

FOREWORD

Timothy Wyllie



This is a curious book for me to have written.

Until recently, it would have been the last thing on my mind.

Over the three decades since I left the community, life has moved along and my interests have changed and developed. It was never my intention to write so fully about the 15 years I spent with The Process Church of the Final Judgment, preferring to think of that time as being immersed in a Mystery School. Let the secrets rest there, I thought.

If it weren't for the intriguing confluence of three quite different people, I would have willingly left it alone. But each of these people had a long and abiding fascination with the group. The persistence of their interest, particularly in the Process magazines with their startling design and provocative content, persuaded me that the inside story of The Process Church needed to be told.

I'd originally met the English performance artist and musician Genesis P-Orridge in London in the late 1980s, after he had formed his group, Thee Temple Ov Psychick Youth, and the musical assemblage Psychick TV. Genesis had gone to considerable trouble to track me down since he must have heard that I was one of the very few people from the inner circle of The Process who had successfully left the fold.

Genesis first encountered The Process back in the 1960s, after we'd returned to London from Mexico in 1966 and he had been bowled over by the intelligence and intensity of its members and the originality of the artwork and presentation. He set about collecting and archiving all the Process publications he could get his hands on and the presence of much of the visual material in this book is due to his foresight.

Gen's essay at the closing of the book is a thoughtful and provocative analysis of the impact of The Process on his own artistic and shamanic transformation.

William Morrison, the documentary filmmaker and rock musician (Skinny Puppy), whom I met when we had started working on the book, had been so



Timothy Wyllie's "P-card," which were issued to all Processeans.

struck by The Process Church and its unusual belief systems that, in the mid-1990s, he formed Process Media Labs. This was a multimedia company inspired by his involvement with The Process, an Internet art collective that had been influenced, in its turn, by The Process Church of the Final Judgment.

William's enthusiastic interest in wanting to know what really went on behind the scenes prompted him to make a documentary on the Church.

It was through Genesis that I met the publisher, Adam Parfrey of Feral House. It was quickly apparent that Adam, too, had taken notice of The Process Church and included Process material in his mid-'80s collection *Apocalypse Culture*. Although initially intending to focus on Process magazines, after interviewing some ex-members Adam's interest developed into desiring to create a book that finally told the truth behind this thoroughly secretive and mysterious cult.

For a cult it was, although we would never have thought of ourselves in those derogatory terms. Yet The Process did have all the hallmarks of a cult: charismatic and autocratic leaders, devotion to an unconventional ideology, personal poverty, obedience, celibacy (from time to time), and a strict hierarchy, with secrets held between the levels.

It was a hard life, yet full of excitement and challenges in which we were pushed, and pushed ourselves, to our limits. We were young and it was London in the mid-1960s, still recovering from a devastating war and now facing the apparent certainty of an atomic conflagration. The dreadful smog that would settle over the city became an apt metaphor for the general state of consciousness in England at that time.

It seemed inevitable that the bombs would fall again—for us, war was still a recent reality—and we viewed life through the lens of the impending apocalypse. We were convinced the world was ending.

When we saw our message of doom and imminent destruction ignored and ridiculed, we turned our back on the world and became increasingly insular and secretive. It was this withdrawal that directly resulted in so many misconceptions and wild rumors that have continued to circulate about The Process.

Less than a handful of the original members of The Process inner circle have left the community over the years, and each would have a different story to tell. An experience as profound as time spent in a cult is bound to be highly personal. To open up the viewpoint in this book, therefore, I asked half a dozen ex-members of the community for some of their adventures and anecdotes. Some will have only spent their time in The Foundation Faith of the Millennium, and others only in The Process, but their viewpoints serve to broaden what is otherwise a distinctly personal account.

As someone who was there from the beginning I had the opportunity to watch while an original and effective psychotherapeutic system was gradually usurped and bent to the desires and fantasies of one terrifyingly powerful woman, Mary Ann (MacLean Moor de Grimston DePeyer). A fundamental reason for my writing this book has been an attempt to understand this strange woman and the extraordinary hold she had over me, and so many others.

Since I left the community 30 years ago I've long since made my peace with the remaining members, although I doubt if they will appreciate my writing this book. So much of the secrecy associated with The Process stemmed from Mary Ann that it's only now when she has passed on that it feels appropriate to let the fresh air in and to get across something of the internal dynamics, both the good and the bad, of the apocalyptic cult that gathered around her.

There are those who have had The Process pegged as a criminal enterprise—as the Satanic masterminds, for example, behind Manson and Berkowitz. They will likely continue to peddle their lucrative myths. The truth, I'm relieved to say, is not quite so dramatic. Our secrets were not of that nature. In fact, The Process was generally law-abiding. One of the only times I recall that we decided to deliberately break the law was to smuggle a German shepherd across the English Channel.

Yet because there was an enigmatic woman who insisted on personal secrecy at the center of The Process, this cast a shadow over everything we did. It created an aura of mystery around the group that no one on the outside has yet been able to penetrate. What was really going on in the community, through its various different iterations, I believe, was far more interesting and revealing than all the misconceptions published about The Process Church over the years.

For all its many ironies, and the betrayal of original dreams of hoping to change the world, perhaps it is no bad thing that The Process has ended up as Best Friends, an animal sanctuary in Utah.

Over the years in the community, my primary function was art director for The Process and Foundation publications for which I occasionally wrote a short article. In going through the magazines gathered for researching this book, which I'd not seen in over three decades, I was astonished to find that some of the subject matter I'd long forgotten—dolphin intelligence in one of them, and extraterrestrial speculations in the other—have turned out to be central to my explorations and writings for the last 20 years.

The cult experience, for many who go through it, can frequently feel as though it was time-out-of-time. Whether the experience is considered beneficial, or time wasted, it can feel discontinuous with the longer arc of our lives. When I came across those two articles again after so many years, it was oddly reassuring to find that my interest in non-human intelligences had been stirring in me, and might even have been nurtured through my time with the group.

The Process demanded everything from me. And I, like the others, threw myself wholeheartedly into the experience. For most of my time I was convinced The Process was going to be my life and I committed myself totally to living its reality. My observations in this book should not be read as complaints. There were times of deep joy, as there were periods of mind-numbing fear. What sticks in the mind, however, tends to be the more taxing situations.

The thoughtful reader might well ask themselves why, under some of the conditions described, didn't I, or my colleagues, simply get up and leave? Well, of course, a few did—I left once, yet found myself compelled by some inner conviction to return. What this question doesn't take into account is that we were young, highly motivated and had turned our backs on conventional society. We were anxious to prove ourselves worthy by rising to any challenge presented. However intolerable life in The Process became at times, it was always intensely interesting. As a consequence, there was a closeness within the group, so much more intimate than most of our own family dynamics, that there was a tremendous investment in staying with the program. Much as soldiers in war bond, we, the Elect, became one large extended family. So, perhaps, it was this interconnectedness that kept us faithful and true for so many years.

More is known these days about cults in general, what conditions produce them, and where they can end up. The Heaven's Gate tragedy and the horrors of Jonestown, both perversions of power and delusion, cast an appalling light on what can happen when an autocratic leader loses touch with reality.

What is far less well-known is what actually happens within a cult: the power dynamics in a strictly hierarchical structure, the psychological pressures endured by members, and the many small moral compromises that lead to becoming a "true believer."

What remains a mystery is why some people are drawn to cults, and others are repelled by them. Is there an emotional vulnerability common to those who join cults? Or, are cults like The Process Church ways of accelerating the evolu-

tion of the consciousness of its members? Are those who do not consider themselves “joiners” more susceptible to cults? Or are those who join more likely to be weak-willed and immature?

And, more generally, are cults emotional and intellectual dead-ends, repositories for those unable to make their way in the world? Or do they allow their members a wide variety of experiences unavailable to them in normal life? And, with specific reference to The Process Church, can cults that turn their back on the world contribute anything of value to society as a whole?

I trust this book will throw some light on these questions, amuse those who have spent time in such a community, and fill in some of the gaps for those who are curious yet sensible enough not to have committed themselves to a cult.