

Art and Dreaming
A lecture by Jan Dworkin, PhD.
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Introduction

What I do:

Work as therapist, facilitator, town hall meetings, etc.

Work with visual artists, musicians, dancers, theatre people

Background in art. Gave it up as my main pursuit

Originally got into PW because I was obsessed with painting portraits and nudes of myself. So I decided to study myself more seriously and I went into therapy and eventually became a clinical psychologist and Process Worker.

Process Work was developed by Arnold and Amy Mindell. What is process Work? It is a philosophy based on Buddhism, Taoism, quantum mechanics and shamanism . Also a method of working with people therapeutically and a form of group facilitation and conflict resolution

I appreciate Joseph for inviting me to speak here. It gives me a chance to think more deeply about art and to make it more central in my life.

Art & Psychology

I always think talking about art together with psychology is controversial and can be dangerous, depending on the psychological approach. I have no interest in reducing art to a psychological level. There is a danger of over-analyzing and this can be a creativity killer.

Rilke:

The poet Rilke warned that psychoanalysis was a threat to creativity, with its focus on civilizing the id instincts and adapting to society's rules and conventions. "If my devils are to leave me, I am afraid my angels will take flight as well," he exclaimed upon declining to enter psychoanalysis with Freud in the early part of last century

Therapies that focus on adapting to the known world are dangerous to the artist . Many creative people are afraid of losing contact with creativity by making the unknown too known. If one starts working on "problems" and getting rid of them, they will become too ordinary, return to the trance of consensus reality. Artists must retain the ability to dance with the unknown. In this way, process work can be very helpful.

Mindell quote.

“... I look for the absurd, nonsensical thing in an individual or group, the thing which others ignore. I look for the spirit of the incomprehensible statement, error or gesture and then care for it and let it unfold... the gold lies in the messages we do not intend to send... the process work mode is interesting because you must reverse your normal mode of consciousness.”

Basic Process Work Concepts

I want to tell you a little bit about some of the ideas in process work and how they might be useful to artists

Process Work is a psychotherapeutic school but it is also a philosophy and a spiritual path. Based on principles from Taoism, Buddhism, quantum physics and shamanism. Because of its strong emphasis on **dreaming** and **awareness** I have found that Process Work can serve artists and their work.

a) Process Work is all about the connection between waking reality, which we call consensus reality (CR) and dreaming or non-consensus reality (NCR).

What is Consensus Reality:

The everyday world that we all agree on. Consensus reality focuses on time, space and social norms. It uses our ordinary awareness which the shaman Don Juan called first attention.

Many of us are well trained in first attention. We know how much money we have, when to take out the garbage, when to be at work.

First attention in art-making: It can be trained in school, you understand color theory, composition, knowledge of anatomy, spatial concepts like foreshortening, 6 heads in a body, the eyes come about halfway down the head

We all know that excellent first attention may create a very well-drafted drawing but it doesn't make great art. In order to be great, a piece of art needs to evoke something mysterious, ineffable, unknown. It needs to be “poetic.”

What is Non-Consensus Reality :

It is the world of feelings, inner experiences, dreams, altered states. Things that can't be proven. NCR is not measurable. It is dreamtime. According to aboriginal australians it is the foundation of reality and the most fundamental, elementary constituent of the universe. It creates and generates reality.

(If I was the model and a psychotic person were drawing , they might see 2 eyes in front of my head and two on the side. Is this not real? What if I dreamed I had eyes on the side of my head?) (Why does Pablo Picasso have that freedom?)

--After about the age of five years old, most of us get trained to ignore dreaming, in fact it is beaten out of us, especially when we go to school and have to adapt.

--Most of the mild chronic depressions in the US and Western Europe, Australia, Japan are due to a lack of connection with dreaming.
--Most addictions and addictive tendencies also try to compensate for this lack of connection.
--Most fear of death is due to fear of the altered states connected with dreaming—death is the big altered state.

In Process Work we make a really big deal about the dreaming aspects of reality in every day life.

3 levels of reality:

C.R: The tree that we can see above the ground THE WORLD OF EVERYDAY REALITY

Dreamland: The roots of the tree all tangled together underground. THIS IS THE WORLD OF MOST DEPTH PSYCHOLOGY. It includes dream images, symptoms, conflicts.

The essence: The earth itself that supports the tree. THIS IS THE WORLD OF MANY RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS. It includes vague feelings and moods, flickers, subtle sensations.

Jans example:

CR: I am 43, white, jewish, psychotherapist, I have a PhD. I'm wearing a black blazer and freshly washed jeans

Dreamland: I dreamed about my nephew, age 13, who saw god in bed. This is about the conflict between my rational, atheist upbringing and my spiritual side. Part of me is worried about money, being important, doing enough in the world and something else in me doesn't care about that stuff.

Essence: I am obsessed by a new couch I bought –it gives me the feeling of being held by the Great Mother.

What does this have to do with art?

--Thinking about these three levels offers us a way to look at art and understand it.
--Our abilities in NCR can assist us in our art-making. We will talk about this later.

First let's talk about the 3 levels in paintings.

We can see these three levels when we look at art and we react at all these levels.

CR issues:

formal elements (structure, composition, color)
political significance, statement (political murals)

NCR

Dreamland:

Our own psychological reactions

What we project or see into the issues of the artist (Frida Kahlo, Picasso, De Kooning,)

Essence:

A spiritual ground or deep feeling sense that is evoked . (Perhaps most evoked in impressionism, cubism and abstract expressionism, when the notion of portraying “reality” became less important)

In the last 125 years, with impressionism, cubism, surrealism, abstract expressionism there was a move away from CR to NCR. (With the onset of “realism” in 1850, NCR was conveyed in the feeling behind the images portrayed)

Example of dreamland:

Meyer Shapiro discusses this in an article about Guernica. He quotes Picasso: “Those who seek to explain a picture most often go astray. How can a spectator live a picture as I have lived it? How can one penetrate into my dreams, my instincts, my desires, my thoughts, which have taken so long to work themselves out and come forth? ...How can one grasp what I have put into my work, in spite of my will?”

Example of essence:

Picasso tried to paint Gertrude Stein’s portrait many times in Paris and he wasn’t satisfied. He could only paint her to his satisfaction when he returned from Africa where he saw masks. The mask-like quality was the essence level, god-like quality, what Zen Buddhism calls “the face before you were born” and don Juan calls the “power aspect of the face.”

Guernica

--In depicting pain, Picasso shows the inside of the horse’s body rather than the CR body
--He doesn’t convey the CR of the Basque town destroyed by German bombers. There are no political slogans or overt scenes of battle. Instead he portrays the essence of the horror—you feel what it must have felt like.

This is unlike Picasso’s “Massacre in Korea” where the feeling is not portrayed as deeply as it is in Goya’s “No se puedo mirar.” You can feel that Goya was really there.

Second attention in art-making.

How do you focus on NCR? Is the dreaming world something that only happens at night when we are sleeping.

No.

In the late 70s Arny Mindell made the discovery that the body dreams all the time and that you could work with the dreaming process, or the unconscious by working with the body. He discovered this while working with a man with stomach cancer. Later he discovered that the dreaming process manifests in relationship issues, addictive processes, sexuality, group conflict , etc

Example of woman with neck pain my neck— she experienced it as if something were pushing her down. She dreamed of an “ordinary” friend, jumping on her while she was

trying to interact with this psychotic woman. So the “ordinary” friend manifested as her neck pain, holding her back from her “craziness.”

Example of a sweet, shy woman who dreams about a tiger. She complains about a relationship conflicts with her boyfriend who acts aggressive. The boyfriend is the “tiger” part of her.

Second attention:

In order to become more aware in non-consensus reality we need to develop a special type of awareness. Shaman Don Juan called it second attention: the skill needed to allow dreaming to unfold. He tried to teach his apprentice Carlos Casteneda to use second attention, squint and use peripheral vision. Carlos saw a coyote and got scared. Then he was relieved when he realized it wasn't “really” there. Don Juan got irritated about his lack of attention to other realities.

(I was very excited to hear that Joseph will work on training second attention later by having you look at slides out of focus.)

Develop “second attention” by:

- notice the mysterious thing
- value it, assume it has meaning
- focus our awareness on it
- Amplify
- unfold it until it reveals itself and enriches us

In order to do this you have to be a little bit of a Taoist.

Nature was God in Taoism. This means that the accidents or expression of Nature, even if they are disturbing, weird, irrational or incorrect are valuable and potentially meaningful. You don't want to just get rid of them, they are the seed or spark for something which is purposeful.

So as psychotherapists we have a strange attitude towards symptoms and difficulties. We see that the things which disturb that identity are an attempt to bring new information and bring the person closer to their wholeness. We don't try to correct people or make them fit in, we bow to the weirdness and explore it make it bigger and find out what's trying to unfold.

You also have to be a little bit of a fool.

How to use second attention (or dreaming attention) while making art:

--Attitude of second attentions inhibits you from criticizing mistakes because in those accidents, mistakes, unconsciousness, all the stuff that isn't supposed to happen is the dreaming process.

--Many of us marginalize altered states and non-consensus reality experiences. If you look at your painting and see a softness in the face when you are trying to convey strength, allow yourself to go into the softness, it is like a dream. Trying to tell you something. It is not just that you are not good enough or you don't have the right color, line, technique.

--We are always looking for the mystery and the unknown—the thing which may not go along with the stated intention of what we are doing.

--For the last 200 years, with “modern” art, process has been recognized as important in painting. Visible traces are left of the underlying layers, accidents of the brush, blank spots on the canvas.

--Delacroix. Compares the artist to the general. “ One can't know in advance what the finished picture will be...

In Zen ink drawings something is always left imperfect and the circle is never completed in order to represent the Tao, the unpredictable, the imperfection of nature. Being one with nature means being imperfect.

Examples in art:

Working with a mistake:

Calm quiet man with occasional outbursts. Does very detailed controlled pencil drawings and just beginning to experiment with color. Ruins his drawing with orange color. Wants to rip it up and throw it away. We explore violent movements and something is out of control. Wild movements. (Like the orange) He needs to become much more uncontrolled in his drawings. Now this man also needed to let his wild, irrational spontaneous side out more in his life, not just in his drawing

More common for performers

Using mistakes is more common for performers, especially dancers and actors. Visual artists have the privacy to cover up or rework their mistakes. (Danger of overworking)

Cassandra Wilson

Several years ago I heard her talking on NPR about her rendition of the blues song Baubles, Bangles and Beads. She was terrified at her first solo performance at a club in NY and the writer of the song was in the audience. She opened her mouth and sang “Baubles... and couldn't remember what came next . She hesitated then slowly came the next word... bangles... here how they jing a ling... and so on . Thus came her haunting slow rendition of the song.

Working with a disturbance:

Jazz singer wants to bring beauty to the world. Loving woman. Very clear, melodic voice. Edged out and too shy to sing blues. Develops polyps in throat from acid reflux.

Makes voice crack and go deeper. Uses that and gets in contact with more sexual earthy raunchy part.

Picking up flirts, distractions

Ask yourself: What stands out, what is most mysterious or fascinating to you?

Man used the incorrect type of paper for his drawing. The color would flake off whenever he put on the pastel. The essence of the flaking off was impermanence. It helped him to let go and finish the drawing, not try to get it just right. Things come and go, this drawing will go too. This allowed him not only to let go more in his style, but to let go and finally finish the picture.

Picking up flirts will help you with the feeling of your work. A painter was distracted by the waning light in the room, could no longer see. Focused on the darkening, closed her eyes and went inside. This added a great depth of feeling to the work and also a “messiness” that reflected a deeper vision

Symbolic thinking

Any picture can be looked at and worked with like a dream. Use the Taoist’s beginner’s mind rather than preconceived ideas about symbols, look for individual associations to colors, forms, placement.

Look for:

- Where things are placed on the paper: lower left side is usually furthest from awareness. Things on right side are closer.
- What is drawn first And last—sequence. Shows the flow of the person’s process, where they are now and where they are headed
- Also how the person draws is very important—wild, controlled, concentrating, fast, slow. We don’t know what it means until we discuss it with the individual

We are interested in symbolic thinking more than we are in interpreting symbols. Usually, interpreting signals one has fixed ideas about what symbols mean. We find it more useful to get personal associations but be careful t stay away from definitions. Symbolic thinking is the ability to translate dreamlike material into everyday terms. Everything that is unknown, disturbing, weird outside of the identity is symbolic of a dreaming process . All dreaming material is symbolic material!

Short exercise

- 1) Go inside and notice where you are at. Make a note of a dream, body symptoms, strange mood, relationship troubles, atmosphere, anything that stands out for you..
- 2) Take 5 minutes to make a picture or drawing.
- 3) Look at your drawing. Either pick the element in the picture that stands out the most to you, that is a mistake or most disturbing or glance at your picture with a foggy mind and squinted eyes and see what flirts with you.

- 4) Draw a second picture of just that element and amplify it. Let it go beyond what it was. Watch as it becomes something entirely new.
- 5) Does this new picture speak to you in a way the original one did not? What about it is meaningful to you?
- 6) Feel the second picture in your body. Make small or large movements that express that feeling. Is this feeling connected to 1).

Reading:

Lucid Dreaming. Arnold Mindell

The Shaman's Body. Arnold Mindell

Unintentional Music. Lane Arye. Hampton Roads

Picasso and Photography

Guernica. Meyer Shapiro