

The Process Work of Arnold Mindell: An Interview with Julie Diamond, Ph.D.

by Til Luchau, Certified Advanced Rolfer

Julie Diamond, Ph.D., worked with analyst/physicist Arnold Mindell (author of *Working with the Dreaming Body*, *The Shaman's Body*, *Sitting in the Fire*, etc.) as one of the original founders of Process Work (or Process Oriented Psychology). In this interview from January 3rd, 1999, Julie talks about some of the basic ideas behind Process Work and gives examples of how they might be applied in private practice.

I began studying Process Work with Arny Mindell in the mid-1980's as a student of bodywork and body-centered therapies at Esalen. As I did, you will notice where the Process Work perspective differs from our own (for example, the emphasis on the psychological aspects of symptoms and experience), as well as the similarities we share (e.g., seeking the "self-correcting" capacity of the body). My hope is that both the differences and the similarities will prove stimulating and educational. As a Rolfer who also works as a psychotherapist, the dynamic interaction between these two modalities keeps me reflecting, growing, and refining my appreciation for each, in all their disparate and complimentary views, values, and methods.

Til Luchau So what is Process Work?

Julie Diamond Process Work is a modality that works with the whole person, in the language of conventional psychotherapy, the unconscious as well as the conscious parts. But "whole person" also means all the different arenas in which people operate and live, like relationships, body symptoms, group life and conflict, movement and physical expression, creativity, spirituality. Really it follows where people go, so it's a very broad ranging modality, but it has a very basic theoretical foundation and the same theories and methods work with all those different applications.

TL What are some of those basics?

JD The basic idea behind Process Work is simple and complex at the same time. It's basically the idea that there is a "dreaming process" underlying the forms and structures of consensus reality. So behind the symptom, behind the group conflict, or behind the relationship difficulty is a flow of meaning, a river of meaning that we call the dreaming process. It's very much in the homeopathic tradition in that the solutions themselves lie within the conflict or the problem. So that by going more deeply into it whatever it is that manifests as the problem, we connect with that dreaming process and that dreaming process is creative, it's

healing, it's helpful, it's more whole. Instead of just being identified with the forms and structures of consensus reality, or our problems, we also connect with a deeper level of meaning.

TL What do you mean by "going into something?"

JD Well, most of life could be characterized as being aware of the troubles and the problems that are confronting us. We have a symptom, or we wake up with a dream we don't know what it means, or we have a relationship problem, or we're not getting along with our family, or we have money problems, or we're aware of social conflicts or whatever. Getting into the flow behind these things means being able to amplify and unfold and go more deeply into those problems. It's like the Taoist idea that we are going more with it, that it is not happening to us, but we are picking up the energy and picking up the flow of what is going on and co-creating with it.

TL I wonder about an example.

JD One of the best examples that I always come back to is an example that Arny [Mindell] talks about in one of his books. He talks about the story of a young boy who came to him with a brain tumor. So that is the identified problem, and is a quite serious one. He was undergoing treatment and he had to be kept very still, and he was very depressed naturally. Anyway, he came to Arny

with his mother and Arny asked him about his experience of the tumor. (This is really key in Process Work. We don't work with the objective descriptions of what a symptom or problem is, but we work with the subjective experience of what that problem is. How you experience it is very different from how I experience it, and that's the key to unraveling that dreaming process.) So Arny asked him, "Well, what's your brain tumor like?" The boy said he had a lot of headaches, so that is what he experienced. Arny went one step further with the unraveling process, again not being satisfied with the objective description of the headache even though everybody knows what a headache is. The key is what the kid experiences as a headache, so Arny asks him, "What is it like to have a headache?", and the kid started rapping his knuckles, knocking on the chair, and said, "It's like a hammer, it's hammering." So this is now getting close to the dreaming process, this is that subjective, irrational element in the symptom. Arny said "Well, let's hammer together, let's do that." The kid was knocking, and Arny started knocking with him, going more into the symptom. Then of course the next step is to really go into it, amplifying it fully to make it a bit more global. Instead of it being manifest in one way like for example the knocking, you could bring in other things like movement and sound and pictures. Arny brought in sounds with the knocking and asked him what the "knocker" was knocking about; were there words that went with that? The kid started to say "Get to work, get to work!", almost like a teacher character came out as he was knocking. "Get to work, do your homework!" The kid had missed a lot of school because of this tumor. Conventional approaches to this would say that the kid needs a lot of rest, but the dreaming process

or the symptom, this irrational element, was actually a "knocker" who said "Get to work, do your homework, get back to work." The kid actually had a lot of energy that wanted to get back into life that wasn't being picked up. So Arny said to the mother, "He should be doing his homework." The mother said, "But the doctor said he should rest more and he could miss school," but the kid wanted to get back to school and do his homework! Arny said following the dreaming process could also be healing for the kid's health because it is tapping into and using his energy. He even said to the kid "You should drink coffee and do your homework," and the kid got better in the end. So that's an example of "getting into it."

TL So, Process Work might try to find out what the symptom itself is trying to do, and encourage it to do it more.

JD Yeah, there is a life in those symptoms, there is an energetic flow, and they're going towards something. It follows Jung's idea that symptoms are purposeful, heading towards something; they are not the result of neurosis but are the solution to something.

TL That's a big shift from, say, treatment-oriented thought that says "Let's get rid of the symptoms."

JD That's right. It's a shift that we saw from Freud to Jung. Freud saw all symptoms, whether physical or neurotic, as a result of a prior trauma. Thus, to heal the symptom you have to go back to that prior trauma, and of course Reich extended that and looked for that in the body. Jung said something very different: he said symptoms aren't the result of a trauma, they are actually trying to correct something, a trauma perhaps. Jung gave a very specific example in one of his books. He said the mother symbol in Freudian thought would

be the symbol of the problem, the neurosis. He says in Jungian thought, it would be the healing archetype—that more "mothering" is needed.

TL This might be taking us away a little but, I am just thinking about how we do something similar in Rolfing®.

JD Interesting, how does that work?

TL Well, classically Rolfing used a lot of what we call direct techniques, which means that if something is tight or contracted we would work it in a way that would make it longer or lengthen. More recently, say in the last ten or fifteen years, many Rolfers are also using indirect techniques, which takes something tight or short more into the tightness.

JD Interesting, amplifying it: the basic homeopathic thought. I guess behind it is the idea that the organism is a self-correcting system.

TL That's a big one.

JD That's a big one, and I think Process Work is really fundamentally Taoist, in the sense that the Way (with a big W) is the way (little w). In other words, the flow of nature is a self-correcting system, if you just align yourself to nature things will heal themselves. Posture as an inner relationship issue.

TL Let's take something like posture or the way someone stands. Let's say a client comes in and says, "Hey, I am not happy with my posture." How would we work with that from a Process Work perspective?

JD OK, that's a great example. Well, if someone comes in and has a particular posture and said they want to change it, then I think to myself that I have two clients in front to me and not just one. I have the posture which is going a particular direction, and then I have the person who is in conflict with that posture. It's like a

relationship conflict. I just hold that in my mind, because working with problems you have to understand that the problem has its own direction; it's like another client that doesn't speak when it comes into the office. It is like the minority that doesn't get to say its piece.

TL The problem itself has a voice that may not be being heard.

JD That's right, and part of what you are doing with amplifying is you're letting it speak in its language. So what I would do is to actually amplify that posture, find out what is trying to happen in that posture, giving it a voice, letting it speak. I don't know what would happen in that session but I can imagine saying to the person, "Well if that tension and pressure or rigidity is something you need right now, it's probably somatic because it is not conscious." That old psychotherapeutic chestnut that things somatize when they go unconscious. So helping him fight or battle more consciously, his body maybe doesn't have to do it, and it will relieve the symptom. So you don't get rid of what the symptom is doing, but it doesn't necessarily have to be only that body part that is doing it.

TL Big change of perspective, big shift.

JD Which one?

TL The idea of getting on the side of the one that is trying to be tighter.

JD Yeah, befriending what the body is doing and actually doing it for the body so it doesn't just have to be just that muscle or body that's doing it.

TL Now we are talking about these examples of people coming in with a body symptom and in some way getting in touch with the psychological life processes behind them.

JD Yes.

TL What about a body symptom that

is the result of an accident or trauma? Someone comes in, say, after a car accident and can't turn their head.

JD Right. Well, there are a lot of different ways to approach a symptom because there are a lot of different subjective experiences attached to that symptom. For example, some symptoms have a very overt and dramatic cause, like an accident. I would work with the accident (as well as the symptom at a later date). Something like an accident would be very exciting to work directly with, the accident and what happened, because in the language of Process Work we would say that the accident is a dreaming process, an event that was way outside of someone's control. Accidents are very frequently connected to major changes in life. We did a study on this once: when people are close to separating in a relationship, frequently accidents happen. It's really something Til, you should keep an eye on this in your practice.

TL I'm just going to go with that one for a second. It sounds like we're relating body symptoms back to some sort of underlying meaning, or to what needs to happen in someone's life or relationships.

JD Yes, I would say yes, very much like a dream. At least in our theory, symptoms and dreams are synonymous in the sense that they are expressions of the flow of life and what is trying to happen.

TL I am thinking about how in Rolfing, often what we do with those kinds of things is that we relate them back to the body. If someone comes in and tells a story about a relationship we'll say to ourselves, "OK, so how is that happening in the body?"

JD Oh, I see.

TL We are doing the opposite in some ways. We look for how these

issues might be reflected in someone's structure and movement, and work with them on those levels.

JD I see, so in Rolfing the body is the ground of being.

TL Yeah.

JD I guess in Process Work, the body is one manifestation of being. I think dreaming is the ground of being in Process Work.

TL OK, so the body is one aspect of being. There's a quote from Ida Rolf, something like "I know the body is not all there is, but that's what I can get my hands on."

JD I love that quote, that helps me. One of the things that we do in Process Work, is that we are trying to get our hands on dreaming!

In Part II of this interview, Julie talks about addictions, the social/cultural dimensions of body symptoms. □