

FINDING SELF IN ADVERSITY

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Table of Contents

<u>ABSTRACT:</u>	<u>3</u>
<u>INTRODUCTION</u>	<u>4</u>
<u>CONCEPT OF AUTHENTICITY</u>	<u>6</u>
<u>THE ESSENCE OF MY INNER WORK</u>	<u>8</u>
<u>AN ELECTRONS TIME REVERSAL IN AN ELECTRIC FIELD</u>	<u>10</u>
<u>SUPPORT OF PROCESSWORK BASICS IN THE PURSUIT OF AUTHENTICITY</u>	<u>13</u>
<u>CONCLUSION.....</u>	<u>15</u>
<u>BIBLIOGRAPHY.....</u>	<u>17</u>

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Abstract:

This thesis explores the challenges and opportunities of identity reconstruction in the face of societal pressures. Drawing from personal narratives, we examine the impact of racial biases, societal discrimination, and the pursuit of self-affirmation on individual authenticity.

In academic settings, I as a solitary individual of colour often faced isolation, harassment, and cultural insensitivity. The quest for a place to call home is further complicated by prejudiced presumptions based on ethnicity.

Process Work and quantum mechanics offer frameworks for understanding and navigating these challenges. By embracing the unfolding nature of our experiences and becoming "nobodies" in the future, we can break free from negative energetic bonds and discover our true selves.

Introduction

I began this journey by highlighting the importance of searching for authenticity in oneself. This is a deeply rooted and painful topic for me to explore. I have faced challenges throughout my life. In the beginning, things were starting to pick up while in Kenya. I got ambitious and decided to move to Denmark. It felt like I was beginning a new life. Yet, the same cycles of challenges that I had faced throughout life followed me there. I faced a challenge when I moved to a remote town in Denmark to start a second bachelor project. I was in a class of 40 white people, all from Eastern Europe, who had never met a black person. They didn't want to speak English and resented my better English. This caused many issues. I hit a peak struggle when I was placed in a group with a guy who sexually harassed me in class. He pushed me against the wall and kissed me forcefully without my consent. When I tried to talk to him, he said I was acting like a princess. He said I didn't belong in a village where people expect to be treated like they're important. I was telling him I didn't feel okay with him groping and kissing me in front of the class. He would just randomly pin me against the wall. Later, his anger and frustration turned into insults directed at me in class. Every time I laughed with other students, he told me I was laughing like a moron. Also, he used racial slurs to address me in front of the class. When I decided to report this matter to our communications teacher, he was also present. During the conversation, he was still insulting me, asking if I was stupid, and shouting all around.

The teacher turned to me in the room. They said I was too culturally unaccommodating and overly sensitive. Is that right? I'm still emotional, even a few years later, because that broke me. I was in depression for a period of time. Luckily, I was able to shift schools and decided to do my master's instead. This was also a challenge. In class, I felt like I was not understanding. However, I was just feeling different. Finally, I had come to a realization that, as a black person, I would never have any rights. This was followed by another attack at the station. This guy randomly assumed I was going to his house because I smiled at him and said hi. I, being unaware, was just trying to be friendly. But this man decided that I was supposed to go with him to his house. He insulted me and my family and everybody else. Everybody was just staring at us. Nobody tried to get in between it. It was a show. Then again i was reduced to a nobody.

One day, I got sick and went to the hospital. I told them that I was not feeling so bad. I just needed something warm. It's an African way of doing things, I just needed to de-warm annually. The doctor showed me a very grotesque photo of someone losing their feet because of ringworms. Being sick as a black person is like you're doomed in this culture. It's just sad.

Looking for a home was a challenge every time I gave my name and I spoke in a different language. The problem started when I started going to interviews. I remember I travelled for over an hour for a job interview. He waited for the director for a bit. After the interview, he said, "Hey, the role has already been filled by another recommendation." Basically, I was nobody again, someone they did not mind wasting their time.

I started getting interviews. In the beginning, when HR and the group individuals were there, it went fine. But when I had to meet with the manager, the first one went fine. I go to the director. He promised that I would have the job. And then the manager would communicate with me. They did not, they stopped picking up my calls. Again, nobody. In other interviews, I tried so hard to demonstrate my skills in that role. The hiring manager told me they do not like someone who brags. I thought, "Why do I even have to try?"

Dear reader, the unfiltered listing of some examples of harshness and blatant racism was necessary to make my interest in authenticity and its relationship to process work plausible and to justify it as impressively as possible. The suffering brought me toward the quest for finding my authentic self or my authenticity.

I hope that at the end of this exploration, I'm going to explore different facets. They will help me see through my process

In the context of the thesis, I now turn to the concept of authenticity

Concept of Authenticity

The pursuit of authenticity is a journey marked by profound philosophical explorations and paradoxical tensions. Rooted in genuineness and credibility, it represents a state of being free from pretence, often contrasted with inauthenticity as light is to darkness. Despite its aspirational value, defining authenticity remains elusive, its boundaries porous and ever-changing.

Authenticity emerges as a beacon in the quest for autonomy and self-determination, a path towards shaping one's own life. It stands as an antidote to external conditioning and a reaction against pervasive inauthenticity prevalent in cultural, political, and religious spheres. The pursuit of authenticity transcends the personal realm, intertwining with the pursuit of truth and a more meaningful existence.

However, this pursuit is not a straightforward path; it is highly individualistic and contextual. What constitutes authenticity for one person may differ significantly from another's understanding. It is not merely about self-knowledge but also about comprehending the intricate interplay between oneself and others. It is an ongoing evolution, a dynamic process woven into the fabric of societal, cultural, and personal contexts. As we will see, this shows the relationship of authenticity to the concept of process in Processwork as defined by Mindell: "The flow of signals in channels over short periods of time, and the changing experiences of identities throughout a lifetime." (Mindell 1989, p.109)

Throughout history, philosophical luminaries like Rousseau, Heidegger, Sartre, and Camus have offered diverse perspectives on authenticity. Rousseau emphasized its erosion in hierarchical societies, while Heidegger linked it to the conscious choice of existence and the awareness of mortality. Sartre's existentialists take centre on freedom and responsibility, while Camus explored authenticity amidst an absurd universe.

Despite their varied perspectives, these philosophical musings converge on a common thread of authenticity in perpetual flux, a dance between being and becoming. Authenticity and inauthenticity are not opposing poles but interconnected concepts, mutually dependent.

The pursuit of authenticity confronts multifaceted challenges. It is not a static state but a lifelong endeavour subject to constant flux. Distinguishing genuine authenticity from mere displays or declarations becomes a formidable task. Authenticity's expression is also

constrained by social contexts, requiring individuals to balance their inner authenticity with the need for discretion in certain situations

Moreover, authenticity demands the cultivation of several traits like unbiased self-examination, humility, empathy, and a willingness to learn from others. Yet, the pursuit is riddled with illusions, biases, and the limitations of self-knowledge, posing challenges to uncovering one's identity.

The paradoxes deepen. Authenticity emerges not through isolation but by immersing oneself in the world, yet resisting external influences is essential for its attainment. Certainty remains elusive such as complete self-knowledge is unattainable, and language's limitations hinder authentic expression and communication.

The multifaceted nature of identities, societal roles, and perceptions further complicates authenticity. Ambiguities persist, with human judgments grounded in interpretations rather than absolute truths, adding layers of complexity to discovering personal authenticity. Social pressures, fear of rejection, and the need for conformity further impede authenticity. In realms such as politics, authenticity becomes a tightrope walk between projecting confidence and acknowledging vulnerabilities.

Looking towards the future, the quest for authenticity faces the evolving landscape of technology, blurring the lines between reality and illusion. However, the potential synergy between scientific understanding and process work insights might hold keys to unlocking untapped energies and transcending traditional physical boundaries in our pursuit of authenticity.

In the following section, I will attempt to capture the essence of my inner work as I followed my path in the pursuit of authenticity. It is a condensation of many hours of inner work on various occasions, culminating in a breakthrough on a day with a winter storm in Denmark.

The essence of my inner work

The starting point is finding myself suffering from all the rejection and abuse I have experienced since my ambitious move from Nairobi to Denmark.

As a next step, I dive deeply into the details of it, realising again and again that I was treated like a nobody. I realise how much all that goes against my identity as a competent woman who has a lot to offer and has managed many difficult situations up to now.

Understanding that “being nobody” was something very distant from my identity, I made the courageous decision to become it.

I credit my X-energy, (for the reader unfamiliar with process work, this term refers to experiences we do not identify with, a short explanation is given in the following chapter) the aspect of becoming nobody, to the compelling circumstances that have persistently marked my life lessons I initially sought to evade. Reflecting closely on my X-energy, let's consider a scenario previously stated in the introduction section, imagine I am being in a job interview and receiving feedback from the hiring manager about coming across as excessively boastful. In awe and shocked, I did not do much in the situation itself. But revisiting this situation later in an inner work, during the role switch and becoming the energy from the manager I started to understand more deeply. My X-energy, becoming nobody, allows me to see beyond the surface; it revealed my struggle to fit into predefined norms, exerting excessive effort to prove capabilities, ultimately overshadowing shared goals. Realizing I dreamed up the manager with my being and it may have been an issue for her life. Our shared essence was the visibility status, and a better situation would have been to make her feel seen.

In a separate session, grappling with the challenge of transitioning identities, I sought guidance from Max (One of my Coaches). We explored my deep connection with nature, an earlier moment of joy witnessing a honey bird's playful dance outside my window. During this session, I visualized myself as a bird and perceived that the bird and the sunset noticed me because I saw them. Through this exploration, I circled back to my X-energy, recognizing a meta-skill: the ability to perceive overlooked elements. This insight highlighted the potential for me to facilitate better by acknowledging and addressing often unseen dynamics.

These moments of introspection and self-discovery unfolded, revealing the power within my X-energy, which is the experience of being nobody I was allowing to unfold. They highlighted

the importance of perceiving beyond the obvious and acknowledging the nuances often disregarded, providing a pathway to enhance my facilitation skills through a deeper understanding of overlooked roles and perspectives.

In a final inner work, I really managed to become nobody. From there, everything changed for me. I realized that in spite of all possible adversaries I was alive and breathing. I also was able to reconnect to the beauty of the sun, the blue sky and nature. In this place, nothing had the power to hit me in the core. Concluding this contemplative session amidst Denmark's post-snowstorm scene, witnessing the sun pierce through the clouds, painting the sky a breathtaking blue, epitomizes my individual transformation. Grateful for nature's unwavering support and the incredible individuals it brings, this moment stands as a cherished milestone in my journey.

This inner work had a lasting regenerative effect on me, which I still benefit from.

Self-reflecting about all these helpful inner work experiences in the context of this thesis, I became interested in how they could be understood and described theoretically. Reading in the Quantum Mind (Mindell, 2000a), I was so excited to find Feynman's diagram about an electron's time reversal in an electric field (38.5,p.503). In the following chapter I will introduce it in more detail and try to highlight its parallels to my pursuit of authenticity.

An electrons time reversal in an electric field

First of all, a few remarks on the publication *Quantum Mind* by Arnold Mindell, which appeared in 2000. In a great book review, Dave Stein (2001, p.39) formulated:

“Building on the visions of Wolfgang Pauli, Carl Jung, and David Bohm, Mindell speculates on exciting new directions for psychology and physics, with profound implications for epistemology and ontology. In his view, the next level of understanding will be based on nonlocality and unbroken wholeness at the outset. Dreaming will be seen as the Universe’s background process, more fundamental than elementary particles, ego, or self. Next-generation mathematics, physics, and psychology will be based on the nonlocal sentient awareness itself as the fundamental “reality.”

and

“Complete with its practical exercises, this book is not only read but also experienced (Stein, 2001p.43).”

I especially liked Stein's insight into the importance of the many exercises in the book, which make reading it not only an intellectual joy but also provide the opportunity and potential for deep self-transformation. This is important at this point because I found an exact pattern of my inner work in Mindell’s understanding of Feynman’s theories.

Mindell uses Feynman's theories as metaphors for psychological theories. They can be used like a dream offering you new patterns for exploring the universe of your daily experiences (Mindell 2000b, p.134). Feynman studied what happens to an electron when it enters an electric field. Charged particles when entering an electric field are pushed and pulled around, similar to tiny pieces of metal in a magnetic field. Feynman offered two different explanations for the path of an electron in an electric field.

The first one involves the creation of short-lived virtual particles, an electron (matter) and positron (antimatter) pair. *“The positron annihilates the original electron. This annihilation produces a lot of energy. Shortly thereafter, the second electron leaves the field (the original was just annihilated) and emerges from the field to go on its way in a direction that is slightly altered from its original direction (see Figure 9.3). The existence of antimatter and the alteration of the original electron have been validated empirically (Mindell, 2007, p.97)”.*

In the Quantum Mind, Mindell (2000b, p.503) describes this version of the path of an electron as “annihilation”.

Remember the hiring manager which, during my job interview, gave me the feedback that I came across as expressively boastful and bragging? In the actual situation I was shocked, muted and became demotivated. My identity as a hopeful, competent and promising applicant was just annihilated.

To use Mindells analogy, just as the electron gets annihilated by its antimatter positron, I got dazed, “knocked unconscious” by the effect of the hiring manager’s feedback!

But Feynman described another possibility for the path of an electron. I depicted it in the diagram below. Mindell interprets it as the path of “the fluid self”. It follows a continuous path, reversing its own direction instead of being annihilated by the positron. He writes:

„In Figure 38.5, I represent the Feynman theory of how an electron is bumped about in a field and its psychological analogy, a tense situation like getting into a complex. I equate the original electron with the primary process and the positron, which is a virtual antimatter aspect of the electron matter, with secondary processes (...). In other words, it is as if matter has two aspects: one is the way we normally identify it, and the other is its antimatter, or secondary aspect (Mindell 2000a, p. 503).“

(In this thesis, I use instead of primary process and secondary process the terms u and X.)

In other words, you find yourself in a non-consensus reality, in a world with continuous flow, where you can go backwards in time or “out of time,” so to speak.

This means, that the path of a fluid self-offers an alternative perspective. The fluid self-embodies adaptability and resilience. Instead of succumbing to the impact of adversities and challenges, just like the electron, it manoeuvres dynamically and does not get destroyed.

Embracing a fluid self implies a dynamic approach to facing adversities. Rather than being immobilized by the impact of racism and systemic issues, I adapt, shape-shift into my most feared states and persist. It's about exploring different directions, both figuratively and emotionally, to avoid being immobilized by challenges.

By embracing fluidity, individuals can transform their experiences. They can evolve without losing sight of their core values and authenticity. This is at least my experience, and I find it backed up by the path of the fluid self. It's about in my opinion the path of persisting through adversity, acknowledging the impact of challenges, yet not letting them define or confine one's identity.

In summary, my journey toward authenticity in the face of racism and systemic challenges can be seen through the lens of fluidity. It involves a dynamic approach, adapting and manoeuvring through adverse situations, allowing me to evolve and persist without compromising my authenticity. Embracing fluidity provides a pathway to navigate the complexities of these experiences, fostering personal growth and resilience.

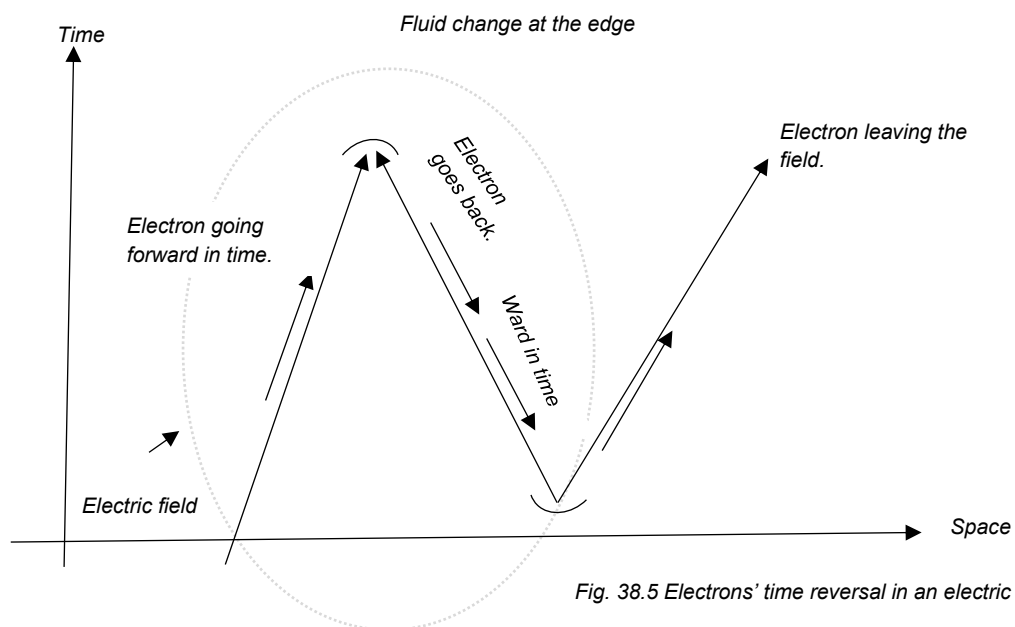


Fig. 38.5 Electrons' time reversal in an electric field (From Quantum Mind)

Support of Process work basics in the pursuit of Authenticity

Besides the described and joyful parallels for me between the electron's path backward in time and my path towards authenticity, some Process work basics provide an additional understanding of the pursuit of authenticity in a partly adverse environment.

- X and u energies

A ground-breaking development in Arny Mindell's work is the introduction of X and u energies, marking a significant paradigm shift in our understanding of human dynamics. X energy represents the energies we tend to distance ourselves from or dislike, whether within ourselves, relationships, or collective settings. Conversely, u energy symbolizes our everyday primary energy, akin to earlier concepts of primary and secondary processes. By simplifying complex psychological concepts into accessible terms, X and u energies make these ideas more accessible to the general public and those unfamiliar with psychological jargon (Mindell, 2020, pp. 16).

Understanding and using this X and u energies beckons exploration of our personal sanctuaries, recognizing the coexistence of favoured and avoided energies within ourselves. For instance, a man finding solace in his Process Mind earth spot by the seashore experienced the tumultuous crashing waves as "X" energy and the serene waters as "u" energy, symbolizing the dance between discomfort and tranquillity. Immersed in this environment, he gained profound insights into the interconnectedness and integration of these energies (Mindell, 2020, pp. 16). In essence, the concept of X and u offers a lens for understanding our complexities and a pathway toward harmonising these energies. It invites introspection, encouraging exploration of our unique landscapes and acknowledgement of duality within ourselves. Through this understanding, we navigate internal conflicts, transforming discomfort into opportunity, fostering an integrated, harmonious approach to life's intricate dynamics.

- Levels of consciousness

The pursuit of authenticity, defined as being true to oneself, is a complex endeavour that has captivated thinkers and seekers for centuries. This section describes shortly Mindell's conceptual framework defining Consensus Reality, Dreamland, and the Essence Level to navigate towards embodying one's authentic self.

The consensus reality is the everyday world forms the bedrock for shared experiences and mutual understanding. Consisting of consensual signals, it encompasses easily communicated notions agreed upon by a given society. Aligned with established identities, these signals often manifest through dualistic categories of good versus bad or right versus wrong (Mindell, 2020, p. 16)

Beyond Consensus Reality lies Dreamland a realm of non-consensual signals and experiences. Here, dream images, subjective sensations, and elusive experiences challenge easy articulation or consensus. Often marginalized, these signals operate independently from conscious control, residing farther from established identities (Mindell, 2020, p. 16).

At the core of our experiences resides the Essence Level a non-dual, pre-sensory realm. Comprising subtle tendencies yet to manifest through sensory channels, it remains overlooked due to its elusive nature. This level serves as the source of experiences in both Consensus Reality and Dreamland (Mindell, 2020, p.

Embracing fluidity and openness to new experiences is crucial in navigating authenticity. Stepping outside our comfort zones to explore Dreamland and the Essence Level allows us to uncover subtle tendencies emanating from the Essence Level. These provide profound insights into our authentic selves, aiding in the journey towards self-realization and authenticity.

Conclusion

Our lives are a tapestry woven with threads of vulnerability and resilience, a dynamic dance between moments of annihilation, when external forces threaten to obliterate our sense of self, and fluidity, when we rise above adversity and demonstrate our remarkable capacity for transformation.

Imagining myself as an electron, tiny particles of energy, venturing into the vast expanse of an electric field. As I traverse this field, I encounter opposing forces that disrupt my trajectories, much like life's challenges disrupt our sense of self. These encounters have the potential to shatter my composure, leaving me feeling overwhelmed, defeated, and even unrecognizable to myself.

Recall the instance at that job interview, where the feedback I received echoed in my mind like a discordant melody, momentarily shattering my hopeful and confident self. It was as if an antimatter counterpart had collided with my very being, threatening to extinguish my essence. Yet, amidst this potential annihilation, there lies a beacon of hope, the fluid self. Like the electron's unknown movement in a magnetic field, the fluid self as one possible path embodies our innate capacity for adaptability, manoeuvrability, and resilience. Just as the electron alters its path to avoid annihilation in the version of the path of the fluid self, we too can shift our perspective, regroup our forces, and emerge from the crucible of challenges transformed. It's about recognizing our inner strength, refusing to be defined by external pressures, and embracing the fluidity to transform and grow in response to challenges.

My decision to shift course in the face of adversity epitomized the fluid self's embodiment of resilience. I refused to succumb to the negative impact of feedback, instead choosing to view it as an opportunity for growth. This conscious shift, this embrace of adaptation, demonstrates the remarkable capacity of the human spirit to overcome obstacles and emerge transformed.

Our lives are a constant dance between these two forces annihilation and fluidity. We teeter on the edge of feeling overwhelmed, defeated, and obliterated by external forces, yet within us lies the potential to rise above these challenges, embodying the fluid self and transforming moments of annihilation into stepping stones toward growth and self-discovery.

By acknowledging our susceptibility to annihilation and cultivating the fluidity to adapt, we can navigate life's challenges with greater resilience and self-confidence. We can learn to leverage these moments of vulnerability as catalysts for growth, transforming ourselves into agents of change and resilience.

As we embrace the fluidity of our being, we open ourselves up to a world of possibilities, a world where annihilation no longer spells destruction but rather a prelude to rebirth. We learn to transform moments of vulnerability into opportunities for growth, to navigate challenges with grace and resilience, and to emerge from the crucible of adversity stronger, wiser, and more authentically ourselves.

This journey, far from merely acknowledging challenges, delves into a profound understanding of the dynamic interplay between annihilation and fluidity. It reveals that moments of annihilation, rather than signifying destruction, can serve as catalysts for our growth and transformation. By embracing our fluidity, we can navigate life's challenges with greater resilience and self-confidence, emerging from the crucible of adversity not diminished, but stronger, wiser, and more authentically ourselves.

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