I was looking at Betty, I just knew that I would simply go closer and sit there with her. Not too close, without any words... I would just sit there with Betty. I would simply look at her with my wet eyes. Now... it is hard to explain in detail how shifting that was internally. Knowing Betty and knowing that she is a part of me, outside of me and yet so close to me in the moment. It was the first time I saw so clearly for myself that I needed someone to just be next to me, to see me, to see my hurt and my hurting, to just be there with me; with me, my wounds and my cage, and my inability to get out of its open side. Also, I think this was the first time I was at a setting where I clearly had empathy and love for myself, i.e., for Betty.

Moreover, in this setting I saw how this scene dynamic is one I carry in the world with me. In my relationships and in the way I relate. In my more intimate but also my less intimate relationships. This scene shows up whenever I feel this dead end in relating. It also tells me how important relating internally and externally is to me. And how entrapment, encaging and discomfort are always part of the scenery...

This empathetic moment helped me open towards myself. It helped open towards this part of me that feels this way and stop calling it just misery. So, I started being curious and therefore more welcoming towards it. I was curious to see when and how it happens. Why it happens and in doing so I had one first tip on what would be helpful to me. Feeling seen and accompanied. That's what I would do for Betty, right? So, a whole world of projections and almost unrealistic expectations from others started to see the day of light for me. I was wanting others to see me badly because I couldn't see myself. I wanted others to sit beside me because I couldn't sit beside me and I was abandoning myself by simply seeing me surrendering to a complete misery of hurt and moods. And then I also started gradually being able to look a little back and further back and recall my mood swings and my self-hatred and see patterns. And then I had something to work on. I had this childhood dream which revealed to me that this entrapment and hurt has always been around somehow. That there was a trauma behind this dynamic that needed to heal. And this shifted my curiosity towards other figures of my childhood dream. Why is this cactus there? What is the void doing beneath the dreamer? Who is that little ninja trying? Why a bridge?

The bridge

What to think of a bridge? The bridges... I really don't know. My first association to a bridge comes from my passion for rivers and river hikes. You may be walking on a beautiful path along a river, looking at the water, listening to its aliveness, noticing how the entire landscape for miles and miles has been shaped by its' stream, but when a bridge shows up in the middle of nowhere... There is nothing like this feeling. A hidden, mythical, ancient, beautiful, so, so, so well-made

bridge is there. Just there. Walk on it and cross the waters. Stop at its' peak and gaze. Made of stone, made of wood, made of ropes, it changes the landscape and redirects your route. It changes the trajectory of things. From one moment to the other, you can cross to the opposite side with which you are not familiar. It is a new place with a new destination. And the waters by which you have been walking are now not just your co-traveler, not just a boundary to the other side, but also just another agent in the scene.

So, in this dream, the dreamer is this passage. This transportation to another side. It is a unifying element that invites, suggests exploring the Other. In the dream there is no river, but the crossing is over a void. One side is a mountain range and the other side is an isolated mountain top. The mountain range is towards the end of the bridge, the feet of the body, and the isolated top is towards the head, where the dizziness is so alive and troubling. The mountains at the mountain range are all different but alike each other. On the other hand, the mountain top is standing there on its' own. Without anything adjacent. The bridge somehow creates an adjacency no matter how dark or bottomless the void is.

And it carries some history the bridge. The reasons why it was made and how it was made. It carries wisdom and know-how. I think that almost everything about this bridge is secondary qualities... 😊. Yet this bridge body work I have not explored as part of this project. This is yet to be done. However, I think that in the course of this work I do experiment a lot with building bridges within and outside too...

The ninja

This ninja remains unaffected by the surroundings. It is perhaps the only dream figure, except from the mountains, that remains intact and focused on her mission. The void, the gigantic cactus, the mountains of all sorts around her are not to be preoccupied with. If this branch is cut, then the mission will have been accomplished. The ninja is an ally fighting the entrapment. A

trustworthy ally, who won't give up. The ninja has this unconditional devotion to her task and she is so present in doing so. What an impressive being and quality.

Later in my work on this project, when I was making the videos unfolding elements from the dream, I realized that unfolding the ninja was not as necessary. Watching the videos I had worked on, one day I thought that the ninja was present in all of them. The ninja quality is present in the form of devotion sometimes. In the video work I unfold the cactus, the void and the mountains like a ninja. Watching the videos I realized that the moment I closed my eyes, in each of these videos, I become one with my goal. I look at my body in the videos shapeshifting into different textures, flavors, sizes and feeling states, and I thought to myself that this is familiar. I know me being devoted and nailing something. I was looking at myself in this work and I thought that this is it. In the naivety of these videos, movement flows over my usual edge flirting with my physical and psychic boundaries. Watching this video work, I feel that this ninja is in them in some form of essence. Simple being in the naivety of the moment. I don't think I had ever looked at myself before in my life feeling that I am nailing something with the accuracy of a ninja. That was fun, to say the least.



by John Tice

The cactus

I have already said several things about the cactus as it is such a central element in the dream. This bounding and asphyxiating energy is so powerful and so secondary. Behind it hides a warm, embracing and loving quality; a protective and caring energy. In sketching the dream, in square 4 above, when I started dreaming the dream on, the dreamer's body and cactus started blending in together. The dreamer was turning into a grasshopper, as the cactus was opening to support all different postures and movements over the void. The branches and the dreamer's body started to interlock transforming into something new. A playful net over the void which was so liberating and fun. At that moment, there was no void, no mountains, no vertigo, just fun and endless options around soft and flexible cactus branches.

In unfolding the cactus with movement (see video work 1), again the same playfulness surfaced. A hanging freedom with eternal options and directions. This shift leaves me with a new perspective around what the cactus is all about; it is no longer just a trapping energy, but it contains all the essentials for an expansion over the void!

Once, in Ireland, I worked with Arny on my childhood dream. He asked me to show him the cactus. How it was wrapped around me in my dream. I told him that I would have to hug him tightly to show him 😊. He said: "Hug me? Did you just say you are going to hug me?". And he was laughing. He advised me to give more love. To love the world more. Give love to people more. In the moment I said OK and went back to my seat. But today, some years later, I know that he is right. That my ability to love and give love often shrinks. It shrinks because there isn't much of abundance of love inside me. I struggle to find it inside me. And in most situations love shows up in abundance when I have psychically and physically exhausted myself. That is when I allow myself to let go of defense and feel vulnerable, seen and loved. And from there, I can love the world too. But most importantly I feel love towards myself. And an unprecedented softness.

The void

The void is the void. I mean it is breathtaking, unknown, dark... It was hard to know how to approach it. The most of information I ever got about it was by experimenting with it through movement. I found an artificial edge and stood around it (see video work 2). From experimenting with the boundary between the edge of the ground and the void, I started exploring the state and the feeling of it. I -so to say- got the vibe and intensity of the void and moved it around in the space. Gradually and slowly, the body expanded and extended. It became a wide complex net extending towards all different directions.

Unfolding it was actually very similar to the drawings in squares 5 & 6 (see picture below). This energetic expansion. Though the void was different in that it wasn't playful. But solid, strong, serious and wide, wide, wide. It was powerful to be the void; something between nothing and everything.



The isolated mountain and the mountain range

Now, the mountains have something from the quality of the ninja, in that their presence and existence is there; and this won't change. They somehow also remain unaffected by the scenery. There is something solid about them and something that remains intact. At the same time, this

unmovable quality about them keeps them separate. An isolated top and a mountain range with the void between them. What an intense dynamic between the two sides or poles. Solid presence, so solid that any sort of life around them seems too vivid.

When working on the mountains in the video (see video work 3), I was myself on a mountain, next to a lake, at 2.200 m. height; an alpine zone lake. There, the presence of the mountains all around me was very intense. But what made it even stronger was all the life around the mountains. The air was so alive and busy; full of invisible-to-the-naked-eye flies of all different kinds, making all sort of different noises and buzzes. Just standing next to this lake, you could hear the air and thousands of flies around you. This aliveness is what I followed in my work. All this life the mountains embrace in their stillness. With movement I explored this stillness and the life in it. I explored with how to use my stillness.



Mt. Smolikas, Dragon Lake,
click by me

The dreaming low & the dreaming high powerhouses

As I have already said earlier in this work, having to sit down and write this Final Project came at a point in my life when things were pretty difficult for me and this work appeared as another burden on my chest. My energy was all channeled in relational conflicts and the remains of it would hardly get me through the day. The effort required to do a thesis was something I could not afford. However, part of me knew that something had to happen. I had to do something to get myself out my mess. Some part of me had a will, a dream, a yearning to get the fuck out of this difficult place. I wanted something else for myself and my immediate surroundings. To change things, I had to change myself. I wanted to change myself and my unbearable reality. So, in the mess of my life there was something that I clearly wanted; change and transformation. As mentioned in “Make Love Better” (2019), a high dream is a deep longing, “a term that pales in comparison to what it represents. Even if they aren’t fully conscious, our high dreams propel us towards a partner and keep us loving, yearning, believing and hanging in there when the going gets rough – or even when it gets dangerous and destructive” (p. 66). And I now believe that behind my deep longing for change and transformation lied a high dream. A powerhouse that propelled me to do something. To put effort. To not fully give up on everything. To not fully give up on me.

In my case, the yearning behind this project is transformation; is change. It is this high dream that guided me in maneuvering and choosing different directions as the work was evolving and deepening. Any observation, any relief, any new awareness would shed a little light and show some possible next step. Or sometimes some new information would just confuse me and disable me from moving forwards. As in all polarities, while “our high dreams propel us” [...] “and keep us loving, yearning, believing and hanging in” (Dworkin, 2019, p. 66), there are forces pulling us backwards. Parts of ourselves, inner voices, people even sometimes that bring about our lowest of dreams and expectations. And this is just bad news. The low dream is the place when and where we get the message that our high dream is no longer happening.

The low dream is bad news. It's the devastating mood that comes about if and when you wake up and realize that your high dream is not happening. The low dream drives you to despair. You give up on any hopes you had for happiness. You feel like an unlovable loser and berate yourself for having made the same mistakes again. (Dworkin, 2019, p.66)

Low dreams too carry equally strong messages; in my case I may say that low dream messages are even stronger as I have grown to listen to them more clearly. I have often believed that they are the sole messages. "Low dreams can be as persistent and blinding as high dreams, and they too carry secret messages. [...] So, dreamers, beware. Like the invisible force of gravity, your dreams keep your moods rising and falling, circling and cycling." (Dworkin, 2019, p. 67)

This is all to say that a high dream was constantly propelling this work to happen and supported me to not give up as the going was getting rough. And this was the very first step which signaled the beginning of this project. The very beginning of gaining awareness on any inch of change. This was the very first realization that bad news cannot just come; just one moment before the bad news I was hoping for something that feels it is no longer happening. And this was the beginning. The beginning of my high dream, of my dreaming, of me picking it up from somewhere. As this initial observation grew with me, I caught myself dreaming away and dreaming high. Of this work having an impact on myself and others. On the world; nonlocally.

Treasurous Process Work perspective

As a conclusion to this piece of personal inquiry, I am going to frame how and why Process Work enabled me to do this work and to create this personal path. In other words, to do my heuristic inquiry I have used tools developed by Arny Mindell and all his colleagues and friends in Process Work community to name almost all different parts of my experience. Process Work theory has enabled me to name my experiences and to also fit them in a broader perspective which would make the scenery greater than just me, interpersonal and -at times- almost universal. But first, let me just frame what I have done so far.

I have used my childhood dream to show how it has guided change in my life and how it really supported me in rekindling the flow. I have also tried to show the importance of moving the energy of the dream figures and how they become clearer through this exploration with movement. The reason I chose to work on this dream is because in it I saw the main dynamics that were troubling me in my everyday life. However, it was mainly this vertigo in the dream that I first recognized. The vertigo in the dream is the exact same feeling I have today, over 30 years after I had this dream as a child, when getting into one of the unpleasant altered states I have talked about. Working on the dream figures instead of forcing myself to focus on real-life situations and relationships provided me with the exact amount of distance from real-life that I needed to get to work. Working in dreamland, with my beloved cactuses and beautiful bridges was almost pleasant. The vertigo still is hard in both real-life and in dreamland, but exploring the void, the wrapping and the ninja brought about a balanced amount of challenge and attraction. Therefore, it was workable. Even the vertigo started to become workable. I could process a couple of things using the dream, I could shed some light into the darkness, bring some hope through the cracks and consequently embrace a little bit of the otherwise challenging energies and experiences both in my everyday life and in my dream.

Up to this level of work, Process Work provided me with the division and interconnectedness between consensus reality, dreamland and essence level. Using these three levels (and the correlation between them) I could:

- name the experiences of my everyday life that were visible to the others and describe my accompanying feelings (consensus reality);
- give life to the figures of my childhood dream and the textures, energies and qualities that I would gradually connect with each one of them (dreamland);
- relate with all the qualities that were revealed to me as the work was going deeper, especially with movement work (essence level).

According to Process Work theory and Jung's theory, childhood dreams and memories carry meaning for the whole spectrum of a person's life; reveal some sort of mythic pattern with crucial dynamic for the past, present and future of the individual. Well, this alone was so amazing to know as almost intuitively without much background knowledge I instantly knew that it was true; which made me want to start looking into this direction. But my childhood dream was telling a story obvious to me at first; and I thought that this story was just true about my entire life too. However, in reality that was true but also very limiting. Arny Mindell broadened this idea that Jung initially had on the childhood dream and the life myth by also bringing in the dreambody. Arny's idea about the dreambody comes with joining the body in its reality, its unintentional messages and experiences. Arny suggested bringing the body in the picture too, just more actively and more intuitively. And this is what I tried to do. I brought my body in what my childhood dream story was. I experimented with deep movement work and allowed the body to intentionally unfold in its' channels, symbols, and experiences from the dream. Arny also links the dreambody with the individuals' symptoms, tendencies, patterns... Relating these aspects of the dreamer's life with the everyday life of this given dreamer is also revealing in terms of content. The patterns, the tendencies and the symptoms are there in everyday life as they are also there in the dream. And this was absolutely my case.

We have long known that chronic symptoms relate to childhood dreams. For example, try focusing on your nonrational sense of the energy in a symptom, the energy you feel creating that symptom (and not merely on the outer description of the symptom in terms such as “pain”, “stomachache”, etc.). Be sure you are dealing with the energy you sense creating the symptom, and not necessarily your response to that energy. [...] If you allow that energy ...to express itself in the form of images and sounds, you discover scenes found in the dreams. I called this discovery the “dreambody”. (Mindell, 2001, pp. 169-170)

However, in this Final Project I am not extending my research into all different tendencies, patterns and symptoms. Of course, while I was doing this work I made many more connections than the ones I have included in this piece of work. I made this choice in order to keep my focus on my much troubling altered states that I have talked about in this work, as well as because otherwise this work would be far too personal and way too long.

In this work I have focused on the vertigo of the dream, which translates into a very unpleasant altered state in my everyday life. The fact that I could name this “loosing it completely state” an altered state deepened my understanding of it both emotionally and structurally. Phrases like my “I lost it” were reflecting my emotional world and my lack of energy perhaps, but the term altered state of consciousness came with a broad spectrum of states of consciousness and descriptions for these states. Undesirable places and states that I disliked and marginalized came with the name of secondary processes that I needed to work on, familiarize myself with and gradually pick up even just a little bit. In both these examples, the fact that I could use a name to identify with and then read about them and put them into perspective was crucial in getting me to look at them differently. I intentionally started to observe these qualities, these places, these head spaces to try to understand them and gain awareness on myself. I took time with my secondary

energies and spaces; I took time with my altered states of consciousness and almost anything that I would identify as “not me”. Because Process Work has taught me that “I am the Other”, that “The Other is me”. In any disturbing energy, quality and texture there is me, I just don’t know me like this. Unfolding, exploring and experimenting with the Other, whether the Other is a colour that you don’t like, a feeling state that you detest, an energy that is annoying, behind it lays a part of yourself that you have disavowed. And this is not always a pleasant material to work with. Sometimes it is hard, difficult, too much work; oftentimes this work needs to engage the body too. Like in my case to deepen my understanding of myself I had to do movement work without any particular goal ahead. Process Work frames this as a blank access technique, where you go in an experience without knowing exactly where you are heading.

This piece of work comes to an end here, though it remains eternally open. There are many more things to unfold, many more experiences to revisit. The qualities of this dream will most probably be changing form and symbolisms as time passes by and as I grow out of things and into other things; as tide comes in and tide goes out, as Emetchi beautifully said it one Tuesday night. Me as a ninja, as a bridge, as gigantic, as mountain and void will always somehow be in the picture depending where and how you look at whatever it is you are looking. These remain open to further exploration.

In the meantime, I know that part of me just keeps the bad news and nothing else. Though I also know that another part of me gives this voice less space; won’t let it take all the space. Part of me will focus on my breath, on my heartbeat, on my blood valves. Part of me is a little less afraid, a little less alone, a little less small. I have learned to hang over the void, to become the void, to dance over it. To stand still and feel solid, in dreamland yes, i.e., inside my deepest self. And no matter the crashes, I can look around me and smile. I can feel what is around me and laugh or cry. I am not angry. I am not moody. And I know I love you. See you round the corner, at the next crash.

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Alice in Wonderland, 1951. Walt Disney Productions.

Dance of darkness, 1989. Directed by Edin Velez.

Appendix 1

Guidance on watching the video work

In unfolding and deepening some of the figures in my childhood dream I have used a combination of movement methods that I have practiced and experimented with. In this section I will write a few things about the two methods that have inspired me the most: Butoh and improvisational dance.

Let me start from Butoh dance. Mark Holborn in a documentary on the art of Butoh “The dance of darkness”, gives some historical context to Butoh dance. Mark explains that this form of movement was born in Japan in the 1960s and derived from the deep Japanese culture. As a form of expression it would bring to life myths, demons and death itself giving them all a more universal meaning. In the same documentary Akaji Maro explains: “It began as a spirit of revolt to break the rules and upset the forms. It is the suspension of decision making. We let the body speak for itself. To reject the superficiality of everyday life”. Tatsumi Hijikata, perhaps the main founder of this form of art, used Butoh to recreate and reconstruct all sort of movements related to his childhood, in order to unfold them and more deeply understand them.

For several years, I was a student of Iwana Masaki studying Butoh. As part of his teachings, I learn a lot about how to explore concepts, textures, fragrances with movement. How to feel a fragrance in the air, smell it deeply, take it in, become it and then be the fragrance with my entire presence. In his workshops, Masaki would often ask us to dance or improvise on concepts such as ruins, Klein blue, receding, blooming, rotting. He was teaching us how to grasp the whole process of blooming, for example. The process of blooming would start by just creating an initial visual with one’s body; a landscape. And just exist there until you fully become it. Then he would ask us to look at the world from this perspective and start to bloom. Just start blooming and then gradually bloom a little more with each breath, until you have fully bloomed. His teachings were all about deconstructing the body, breaking down concepts, feeling deeply into atmospheres and becoming places.

In addition to all the learning involving Butoh, I have also used the awareness I have earned as a student of the choreographer Mary Tsouti at her workshops in Athens. She guided me through every inch of my body. She taught me how the smallest move is incredibly important to be able to feel and “see” from the inside, and how to be conscious and aware of my whole physical presence. Alongside Mairi I got to know my body emotionally but also anatomically like I never had before. I grew unprecedentedly close to my body in a way that creating landscapes or sculpting feeling states or become colors and sounds with my whole body was purely ecstatic.

So, with this knowledge and understanding I danced my childhood dream figures. I moved the cactus, the void and the mountain, and moving them moved me too.

Lastly, these videos that go with my project I have called them naïve as they have not been edited, nor set up. I simply chose an attractive and safe for me place to sit and just explore. Behind the camera is one of my dearest friends Laura or Christina who were just asked to shoot a short improvisation and not to worry about anything else. I told them that there was no right or wrong and that they could follow me in any way they wanted. So, in a way, the camera in their hands is also improvising with me. Moving, not moving, focusing, coming closer or moving back, it is all their body in relation to the powerful surrounds and to my body.

Behind the camera:



Christina Negrepontis,
photo by Victoria Giannaki, November 2021



Laura Maragkoudaki,
photo by me, 2020

Below you may find some more detailed guidance on things to notice as you are watching each video, though simply watching them and observe whatever you observe is also great.

Video work 1 – the cactus

Shot by Christina Negrepontis at her garden, up on the mountain in Varkiza, Athens, Greece.

23rd of July 2021

In the first 3 minutes of this work, I start off by picking up the steady and firm wrapping energy of the cactus branches in the dream. Something is wrapping calmy but firmly. All the other elements of the surroundings, like the passing dogs, the nature itself and the noises are just on the outside of this wrapping. Gradually, after 3 minutes, the energy I explore embraces more the idea of the extended and long cactus branch. It is still holding, wrapping, but it is also wrapped around as a long, juicy and really strong branch. The airplane noise, the kids' voices... everything is distant; their only impact is reinforcing whatever it is that is happening in this extending wrapping energy. The cicadas also support the energy of going deeper in the cactus, as in my mind they are closely related to hot weather, dessert, and cactus climate. This strong energy carries on unfolding and unfolding. It is extending more and more. It is wrapping tightly. It is holding tight while it also revolves, rolls, trying to find an inner balance. It was only when I myself watched this video when I noticed that around minute 9, the camera changes perspective a bit and I saw that me and a cactus just next to me we share the same landscape and the same mood... My arching body is sort of mirroring the arching, curving parts of the cactus in the background. Around minute 10, this powerful extension becomes more of an expansion. Turns into a wider and more calm form. I could say that at this point the energy has become rather an inner landscape; a feeling state of the initial energy. Doesn't it resemble an arching bridge? I think it does. All the way up to minute 12, the inner landscape just is, until it rewraps, it holds onto anew with an entirely different attitude and style this time. It wraps itself calmly, beautifully and full heartedly in the air. This time its energy is playful, dance-like, light. It almost resembles the toy

boat at the background, the surrounding tree branches and leaves on the ground. What a feeling to just freely roll, swing, fly, float, lie down and sit up. So many options, so many possibilities, so much freedom. Pure joy!

Christina, I couldn't thank you more for joining me so beautifully in this work with your eyes behind the camera lens.

Video work 2 – the void

Shot by Christina Negrepontis at her garden, up on the mountain in Varkiza, Athens, Greece.

23rd of July 2021

Experimenting with the idea of the void was a concept on its own. Right before starting the exploration, I felt that I needed some aid into the atmosphere. Therefore, I have picked the edge of this patio. Standing there put me directly in a state of balancing between groundedness and the void. Little by little my body is more visibly attracted to the void. In the moment there I had a feeling that my right side of my body was absorbing the essence of the void. It was sucking it in. A little after the first 2 minutes, I feel like deflating from the air and the intention of integrating the void and at around 2.30 minutes it feels like a somewhat void-like energy is moving me; still extending, still expanding but also very solid, thick and present. Every direction is a possibility for the void. A fine balance between being solid and just a fragrance.

At around 4.30 minutes, my embodying of the void started to look a little like the surrounding tree branches, don't you think? It almost feels like the void is just another element in the scenery. A unifying element amongst all others in any given landscape. A sculpting energy, giving form, boundaries, and color to its surroundings. It almost feels like the void is a figure between all other figures, carrying messages and reflections from one place to another. At 6.30 minutes I believe that the camera too gets in a landscape dance, where everything in the scenery is just another element in motion. Everything is in motion. Motion is speed, space, direction, possibility. Possibilities. The void is full of possibility. Full of textures, flavors yet to be discovered, isn't it?

And it is around 12 minutes in the video that an airplane crosses the sky somewhere near. A noise from far away travels in space and time and reaches this particular landscape. I thought that was some sort of synchronicity¹¹ around the interconnectedness of the world through space and the void. Through the nothingness of matter.

Video work 3 – the mountain

Shot by Laura Maragkoudaki at Dragon Lake (altitude 2.160m.), Mt Tymphi, Greece,
August 2021

This is an alpine zone video. Alpine zones are a magic on their own. They are regions high up on the mountains, just below the snow-line and just above the tree-line. Have a look at this photo I took on our way down from the mountain. Walking down towards the tree region again.



In this video Laura is behind the camera and she mainly chose to stand still. Just like the surrounding mountains. The landscape looks solid and still, and yet is so powerfully vivid. The air that you could both hear and feel, was filled by this incredible buzz from hundreds of flying creatures invisible to the eye and the camera. As I stood there in the first instance, before anything else happened, my ears were filled with the sound from these flies. It was a vibrant buzz moving in the air. It sounded like they were moving in circles. This is what initially started moving me. But something was also calling me towards solidity. Like it happened to Laura. There was a

¹¹ Check Glossary of Terms, Appendix 2.

lot of stillness in the air too. Mass, size and steadiness were present in the atmosphere. Some eternal presence in modest motion; which does sound a lot like a mountain. But have a look at the surfacing water in the lake and the surrounding grass. Aren't they too in an eternal pattern of movement which almost looks like a loop? At around 7 minutes it feels like all the movement becomes an inner world of life and the physical presence more of an element in the field. If you take a step back from looking and you just watch, there are elements that seem completely still, others that look repetitive, others visiting or passing by (like Spitha, my dog), others shifting from one to another. And this is more or less where I stop. Somewhere between starting all over again and simply being there for some time. Forming a different alpine-like scenery between outer and inner motion, visible or invisible to the eye, yet fully present and definitely alive.

Appendix 2

Glossary of Terms

“Altered states of consciousness: Any state of consciousness that is different from the state we ordinarily identify with. Typical altered states of consciousness include drowsiness, intense anger, or falling in love. Altered states can happen willfully, for example, through the use of drugs or high levels of exercise, or involuntarily, such as through the onset of coma.”

(Glossary of Process Work Terms, 1995)

“Consensus reality: CR is impersonal; it has authorization and is considered fundamental in a given time and culture. In Quantum Mind consensus reality refers mainly to the reality of physics, the classical, everyday cosmopolitan reality of everyday life in which terms such as space, time, size, age, particle, and, even, person have fairly well-defined and collectively consented-upon meanings.”

(Glossary of Process Work Terms, 1995)

Dream figure: When I refer to dream figures in this work I am essentially talking about the figures, the elements that are present in the dream. Anything in a given dream plays a role and tells a story about the dreamer. Any little detail observed in the dream could be unfolded into something meaningful for the dreamer. An object, a person, a thought in the dream, a color, a texture, a smell, a vertigo etc. Moreover, a dynamic that is apparent in a dream or affects the dreamer is an element, a part of the dream.

“Dreamland: The world where Dreaming first expresses Itself, in a particular form such as the dualistic world of dreams, movement, dance, images, body aches and pains, and so on. Dreamland appears in narratives in terms of past, future, or not here, not-me. A general level of awareness including dreams, dreaming while awake, and nonconsensual experiences (relative to a given community)”.

(Glossary of Process Work Terms, 1995)

Earth spot: My use of earth spot here is very close to Arny's idea of: Loveland: Your favorite and most consistent earth-based association to the deepest part of you. I also call this earth spot your processmind.

(Glossary of Process Work Terms, 1995)

“Edge: The experience of not being able to do something, being limited or hindered from accomplishing, thinking or communicating. [...] An edge is a kind of threshold. Just as logs or rocks in a river give form to the river, edges give form to your inner processes. Edges are neither good nor bad; they simply divide us into different worlds. We know this because at one point or another, we feel we cannot go more deeply into an experience, insight, thought, or feeling.”

(Glossary of Process Work Terms, 1995)

“Metacommunication: ‘Meta’ means ‘about,’ and ‘communicate’ means to inform. If you metacommunicate, you can talk about your states of consciousness. You have a view of your own views and can communicate about both CR [consensus reality] and NCR [non consensus reality] states of consciousness. To metacommunicate, you need to be detached enough from both viewpoints to move from one to the other without getting caught in either.”

(Glossary of Process Work Terms, 1995)

Secondary energy: A secondary energy is an energy with the qualities of which an individual does not identify. An energy of which a person is less aware of, more unconscious about. The qualities and textures of such an energy are more difficult to reach when trying to unfold them, because they are further away from the identities an individual identifies with.

“Secondary process: All the verbal and nonverbal signals in an individual's or community's expressions with which the individual or community does not identify. The information from secondary processes is usually projected, denied, and found in the body or outside the sender. Secondary processes refer to all other processes which an individual does not experience as

belonging to him, and which he speaks about as if they happened to him from the outside, or as caused by another agent.

(Glossary of Process Work Terms, 1995)

Synchronicity: Synchronicity in Process Work does not simply translate into “chance” or “luck”. Arny suggests looking at synchronicities in a more useful way; as secondary processes split off from the main entity that then appear in dreams, double signals and even the surrounding world. In this way they become useful when addressed and unfolded.

(Mindell, 1987, p. 99)