



— Georg Dunger Dec. 3. 1900 - ? —

Schorsch, Who Art Thou?
The Contemplative Practice of Serving as a
Representative In Systemic Constellations

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by
Karin A. Dremel
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Introduction

The roots of Systemic Constellation Work (SCW) reach into many fields. A kind of 'action therapy', the group-based approach was conceived by Bert Hellinger in Germany in the early 1970s. Initially, SCW was used to help individual clients explore their entanglement with their family system. Among other facets, the use of ancestral cause theory allowed for exploring, finding, and restoring ruptured Orders of Love in the client's family system, including reaching back into their ancestral lineages. Hellinger, "the ultimate empiricist", synthesised numerous schools of psychotherapy, named it Familienstellen (Family Constellation, FC), and developed this form over several years with "unwavering loyalty and trust in [the authority of his own] soul."¹ Infusing the radical newness of ancestors and soul into psychological discourse made Familienstellen an almost instant success among German consumers and practitioners. The same chutzpa, in time, also made it a target for scathing critique. Publicised by both, FC since has spread around the globe; a remarkable phenomenon indeed.

Basic tenets of Hellinger's classic FC approach still are upheld, albeit by many expanded to a more generic term Systemic Constellation Work (SCW) and adapted to numerous fields outside of psychotherapy. Most of these contexts focus on the improvement of client issues and collect treatment outcome data. Other aspects of this group-based process are touched on, e.g., its likeness to ancient community rituals.² By far not as visible are group participants while not in a client role. The participants take turns representing parts of a client's system. They perceive and report experiences that arise from these roles during the constellation process. Not always, yet frequently, these

¹ Bert Hellinger, Gunthard Weber, Hunter Beaumont, *Love's Hidden Symmetry. What makes Love Work in Relationship*. (Phoenix, AZ: Zeiss, Tucker, & CO., 1998), 330

² William Sax, Jan Weinhold, & Jochen Schweitzer, "Ritual Healing East and West: A Comparison of Ritual Healing in the Garhwal Himalayas and 'Family Constellation' in Germany," *Journal of Ritual Studies* 24, 1 (2010): 61-77

are painful and arduous. The innate value and transforming thrust the 'in role' participation affords is to my knowledge not much scrutinised, outside anecdotal narratives. Yet representatives and witnesses make systemic inquiry visible and thereby possible in the first place. The take away for 'only' representing is generally framed as helping others and receiving others' help in turn, as much as the reassurance (and reality) that representational experience often mirrors issues in one's family system — often thrown in as an afterthought. That said, Varga von Kibéd and Insa Sparrer developed an extensive grammar for working with SCW in the early 2000s. It deviates in important ways from Hellinger's Familienstellen and became known as Systemische Strukturaufstellungen (SySt®.) The facets and layers of representational perception are described, analyzed, and translated into grammar.³

By extension of theoretical intricacy, this thesis addresses the value of representing as such and frames representational perception as a contemplative relational practice. The outcome of representing lies in broadening personal epistemology and ontology beyond the confines of one's Sitz im Leben (socio-historical context.) In short, the takeaway highlighted by the following text is increased human systems and relational literacy. This honors agency for all roles and explicitly imparts importance to everyone partaking in the promise of SCW. Representative praxis will be defined as working on self (and with Self), as well as partaking in the project of greater social change through mending family and social systems beyond.

Part I — Origins

Briefly introduces SCW with a case study; sketches the evolution of the work and life of its founder, and sets the stage for nesting ancestral cause theory within the

³ I am grateful to their work and its weaving through mine. Web: <https://syst.info/english/contact>. Accessed: Aug 15, 2017.

family systems theory framework. Pointing out important tenets of the work concludes this brief overview.

Part II — War Stories — introduces the author's Sitz im Leben within Germany's legacy of historical trauma, offers insights into her family system and ancestral legacy, and correlates them to the experience of Germany's still living 15 million "Kriegskinder."

Part III — Pincers Manoeuvre

Begins a 'we-logical' discussion and creates a theoretical foundation for we-logical discourse and applied we-logy (its contemplative tool.) Martin Buber's I-Thou encounter will be embedded in systemic I-We processing. Likewise, Emmanuelle Levinas's call for seeing the naked face of the other will be embedded as (temporary) situational responsibility each participant takes on for all others. Both their voices are combined in a pincers manoeuvre and intertwined into a taproot which reaches deep into (and radiates out from) the heart of process-oriented SCW. Representing, then, becomes a path on which horizons of particulars and otherness meet in service of mending the world.

Part IV — Here We Come!

Concluding remarks follow an outlook on the importance, scope, and future of SCW if taken on as a personal practice and will end with guiding our gaze beyond outcome data.

Part I: Origins

Here We Go!

Activism? Therapy? Religion? Ritual? Pilgrimage? Politics? Many wonder these days how to move forward, as we simply must learn to co-exist in more life-supporting ways. There are some prophetic voices. Prominently among them figured Pope Francis when he addressed a TED2017 conference in Montreal and interpreted the conference title. The Future You, he stated, calls for living an inclusive we now; to look at tomorrow

by opening a dialogue today. He emphasised, “the future is made of you (sic!); it is made of encounters because life flows through our relations with one another.”⁴

Words and vision of Pope Francis introduce this thesis because he asks for inclusive, we-oriented dialogue and experience, the kind of which is at the core of Systemic Constellation Work (SCW); a group approach to make visible and tangible systemic imbalances and to mend broken connections. This method was first conceived and developed in early 1970s Germany. Initially named Familienstellen (Family Constellation) this evolving method was synthesised from a variety of sources, many rooted in family systems and ancestral cause theory.

Charisma and the sure-footed skill of psychotherapist and theologian Bert Hellinger, as well as captivating experiences for his audiences at often large workshops, demonstrated the method and rapidly spread SCW throughout Germany. It was spread — by him and his early followers — eventually to places worldwide.⁵ The group process offers participants an embodied experience of fragmented others ('yous') AND a process by which the process of mending broken connections in the client's family system is facilitated. This capacity of SCW has been researched extensively in Germany, South America, Australia, and the US, among other places. So far, that research focused mostly on the efficacy of the method. More recently, several academic papers have discussed the Wirkmechanismus (the how-it-works).⁶ Such data show that SCW promisingly addresses imbalances in an individual, a family lineage, a community, or an organisation. Other facets of the work, however, still await our attention.

⁴ Web: https://www.ted.com/talks/pope_francis_why_the_only_future_worth_building_includes_everyone/transcript. Accessed May: 10, 2017.

⁵ Efficacy of the work for clients can be gleaned from a wide variety of anecdotal data, as well as from client-centered SCW research as seen in articles noted in the bibliography

⁶ See: Jellinek, Elizabeth M. “Epigenetics: The Transgenerational Transmission of Ancestral Trauma, Experiences, and Behaviors As Seen In Systemic Family Constellation.” PhD diss. California Institute of Integral Studies, 2015. Accessed October 29, 2015. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/283268866>

My thesis expands existing work by discussing theoretical and philosophical foundations, as well as the embodied impact of representing and witnessing in SCW groups, and is framed as contemplative practice in service of an Other (others.) This text claims that we can thus expand a representative's human systems literacy, personal epistemology, and ontological horizon.⁷ A more poignant way of saying the same is that service in SCW offers us an opportunity to practice alternatives to killing each other/ another.

Martin Buber's I-Thou encounter will be applied as the conceptual framework for what is invited to happen during the experiences of representing and witnessing, respectively. The possibility of Buber's *Begegnung* (meeting) is the ground in which mending broken connections roots, even on larger scales. Buber defines *Begegnung* as not located "in one of the two [or more] partners nor in both together, but only in their dialogue itself, in this 'between' in which they live together."⁸ I will show how process-oriented SCW deliberately makes space for — and ritually tends to — this very between. As representatives and a circle of witnesses experience a series of estrangements, fragmentation, and entanglements in the 'between' their roles, a facilitator holds the field for co-creation of dynamic relational mending of said ruptures.

A constellation at heart, therefore, is the practice of mending of the world and expands Martin Buber's occasional arising of such experiences into near predictability.

⁷ For this thesis, I focus on human systems literacy and claim that we become innately more literate with any other (animal, plant, water, air, planet, cosmos) through embodied presence to previously neglected connection with fellow humans. One branch of facilitators however turns this on its head and focuses on Nature Constellations. See: Francisca Boring Mason and Kenneth Edwin Sloan, *Returning to Membership in Earth Community: Systemic Constellations With Nature*. (Pagosa Springs, CO: Stream of Experience Production, 2013)

⁸ Buber, M. 1965, *The Knowledge of Man*, transl. Ronald Gregor Smith and Maurice Friedman, New York: Harper & Row. 2nd Edition New York, 1966, in Hycner, R. 1989. *Between Person and Person: Toward a Dialogical Psychotherapy*. Gouldsborough: The Gestalt Journal Press, 3.

Participants usually come to workshops because of their need for help. Most stay, because of de facto interest in other humans and their experience. This, Emmanuel Levinas, calls for in his life's work. Their service temporarily answers Levinas' call by aliving ethics through embodied service for others and their (family) systemic experiences. Representatives dwell in the place of a particular other (dead and living) during a constellation and attentively notice sensations, emotions, and impulses that arise in their role/place. This experience is bound to and occasioned by the very place/position in the constellation (i.e., they differ from their own experience outside of the constellation space.)

The significance of representing and witnessing, then, answers the call of both scholars, enacted as showing up for voluntary, de-facto ethically inspired contemplative and embodied presence for strangers. How a conversation between aspects of Buber's and Levinas' teaching reflects this, will later be demonstrated in a pincers maneuver.⁹

"Now I See You!"

To make these claims more accessible to readers unfamiliar with Systemic Constellation Work (SCW) the following case study describes a Systemic Constellation (SC) process. This vignette demonstrates the four functions participants have during a constellation process – client/issue carrier, representative, witness, and facilitator.

Composite Case Example

A client presented with resistant drug problems suffered bouts of debilitating depression and grieved the recent loss of his lover who had suddenly died. The facilitator inquires about tragic events in his lineage, of which the client claimed to know nothing. He reported pervasive alcohol use, dogged stoicism, and bouts of

⁹ "...in scientific research you start from two beginnings, each of which has it's own kind of authority: the observations cannot be denied, and the fundamentals must be fitted. You must achieve a sort of pincers maneuver." Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind. Collected Essays in Anthropology, Psychiatry, Evolution, and Epistemology.* (Chicago: University Press, 1971), xx-xxi.

depression in his mother and grandmother. This guides the facilitator to take a closer look at the maternal lineage.

The client was asked to choose someone to represent himself, his mother, his grandmother, and his great grandmother, and set them up, one behind the other in historical order. The representatives are asked to stand with quiet attentiveness. One by one, the facilitator asks them to share feelings, sensations, and impulses initiated by their role. The mother and grandmother immediately looked at the floor (e.g., in SCW the place of the dead.) The great-grandmother stands visibly rigid and is barely able to remain standing. Nor can she lie down in the position of the dead. The client's representative walked off to the side, looks on, and reports being cold, lost, and despite the presence of three others in the circle, feels utterly alone.¹⁰ Suddenly the client, seated in the circle of witnesses (himself a witness of the process), recalls a faint memory; something that was never spoken of in his family of origin.

His great-grandmother had gone missing and likely died during the 1906 San Francisco earthquake. The client's family had waited for her to appear, then gradually stopped speaking of her. The systemic silence became so powerful that even her name no longer was remembered. Hearing this, the client's representative attention shifts. He intently looks at his great-grandmother, unable to take his eyes off her. Tears are welling up slowly. Her representative, who had reported feeling terrified and frozen, is gently invited to face her great-grandson. Their eyes lock. He winces, cries, and finally wails uncontrollably, his eyes still locked with hers. Everyone else in the room is now also moved to tears – exactly what the family system had denied itself through stoic erasure of loss, grief, and memory. Tragic loss, nested in the collective terror of an earthquake, remained unprocessed; the family's anguish froze in time. Two generations of women and her great-grandson carried the burden of denied grief and collective loss in silent loneliness and now tears flow, people approach each other slowly, hold hands, hug, and cry some more.

After a while, the shared grief settles and the facilitator gathers the whole group into a ritual to create closure for the unfinished 'family business'. They are invited to create a temporary shrine in honor of their ancestor. The well-appointed room offers images, flowers, and figurines. With the help of all (client still watching) artifacts are gathered, set on a quickly added side table, and lovingly arranged, while here and there laughter bubbles up.

¹⁰ Clients sign up for a group to explore an issue within a systemic framework. They also choose a representative for themselves, then sit in the circle and watch the unfolding process. This allows information to surface which lies outside the client's own narrative.

Great-Grandma is seated behind the table and watches the activity with rapped attention. Then the facilitator invites all back in a half-circle to face their seated elder. He offers simple sentences to whoever feels moved to speak: "Granny, I am your great-grandson, (name)." "I now see you, Granny." "You have a place in my heart." "I am so grateful we found you." "Please bless your daughter and my mother, who grieved for you too." "Please, bless me (name), as I go forward from here." Slowly ease settles in.

After releasing the client representative from his role, the facilitator asks the client to himself stand in his place in the system. He steps into the new systemic configuration and is given time to settle in. Finally, the facilitator offers the closing sentence, frequently an opportunity to experience consent to the tragic loss of a loved one while a community bears witness: "You died. I live my life for a while longer, and when my time comes, I too will die. Until then, you have a place in my heart."

Standing next to his 'granny', the client no longer needs to carry forgotten memory and un-lived grief for his family system. He can know his ancestress and claim her as an ally. Which he does. "For the family album", he only half-joking tells the group as he excitedly takes pictures of the colourful shrine.¹¹

Common Origin

Longing for better human relations needs not only proclamation but also doing. We urgently need to update to life-giving (even life-saving) inter-human comportment. Some already manifest this longing for better relations through their actions; Dan Booth Cohen was one of them. An erstwhile international peacemaker, Booth Cohen recalls that his peace-making relied "largely on education, dialogue, spiritual development, emotional literacy, and cognitive awareness."¹² While he praises these tools as necessary and powerful, he also experienced how "psychological, religious, and spiritual tools do not reach and resolve the source of [conflictual] impulses."¹³ In 2000, the missing tool found him. He soon became a facilitator

¹¹ This vignette of a constellation is a composite which closely mirrors an actual constellation.

¹² Dan Booth Cohen, *I Carry Your Heart in my Heart: Family Constellations in Prison*. (Heidelberg: Carl-Auer-Systeme Verlag, 2009), 10

¹³ *ibid*, 10

of Systemic Constellation Work and conducted the “first academic research [in the US] that examined its philosophical stances and roots as an integration of existential phenomenology, family systems theory, and elements of indigenous spiritual mysticism.”¹⁴

Sally McFague, feminist theologian and ecologist, also calls for a tool. Her tool is justice-inspired praxis. She thinks systemically when she calls on common origin as a starting point to help us understand surefooted cosmic poets — like Barbara Taylor Brown’s metaphor of the *luminous web*.¹⁵ Common origin places human beginnings next to non-human life and equal to all of creation. McFague, then, takes Taylor Brown’s poesy to its ethical conclusion when she spells out that

The common creation story is more than a scientific affair; it is, implicitly, deeply moral, for it raises the question of the place of human beings in nature, and calls for a kind of praxis in which we see ourselves in proportion, in harmony, and in a fitting manner related to all others that live and all the systems that support life.¹⁶

Mc Fague, Buber, Levinas, and Pope Francis, each in their way urge us to grow into seeing the other in a way that makes us beholden. Volunteering to represent, then, becomes one such practice to grow into our caring capacity and agency through the practice of intentional, purposeful inter-dependence, as we negotiate the right place in a given family (again: not our own) or other systems. Done through embodied presence, lived experience, and participation in a Knowing Field.¹⁷

Listening to this Knowing Field has shown to connect representatives and offer access to all that supports life. We literally sense, feel, and eventually know ourselves

¹⁴ *ibid*, 90

¹⁵ Barbara Taylor Brown, *The Luminous Web. Essays in Science and Religion*. (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publisher, Inc., 2000)

¹⁶ Sallie McFague, *The Body of God. An Ecological Theology*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 111.

¹⁷ Dr. Albrecht Mahr (Germany) introduced the term Knowing Field to SCW in the early 2000s.

better “in proportion, in harmony, and in a fitting manner related to others.”¹⁸ The practice is instrumental in forming *beholdeness* to others through a temporary experience of taking on particular, adequate responsibilities connected to the place we find ourselves in. We serve particular others in their quest for mending while tangibly expanding our own ontological and epistemological horizons in the process.

Here, I introduce the term thou-o-logy to signify the process of cis-cendental contemplative presence and interaction with others. ‘Becoming’ a particular other and temporarily dwelling in another’s system will be termed applied thou-o-logy. Applied thou-o-logy in turn roots in a we-logical understanding of unrelenting albeit exceedingly complex existential and historical interdependence between all life forms. We-logy emphasises the need to “keep as wide open the arena for testing our proposals as we can and to be open to multiple voices, including the voices of bodies and material reality.”¹⁹

When asking, how we can represent the other meaningfully and ‘efficacious’ undoubtedly mystery comes into view. The unknowable of ‘how-this-works’ and the ethics involved, while not the focus of this thesis, will later be briefly explored.

The Scars We Inherit

Ancestral trauma theory receives more attention in disciplines concerned with individual and collective suffering. SCW makes ancestral trauma tangible: a representative feels the ‘frozen’ trauma lodged in the lineages in/through body sensation. Violence and other traumatic experiences shattered connections. The antidote to traumatic rupture is the mending of connection; often a daunting pursuit.

¹⁸ Nature Constellations, which include trees, rivers, landscapes, and animals blossom from tangibly embodied narratives.

¹⁹ Sheila Greeve Davaney, *Pracmatic Historicism. A Theology for the Twenty-First Century*. (New York: State University of New York Press, 2000), 183

Participants and facilitators alike are faced with and sometimes overwhelmed by seemingly monolithic suffering. A closer look at the systemic Gestalt of suffering allows us to see three intricately interlaced parts; a powerfully educational simplification nonetheless.

The most obvious layer is the effect of biographical trauma: traumatic development and events disrupt an individual's life, day-to-day functioning, and overall resilience to life's challenges. Diagnosed as PTSD and now increasingly also seen as developmental (complex) trauma the aftermath of broken connection to self, others, and the world may require individual therapy and care.²⁰

The generational component beneath the individual's vulnerability emerges upon closer examination. SCW addresses this second layer by assuming generational/ancestral causes entangled with present-day conflicts and struggles. African American scholar and neuropsychologist, Dr. Joy De Gruy, researches intractable conflicts and health conditions in her African American community and finds persistent patterns of ancestral injury. She notes "While African Americans managed to emerge from chattel slavery and the oppressive decades that followed with great strength and resiliency, they did not emerge unscathed. Slavery produced centuries of physical, psychological, and spiritual injury."²¹ Lauded Hebrew poet, Yehuda Amichai calls this "the howl of the orphans ... passed from one generation to the next, as in a relay race: the baton never falls."²² Another, psychologist and Holocaust researcher at Hebrew University Rachel

²⁰ American Psychiatric Association. Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th ed. (Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Publishing, 2013)

²¹ Web: www.joydegruy.com. Accessed: May 17, 2017

²² Yehuda Amichai was born 1924 in Würzburg, Germany. He lived and died in 2000 in Jerusalem, Israel, after fleeing Germany in the 1930s.

Yehuda, collected decades of data, which back up that descendants of Shoa survivors are now in the fourth generation still present with lowered resilience to life's stresses.²³

A third layer, woven into these, albeit less discernibly, is the cultural-historical context in which any lineage narrative unfolds over time. Sociologist, Michelle Sotero, professor at Las Vegas University, explains how the relatively new field of "historical trauma theory provides a macro-level, temporal framework for examining how the 'life course' of a population exposed to trauma at a particular point in time compares with that of unexposed populations."²⁴ This, of course, begs the question about the existence of an unexposed population on this planet. Larry Graham suggests, maybe not. The late professor emeritus at Iliff School of Theology pondered the pervasiveness of war within human existence:

The human race is constructed by war in ways that we don't even begin to understand.... Our beings, [our families], our nations, our cultures, our religion—they are constructed, infused by, built, and rebuilt by war.... The fact that we are not aware of that doesn't mean it's not true. What we have not found is a way in our culture to productively engage the multilayered ways we have experienced war—it's impacted us, we've endured it, we've recovered from it, we are passing on our legacies from it and all of that is part of who we are.²⁵

Larry Graham's lament is reflected in the quickening of brinkmanship in many parts of the world that has and continues to result in huge numbers of displaced and genocide-threatened people. The enormity of grief is overwhelming and the ongoing shattering of connections across the globe is deafeningly loud.

²³ For some of Rachel Yehuda's research see: Yehuda R, Teicher MH, Seckl JR, Grossman RA, Morris A, Bierer LM. Parental PTSD as a vulnerability factor for low cortisol trait in offspring of holocaust survivors. *Arch Gen Psychiatry* 2007 Sep; 64(9): 1040-1048. Yehuda R, Bierer LM. Transgenerational transmission of cortisol and PTSD risk. *Prog Brain Res* 2008; 167: 121-135.

²⁴ Sotero, M. 2016. "A Conceptual Model of Historical Trauma: Implications for Public Health Practice and Research." *Journal of Health Disparities Research and Practice*. 1, 93-108 School of Public Health, University of Nevada, Las Vegas. [http://www.ressources-actuarielles.net/EXT/ISFA/1226.nsf/0/bbd469e12b2d9eb2c12576000032b289/\\$FILE/Sotero_2006.pdf](http://www.ressources-actuarielles.net/EXT/ISFA/1226.nsf/0/bbd469e12b2d9eb2c12576000032b289/$FILE/Sotero_2006.pdf), Accessed November 4, 2016.

²⁵ Larry Graham, 2014 "War, Theology and Religious Practice." Lecture: Iliff School of Theology, Denver, CO. In Carrie Doehring, *The Practice of Pastoral Care* (Louisville, KY: Westminster Press, 2015), 31-32.

From a systemic perspective, however, something is missing in Graham's sweeping lament: It is important to name that wars are *initiated*. Perpetrators of violence create divisiveness, separation, alienation, destruction, and loss; all antithetical to connection, inclusion, thriving, and balance. Perpetrating, therefore, becomes an important distinction from being at impact, albeit, in the end, perpetrators and victims both certainly suffer in every war. To open pathways for balancing every systemic constellation process — undeniably and explicitly — includes perpetrators and victims to explore the not-so-luminous underbelly of the human web. A representative for war often will be added to open a three-way relational exchange between victim/perpetrator/war; sometimes a path for mending and healing.

While we 'are not obligated to complete the work we are also not free to abandon it.'²⁶ Alas, even after more than 70 years of effort the legacy of horrendous trauma inflicted by Nazi Germany is a baton still handed to every next generation. What gruelling destruction may the current rising tide of violence leave in its wake? In the face of this, not giving up becomes soul work. Through engaging in SCW we offer a person, a family, a community, even a nation the voice and our sentient body to express itself. This will be discussed in more detail later on.

A Systemic Perspective

Booth Cohen marvels how "[a] constellation group defies conventional description. It is "neither group therapy, nor a variant of an encounter group, 12-Step program, peer counselling, support group, or religious or spiritual gathering."²⁷

²⁶ Web: https://www.reddit.com/r/Judaism/comments/2d1w2k/quote_from_the_talmud_do_you_know_where/?st=j3ci4i5x&sh=dea6690d. Accessed: May 30, 2017.

²⁷ Dan Booth Cohen, *I Carry Your Heart in my Heart: Family Constellations in Prison*. (Heidelberg: Carl-Auer-Systeme Verlag, 2009), ..

While I generally agree with Booth Cohen's assessment, I suggest that SCW does have a spiritual, albeit a non-religious, dimension. After all, the founder of Familienstellen is a trained theologian and philosopher and was a catholic priest for many years. While his facilitation has a phenomenological emphasis, his poetic and extensive prose writings are decidedly in conversation with wisdom traditions and characterised his work as 'conversations' with the family and greater soul. Here it should also be mentioned that his self-assured and unapologetically confrontational facilitation was critically investigated in 2004 by German authorities as a potential 'cult'. This accusation was based on the stunning number of followers he attracted in a short time.²⁸ Eventually, the Family Systems Therapy and Family Constellation 'families' in Germany clashed (a kind of highly publicised systems therapy culture war), and since then a variety of forms of Systemic Constellation Work outside Bert Hellinger's sphere developed — and counting.

Some (myself included) developed less directive, process-oriented styles of facilitation. Others translated systemic principles into language applicable to organizations and corporations. The claim here remains that regardless of contextual adaptation, participation in constellations provides a relational contemplative practice for all and offers spiritual experiences for many.²⁹ Interestingly, 'soul' now comes full circle (i.e., becomes marketable): A recent edition of essays, written by German coaches and business advisors to corporate clients, sports Bernd Schmid's article "Soul, Guilt, and Professional Action in Organisations."³⁰

²⁸ Web: https://afa.home.xs4all.nl/alert/engels/hellinger_e.html. Accessed : November 12, 2016.

²⁹ Ivo Jirásek and Miroslava Jirásek, "Systemic Constellation as a Trans-Rational Image of the Unconscious: Non-Religious Spirituality, or Implicit Religion?" (Sheffield: Equinox Publishing Ltd. 2015)

³⁰ Markus Hänsel, *Die Spirituelle Dimension in Coaching und Beratung*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht GMBH & Co. KG, 2012), 81-96

Hellinger's Dasein³¹

Bert Hellinger (*1925-2019) grew up in a Catholic household where he resisted Nazi pressure, even as Hitler Youth organisers were "notorious for encouraging children to betray their parents."³² At age 17 Hellinger was tried as *Volksfeind* (enemy of the people) for this refusal to conform. Ironically, being drafted into the Wehrmacht before his conviction may have saved his life, it certainly saved him from imprisonment. He returned at the end of the war, 20 years old, experienced in "combat, capture, defeat, and release from a prisoner of war camp."³³ Soon after he entered monastic life — his intention since a very young age — and the study of theology and philosophy. He was ordained as a catholic priest and eventually sent to South Africa where he lived for sixteen years; engaged in educational ministry. He learned to speak Zulu, studied Zulu culture, and was (not surprisingly) impressed by never hearing "anyone speak disrespectfully about their parents."³⁴ Zulu's philosophy also challenged one of his teacher's dictum (Heidegger) who categorically claimed "To be human is to be thrown into a world with no clear logical, ontological, or moral structure."³⁵ Quite the opposite! "These were not lost individuals thrown into being but temporary custodians of life knit into a tightly woven fabric of generations past and yet to be."³⁶ After 16 years in South Africa, he left the order amicably and returned to Germany.

³¹ Dasein is one of Heidegger's core concepts. Used here, as a nod to Hellinger's philosophical roots in Heidegger and Husserl. Dasein (by me loosely/naïvely translated as 'being relationally present' was the precondition for phenomena to arise, Hellinger's taproots for facilitation. Not so much method, as often artful improvisational dance.

³² Dan Booth Cohen (2009), 111

³³ Bert Hellinger, *Loves Own Truth, Bonding and Balancing in Close Relationships*. (Phoenix, AZ: Zeiss, Tucker, & CO., 2001), 443

³⁴Dan Booth Cohen (2009), 111

³⁵ *ibid.*, 111

³⁶ *ibid.* 111

He arrived in the late 1960s and enrolled in Zurich to become a Jungian analyst. Discontent with their formal framework, he expanded his query into family systems therapy, traveled widely, and immersed himself in many of the emerging humanistic psychology approaches. Hellinger eventually combined his career as an educator, his experience of Zulu philosophy, his theology and philosophy background, and studies with numerous humanistic psychology celebrities in the US and Germany, into his approach to human pain: Familienstellen.

All around individuals and families were busy partaking in the *Wirtschaftswunder* (economic miracle.) They had tucked away pain, despair, and guilt — out of sight, out of mind. Families harboured secrets and silenced stories of loss and violence (received and committed), minimised displacement (caused and experienced), many disconnected from a Third Reich that had gone up in flames by burying their belonging to that time. As said, Hellinger was impressed by the respect Zulu People felt for their ancestors. He quickly and unapologetically included the German ancestors — the dead, their deeds, and their fate — into his version of action therapy. This (in the 70s!) stood in stark contrast to then contemporary Family Systems modalities that included mostly, if not exclusively, living members of a family. More importantly, for post-WWII German clients, he included *all the dead* — victims, perpetrators, life-giving, life-destroying — all were given a place. It may not come as a surprise that practically every German constellation revealed lost members, right out perpetrators, and those who had suffered under the Nazi war machinery (namely, children and grandchildren of war.) Nearly all perpetrators, while represented in constellations, felt shame and/or showed impenetrable numbness. Again and again, grandparent-, father-, mother-, sibling-

shaped holes showed up in family systems.³⁷ Moreover, parents and grandparents who had survived were often disowned by their offspring — the *Kriegskinder* (war's children) and *Kriegsenkel* (war's grandchildren); born between 1930 and 1950 and their children in turn. Involvement in horrendous Nazi terror was overwhelmingly unforgivable — a painful loss for both sides nevertheless.³⁸

Kriegskinder, the parents of Hellinger's early clients, all too often had survived experiences and memories by literally choking emotions, authentic connection, and relational meaning with all too tightly pulled up bootstraps. Over a couple of decades, Hellinger's ancestral cause method swept through Germany and offered a forum to explore and possibly solve life's generationally entangled problems. He swiftly gained nationwide prominence, and yes, as mentioned above, also notoriety.

Belonging and Loyalty

Just as radical as engaging with 'the dead', was Hellinger's understanding of family 'origin' which had (and has) the medically informed therapy establishment up in arms. The individual is seen as nested within and belonging to a family soul. "[It] is not we who possess a soul, but rather a soul ... possesses us; and ... the soul is not there to serve us, but rather we are in the service of the soul."³⁹ Booth Cohen comments:

The radical, if not revolutionary, context of the soul in Family Constellation is this:
Foremost our Creators are our biological mother and father. In the soul, the object of

³⁷ I owe the concept of human shaped holes to Father Gregory Boyle who speaks of the father shaped holes in his homies.

Gregory Boyle, *Tattoos on the Heart: The Power of Boundless Compassion*. (New York, NY: Free Press, 2011), 91

³⁸ The 68er generation is likely the most visible expression in German history and culture of this pattern.

³⁹ Bert Hellinger. *Peace Begins in the Soul. Family Constellations in the Service of Reconciliation*. Translation Colin Beaumont. (Heidelberg: Carl-Auer-Systeme Verlag. 2003), 4

greatest love and yearning are the parents. ... In a Constellation circle, the emphasis on one's parents as the source of life aims to re-integrate the soul in the body and mind.⁴⁰

Bert Hellinger's notion of parents as 'origin' compares favourably with the extensive interdisciplinary research of psychologist Darcia Navaez who, among others, maps the development of human morality.⁴¹ Her data, taken from attachment studies and developmental neurology research, suggests "mammalian caregivers and offspring need to bond — especially the mother and the neonate — so that the offspring are well cared for with warmth, food, safety, and acceptance." She goes on to say "75% of the brain (in terms of size) develops after birth, co-constructed by caregivers ... through at least the first five years of life."⁴² Giving birth, and co-constructing an infant's becoming makes parents indeed the origin of sensory and emotional existence and gives credence to Hellinger's metaphorical origin of fierce, no-matter-what belonging and loyalty to parents. Moreover, Hellinger, like Navaez, consistently observed an interrupted reaching-out movement by and to the mother (*unterbrochene Hinbewegung*.)

Navaez lists a mother's death, postpartum depression, infant hospitalisation, and other means of infant-mother separation, as well as relationships haunted by loss and unresolved grief, to name just a few, as disrupting the bond and resulting in "poor social experience during sensitive periods [for the infant which] may result in the development of competitive, soloist universes."⁴³ A sentence, as simple as, "I am sorry, I was not there for you" or "Now I can see you", if spoken genuinely by a representative,

⁴⁰ *ibid*, 136

⁴¹ Darcia Navaez, *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality: Evolution, Culture, and Wisdom*. (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 2014) Also see: <https://evolvednest.org/>

⁴² *ibid.*, 27

⁴³ *ibid.*, 10

can thaw long-frozen grief and open the system to more fluid giving and receiving.⁴⁴ 'Souls breathing again' and 'love flowing again' become tangibly experienced metaphors. Distressing loyalty with the family system therefore becomes soul work, to be discussed later in more detail.

Part II: War Stories

Sitz im Leben

Just as with theology, we-logy includes biography — meaning context. *One's Sitz im Leben*, matters.⁴⁵ The following is a brief overview of my origin to familiarise the reader with the roots of my passion for systemic trauma and, by extension, for systemic constellations.

I was born eleven years after the gates of Auschwitz, Buchenwald, Treblinka, Dachau, and many, many lesser-known concentration camps opened in Heidelberg, Germany. I identify as cis-gendered, female, pink-skinned, silver-haired and Deutsche Bürgerin (German Citizen.)⁴⁶ I dwell in the US where I am categorised as a legal (alien) resident, married to a (self-proclaimed) white US-American of Scottish descent (five generations removed from Scotland.) Before 2001 I breathed, loved, and worked near and in Heidelberg, Germany. My interests made me a crafts journeywoman, a humanist, and a healing-arts professional. In hindsight, I engaged in contemplation and the

⁴⁴ Personal conversations with Dr. Naomi Rusk (Neuropsychologist and dementia specialist) and Dr. Rohini Kanniganti (Hospice Medical Director), both of Boulder, CO, backed up how much we long to be seen by our forbears: Similar sentences spoken by dying parents in conversation with their caretaking adult children tend to have a profoundly reconciliatory impact, even after years of previously troubled relations.

⁴⁵ In Biblical criticism: the circumstances or social context in which a text, teaching, tradition, etc., was created or preserved; the doctrine of studying this as a critical method. The term was originally used in German by H. Gunkel (1862–1932) and is associated with form criticism. Source: https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/sitz_im_leben Accessed 26.10.2021

⁴⁶ Since I have come to understand whiteness as a complex and pervasive legal construct of exclusion and supremacy and not a phenotype, I do not identify as 'white'. See: Ian Haney López, "The social Construction of Race" in Delgado and Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory. The Cutting Edge*, 3ed (Temple University Press, 2013), 239

practice of we-logy all along, and most currently added post graduate education at a United Methodist theological institution.

Some 45 years ago, one unforgettable day, I dimly grasped that I opened a door to which no one handed me the key. I happened upon a book in the *Städtische Bücherei Heidelberg* (public library). Pulling it from the shelf, it opened to a grainy black and white photograph of pale, emaciated bodies, hanging from butcher hooks in front of a brick wall. I got violently sick and — horror-struck — fled from the building. I was fourteen. There were (of course) WWII and Holocaust curricula at school; however, experiencing this moment was so horrific that I never discussed it anywhere. To this day, the image has not paled from my retina, nor has nausea it brought on dislodged from my soul.

Being German, even *eine Nachgeborene* (a later-born), has ever since meant having an intimate relationship with millions of slaughtered Jewish and non-Jewish victims of Germany's Nazi past, as well as to the perpetrators who slaughtered them. This moment brutally hit home that 'we' abandoned neighbours to peril, persecuted men, women, and children, cruelly tortured and coldly butchered them. These adults — my childhood 'we' — were the very people I loved as grandparents, trusted as neighbours, sat in church pews with. Today, all the adults of that era are dead. Their children (my parents), born between 1930 and 1945, the *Kriegskinder* (children of war) are dying. Then, they still were all around me, my family, my teachers, my elders.

A Practical Necessity?

Many German families managed the dual trauma of perpetrating and suffering through silence and numbing; some began a new life elsewhere. Like the parents of US-born Burghart Bilger, staff writer at the *New Yorker*, who immigrated to the US in the early 1960s. In 2016 Bilger returned to Germany to research his grandfather's

involvement in World War II and published an article in the 2016 September issue of the *New Yorker*.⁴⁷ He encountered several hundred Germans of his parent's generation at a national congress of *Kriegskinder* (war's children) in Köln and notes:

They came to Cologne from every corner of the country ... because they couldn't sleep at night and their marriages had foundered. Because they'd lived in the same town all their lives yet never felt at home. Because they were undone by loud noises and tight spaces, uneasy with intimacy and desperate with solitude. Because they were seventy years old and still waiting for their lives to begin.

While traveling down memory lane, Bilger also encountered German *Kriegsenkel* (war's grandchildren) of roughly his generation (and mine). They suffered under estrangement, manifesting similar symptoms as their parents. While some remained (and remain) in denial, this generation was able to engage suffering en masse and often chose to see its connection to their troubling collective past.⁴⁸

Bilger had heard of *Familienstellen* and signed up for a group in Berlin. He witnessed, as he puts it, how Germans over the last three decades made "peace with their dead." He later reflects on the experience of sitting in a circle with some fifteen participants:

What happened next is hard to categorise. It was part theatre, part therapy, part séance—a measure of just how far Germans will go to come to terms with their past ... If sessions

⁴⁷ Burghard Bilger, "Where Germans Make Peace with Their Dead. Through a practice that is part therapy and part séance, children of war come to terms with their history." *New Yorker*. 2016. Web: <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/09/12/familienaufstellung-germanys-group-therapy>. Accessed: October, 9. 2017

⁴⁸ Anyone, who has ever heard of the ACE study (1995-97) knows how highly adverse early childhood experiences (event cum developmental trauma) correlate to affected mental, physical, emotional and relational health throughout the life span. Findings reflect grave effects, even earlier deaths. See: DOI: [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0749-3797\(98\)00017-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0749-3797(98)00017-8). While the initial ACE questionnaires collected data about domestic abuse, neglect and violence, it is not a big stretch to consider a child's experience in and after a war as gravely 'adverse'. It is also easy to imagine that the amount of such experiences may in many cases be staggering — bombing, rapes, death of caretakers, arduous marches, displacement, hunger, and more — resound in *Kriegskinder Literature* which began to emerge in Germany in the early 2000s.

like [this] have found such a passionate following, it may be because [the] country's secrets run so dark and deep. Communing with your ancestors is more than a matter of mystical belief in Germany ... It's a practical necessity. How else can a people so bent on silence for so long ever learn their true history?⁴⁹

Bilger did not quite understand the necessity for those with traumatic histories to engage the past in community. Community, i.e., connection, is, as it were, much more important than finding or knowing (historical) truth. Constellations are about groups that shed light on issues and offer processing of pain, grief, disgust, hatred, joy — the gamut of human emotion and experience — in connection. The intimate heterotopia of a constellation space draws together strangers to tend the hearths and hearts of individuals and hold shared suffering.

Eminent scholar Alaida Assmann, professor of Cultural Studies in Konstanz, co-founded a new discipline of memory scholarship in conjunction with her bible scholar husband, Jan Assmann. They, along with others, created a vivid public discourse for decades and jointly received the prestigious 2018 *Friedenspreis des Deutschen Buchhandels*, an international peace prize awarded by the *Börsenverein des Deutschen Buchhandels*.⁵⁰ Numerous books to Alayda Assman's name document *Deutsche Erinnerungsgeschichte nach dem 2. Weltkrieg* (History of Remembering in Post World War II Germany.) We can follow her book (and articles) to see the unfolding and forming of the academe under Assman's (and others') tutelage.⁵¹ In contrast, the personal, the privately held, the unrecognized trauma of *Kriegskinder* (*1930 – 1945) and their voices were powerfully silent for a long time. Alas, their unnamed suffering and unresolved trauma, informed the generation of *Kriegsenkel* (* after 1945) and further.

⁴⁹ *ibid.*

⁵⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Friedenspreis_des_Deutschen_Buchhandels. Accessed: Oct. 1, 2020

⁵¹ Alaida Assmann, *Geschichtsvergessenheit - Geschichtsversessenheit: Vom Umgang Mit Deutschen Vergangenheiten Nach 1945*. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2013) and Alaida Assmann, *Das neue Unbehagen an der Erinnerungskultur: Eine Intervention* (München: C.H.Beck Verlag, 2013)

Silence

SCW accesses ancestral fates, ancestral trauma, ancestral coping, and unresolved ancestral entanglement in the lives of descendants. One such strand of fates are the 'war stories' in my maternal lineage: My great-grandmother, Anna (*1879; †1960), was 35 years old when my great-grandfather was drafted into WWI. She became a single mom of three small kids for the next four years; fighting hunger, terror, and all the trappings of a brutally destructive war. My great-grandfather returned, albeit, he died young (in his early 50s.) Six more years of WWII amounted to a total of ten war years in her life. My grandmother Marie, (*1903; †1998) was eleven and 36 years old respectively when the same two wars became her decade of war-life. Her first child, Georg Junior, died in 1931 at age two from a fever. That same year, my mother Elisabeth was born. Her childhood was steeped in ever-present Nazi propaganda from conception until age fourteen. She was 8 years old at the outbreak of WWII and, like her mother before, she had an absentee soldier father. Grandfather Georg Dunger (Schorsch in my Kurpfälzisch vernacular) was born in 1900 and drafted before he was 18 years of age to fight in WWI, then drafted again at age 39. My grandmother, like her mother before, became a single mom the same day.

Grandfather Georg had left his family, backbreaking quarry work, patches of subsistence farmland, a pig, two goats, a small flock of chicken, and the right to make firewood in the forest commons. During six years of his war absence, he was a voice, read from short letters and postcards. He morphed into a flat presence on small (now) yellowed photographs: a slight infantryman, solemn eyes behind thick wire-rimmed glasses. He often stands among horses. He often holds a little dog. One photo shows him butchering a cow in the field near a shed, other soldiers and maybe locals, standing

in a circle nearby. He always, gently and earnestly, gazes into the camera. Meanwhile, my grandmother — among other seasonal chores — farmed, raised and butchered animals, felled trees and chopped wood for the winter. She was skilled in all of it, having grown up on a tiny middle European-style subsistence farm herself. As the war years stretched, life for those at home became harder. Finally, the country was freed from its open participation in tyranny by allied forces. The first wave of men came home. They were cramped in trains, had walked days or weeks, stumbled into houses, no longer their homes. Later those from POW camps arrived. Eventually, the numbers of home comers dwindled — along with my grandmother's and mother's hope. They never returned to 'normal': Georg Dunger, husband and father, remained missing in action. His last letter arrived in January 1945.⁵² Their loss froze into a formulaic, close to silent narrative: He spoke French. He made my mother's earaches go away with chopped parsley packs. Mom waited. And over and over, to this day, she repeats had he only come back, her life would be better. He was officially decreed dead in 1965; 20 years after the end of the war.

A Kind of Homecoming

The narrative (as in many German families) secured silence and squelched questions hidden in plain sight.⁵³ My mother never questioned (nor, lamented) *what* her father may have done, nor how he may have been killed or died. I mostly learned about 'Schorsch' by being a representative in SCW. I learned by bodily experience and

⁵² My grandfather's last letter apparently gave some indication that he was somewhere at the Eastern front. Two dates of a 'last letter' exist simultaneously in the narrative of my mother. Arrival of the letter some time in 1942 from Stalingrad is most likely. Arrival 1945 is most dramatic.

⁵³ Until about 15 years ago Germany's pain and grief was 'lump summed' into towering guilt (and denial). At large the Germans, perpetrators of Nazi atrocities, were not granted suffering and pain; not by themselves nor by others. There was under-the-breath rumbling of 'can-we-just-forget-this-and-move-on.' In many places, however, silence reigned over owning what was horrendously obvious.

conscious witness how other family systems in Germany (and later in the US) wrestled with the past ... or did not. Standing in the role of the SS officer, the child of a concentration camp survivor, the victim of genocide, the mother grieving her child's death in a bombing raid (or, more recently, to violence and drugs), the raped grandmother who eventually killed herself, the 'lifer' without the possibility of parole — these were but a few ways to learn. The experience in these roles and the experience of solutions these respective constellation processes reached were (and are) now embodied knowing. This expanded my emotional courage as well as my capacity to bear the painfully disturbing possibilities, hidden within my grandfather's (and other elders') unknowable story. Representing helped me, at the very least, to add previously un-included questions into my life story. SCW radically includes otherwise un-includable questions and members into the system – tentatively, and without claim to 'true' answers.

My questions? Did Grandfather Georg's body explode in the trenches? Was he part of a trek of soldiers marched into captivity across the vast expanse of Russia? If so, did he freeze at the roadside under a blanket of ice and snow? Did he starve or otherwise die in a POW camp? These questions remain muted by the silent web of this man's unknowable history. More arresting, however, is how my mother's silence kept me (and the family at large) from wondering (let alone asking) who this man was. Who was he behind those wire-rimmed eyes, the gentle face? What was his experience? What did he do? Was he just one more 'ordinary Wehrmacht Soldier'? For sure, research offers options to posterity what an 'ordinary' Wehrmacht soldier might have done. Historian Daniel Goldhagen documents many incidents in his painstakingly detailed book *Hitler's Willing Executioners*.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Daniel Jonah Goldberg. *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust*. New York, NY: Vintage Books Random House, Inc., 1997.

An exhibition, initiated by the Hamburger Institute für *Sozialforschung* in 1995, traveled until 1999 to many German cities. The history of this exhibition demonstrates both, German commitment to *Geschichtsbewusstsein* (history consciousness) and the struggle with realities on the ground. 1400 private, original photos documented war atrocities that the *Wehrmacht* had committed. A national controversy around sullyng the nest versus not being graphic enough (and everything in-between) became a veritable '*Bildersturm*'. It even included a bomb exploding outside one of the exhibition locals. Those in favour felt truth was finally shown. Critiques, including many in their 70s and older who had fought in WWII, were outraged by being accused of such claims; yet others outright denied any guilt on their part. Accusations of biased language (often for political gain from all camps) were hurled and eventually, the issue became pressing enough to be discussed in the *German Bundestag* (German Parliament). The touchy subject (to say the least) was fanned by twenty wrongly attributed photos (of 1400), showing soldiers in Russian and Finnish uniforms. The organising institute closed the exhibition to re-assess. It opened again in 2004, much less suggestive and thoroughly vetted by a panel of historians.⁵⁵

Another source of learning about the extend of atrocities (collected during the last twenty-plus years) is the voice and books of Father Patrick Desbois, a French Catholic priest. His life is dedicated to identifying and commemorating the sites of Jewish and

⁵⁵ In a press release Philipp Reemtsma is quoted to have said: "We greatly regret that we did not respond to a number of critics, whose objections have been shown to be correct, with due earnestness and that we did not decide to impose a moratorium at an earlier date. Nonetheless, we reiterate that the key statement of the exhibition – that the *Wehrmacht* led a war of aggression and annihilation – is correct and is upheld." While I was able to find a link for this quote, it opens to an archive which no longer offers the connection to this press release. "Crimes of the German *Wehrmacht*: Dimensions of a War of Annihilation 1941-1944: Press releases, January to November 2000" (PDF). See: [91](#) Accessed: September 2020.

Roma mass executions during World War II across Eastern Europe and into Russia.⁵⁶ Debois is devoted to finding and interviewing (then children) survivors (and witnesses) of mass murder as the German troops swept across Eastern Europe. He founded Yahad – In Unum, a global humanitarian organization in 2004.

All this graphic evidence solicits graphic questions: Did Grandfather Georg round up Jews in a Polish village? Did he herd women and children into woods? Did he watch them dig their own grave? Did he raise a rifle to shoot row after row after row of unarmed victims? Did he throw a torch into gasoline-soaked straw bails? Did he watch crazed humans trying to claw their way out of a burning locked barn?⁵⁷ In my maternal lineage, such horrendous possibilities remained shrouded in silence, even oblivion, and were buried by frozen grief. My shroud tore open when I finally developed the courage to look at the *man* and consented that being a soldier in that war, in that army, in that occupation, quite possibly offers gruesome answers to my questions. Alas, no historical information (or intimation) ever was found; Großvadder Schorsch (again, Grandfather Georg, in my family's Kurpfalz vernacular) remains a faded ghost.

It was, as stated before, by perceiving feelings and sensations of those I represented — on both sides of numerous perpetrator/perpetrated equations — that I grew able to hold these questions and live with purpose and dignity in their unanswered presence. In and through embodied pain of others, my own somatic and emotional resilience expanded and gradually extended beyond loyalty to my family system's muted voice. Standing in an other's shoes and taking response-ability, as

⁵⁶ Desbois, Father Patrick, 2008. *The Holocaust by Bullets: A Priest's Journey to Uncover the Truth Behind the Murder of 1.5 Million Jews*. New York: St. Martin's Griffin.

Father Desbois spoke to a packed auditorium in the Jewish Community Center in Boulder, CO in the fall of 2018. Interviews with men and women, who then were children, was deeply troubling for me to witness. Most had survived the raids of their village and reported how they saw, dug trenches, or were pressed in other ways, to participate in the logistics of man murdering their Jewish and Roma neighbors. Some watched from hiding places.

<https://www.yahadinunum.org/patrick-desbois/> Web Access: October 2020

⁵⁷ Goldberg, Daniel Jonah, 1997, p.154.

Levinas asks us to do, awarded me the study of pain, rage, coldness, longing, numbness, protectiveness, hatred, love, care, and connection — depending on the systemic process and the respective role I embodied. Through seeing and experiencing the grief, disdain, rejection, longing, shame, and love others had felt for their loved ones —perpetrators, guilty of known horrors — I learned to carry my Grandpa Georg's heart, possibly the heart of a war criminal, in my heart, right next to inescapable sorrow; after all, a kind of homecoming.

Pincers Manoeuvre

For the Love of Life

Now I approach the pincers manoeuvre I earlier announced. Two *pieces de resistance*, Martin Buber's and Emmanuel Levinas', will be intertwined into the taproot which reaches deep into — but also radiates out from — the heart of SCW. A selective gaze into the life and work of Buber and Levinas respectively demonstrates how individual and collective histories are inextricably interwoven.⁵⁸ This is the reason why their work and calls are so important for this thesis, my life, and my work.

Emmanuel Levinas was born in Lithuania in 1906 and belongs to the generation of philosophers whose youth and young adulthood were formatively impacted during and after WWI by violence, destruction, and ensuing chaos all across Europe. In 1914 Levinas' family fled to Ukraine and returned to Lithuania in 1920. Before he was 14 years old, Levinas endured the first global war of known history. Thereby, he also intimately experienced the age-old blight and flight of Eastern European Jewry and Jewry in the diaspora everywhere. He left Lithuania for France in 1923 to study philosophy,

57 M. Buber's and E. Levinas' biographical notes are taken from <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/buber/> and <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/levinas/> respectively. Accessed: July 12, 2017.

psychology, and sociology at Strasbourg University. Later, he added Husserl and Heidegger lectures in Freiburg, Germany (1928-29.)

One year after Hitler's rise to power, Levinas lived in Paris, where he published *Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism*. Decades later, in 1990 he sends a handwritten *Prefatory Note* to Seán Hand, the English translator of the paper, which reads "[The] source [of bloody barbarism] stems from the essential possibility of elemental Evil into which we can be led by logic and against which Western philosophy had not sufficiently insured itself."⁵⁹ He brandished Heidegger's "ontology [as] being concerned with being [de l'etre soucieux d'etre] - a being 'dem es in seinem Sein um dieses Sein selbst geht." (Roughly, a being that is concerned only about its own being.)⁶⁰ That freedom, he claimed, makes human inter-dependence and inter-human responsibility altogether fall by the wayside.

Levinas "lays bare levels of experience described neither by Husserl nor by Heidegger. These layers of experience concern the encounter with the world, with the human other, and a reconstruction of a layered interiority characterized by sensibility and affectivity."⁶¹ Levinas recognized (and experienced) self-possession and transcendental escape in the core of Hitlerism, allowing for the Nazi German obsession with de-humanizing other humans; Jews, Roma, the disabled, non-conforming others, and more. He claims in 1933, clear-eyed, "not a particular dogma concerning democracy, parliamentary government, dictatorial regime, or religious politics" is in question but "the very humanity of man."⁶²

⁵⁹ Emmanuel Levinas and Seán Hand. "Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism." *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 17, no. 1, 1990, pp. 63–71. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/1343726.

⁶⁰ *ibid.*, 63

⁶¹ Bettina Bergo, "Emmanuel Levinas", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2015 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2015/entries/levinas/>>.

⁶² *ibid.*

Levinas' passionate scholarship observes and foreshadows (!) the ever-intensifying perversion of human ethics during the next eleven years. He joined the French army in 1939 and was soon captured "by the Nazis; imprisoned in *Fallingsbotel*; a labor camp for officers. His Lithuanian family is murdered. His wife Raïssa, and daughter, Simone, are hidden by religious in Orléans."⁶³ By the chance of being a French soldier, Levinas survived in a POW camp, albeit under severe conditions. Post-war he devoted his professional life to reclaim embodied relational human ethics in a post-Holocaust world. In 1976, at long last, he writes about his captivity and the brutal deconstruction of his humanity by German camp guards. In an essay titled "*The Name of a Dog, or Natural Rights*" he famously shares how the German shepherd, Bobby, resisted Nazi dictate. Bobby would "appear at morning assembly and was waiting for us as we returned, jumping up and down and barking in delight. There was no doubt that we were men ... This dog was the last Kantian in Nazi Germany."⁶⁴

The Naked Skin of Face

The late Deborah Bird Rose, US American environmental philosopher and extinction scholar, studied with and among aborigines in Australia.⁶⁵ She was inspired by Levinas' call for human-on-human responsibility *and* she laments how over time Levinas shifted the actual naked skin of the face into bodiless abstraction. "He gives us a God so abstract as to be effectively absent, and calls us to be responsive to a face that is equally abstract."⁶⁶ That means bodies and particular faces are removed from his First

⁶³ *ibid.*

⁶⁴ Published originally in "*Celui qui ne peut pas se servir des mots*" Montpellier: Fata Morgana, 1976,153.

⁶⁵ "Deborah (Debbie) Bird Rose, a leading figure in the anthropology of Indigenous Australia, passed away in Sydney on December 22, 2018. A profoundly interdisciplinary scholar, she was instrumental in the establishment of the environmental humanities and extinction studies as scholarly fields." URL: <https://anthrosource.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/aman.13376> Web Access: October 2020

⁶⁶ Deborah Bird Rose, *Wild Dog Dreaming: Love and Extinction* (Virginia: University of Virginia Press, 2011), Kindle

Philosophy to offer a faceless human face instead. His call thereby, alas, loses traction when we wonder how any particular embodied answer can be given. Bird Rose, nevertheless, honours his pre-incarnation human ethics as more than reasonable, given he scarcely survived the *Endlösung der Judenfrage* (Final Solution to the Jewish Question) and by extension, most of European Jewry — including many of his family members who did not.

Bird Rosen reminds us how Western culture has for centuries withheld even denied humanity for some by defining the other as not, or not quite human. Race categories were created, as Levinas knew all too well, to de-humanize otherness ad-lib according to 'science, theology, or philosophy du jour'. Ted Vial espouses both, Levinas and Bird Rose, when he writes, "Race connects physical characteristics to the essence of who a person is, to their culture, personality, intellectual and moral predisposition."⁶⁷ She, then, connects Vial's thought back toward Levinas' experience and suggests, "Clearly, the self defined by substance is in peril in a world where substance is the criterion by which life-worthiness is made."⁶⁸ Bird Rose, sensitively and compassionately, reads Levinas' abstract face as a mask "behind which are the hidden others of Levinas' life work: the six million dead." She adds "he testifies to the unimaginable; the lost bodies, lost lives, lost dead, lost humanity, lost God." Whereby she laments, yet also honours that "He offers us "beautiful tropes ... ghostly and insubstantial, full of love, and drenched in hidden grief."⁶⁹

This reading of Levinas converges with mine and with my previous claim: SCW answers, enacts, and fulfils Levinas' call for a practice of a *priory* ethical responsibility. Granted, I read Levinas rather literally (and, therefore, almost certainly naïve.)

⁶⁷ Ted Vial, *Modern Race, Modern Religion* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016), 190

⁶⁸ Deborah Bird Rose (2011), Kindle

⁶⁹ Ibid., Kindle

Consequently, as does Bird Rose, I fail to follow Levinas into the rarified notion of a 'faceless face'; fail to grasp a realm so disembodied that only abstract language is felt to be able to convey it.⁷⁰ Levinas' Face always summons particular faces on my retina and reflects them into my soul. In SCW praxis, others and I have represented particular 'faces' of dead (or living) — as well as conceptual 'faces' of unknown victims or perpetrators — in countless constellations in Germany, throughout Europe, the US, and in Israel.⁷¹ When I close my eyes, Levinas' face morphs into the faces I saw of the 6 million dead. Six million faces, twelve million eyes. Gazing from passport photos, bunk beds, cattle cars, selection ramps, mass graves, and bodies hung from butcher hooks. Women's Faces, Children's Faces, Men's Faces —and more women, children, and men faces. They, and the day-to-day faces of their descendants, some of them friends and family of choice, constitute and ground my being beholden to Levinas' Face.

Melissa Raphael concurs in the premise of her book *The Female Face of God in Auschwitz*.⁷² Raphael is in critical conversation with her (mostly male) scholar ancestors and, of course, includes Emmanuel Levinas. To construct a post-holocaust feminist theology she interviewed women who survived the Shoah in camps. Their recollections condensed into the female face of God, present in each particular face of another woman. Seeing, touching, holding, and importantly, physically cleaning and tending to another, the women told her, was the very way by which *they helped each other and each other's dignity to survive*.⁷³ Survival in the camp, then, was not only nourished by

⁷⁰ Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity* (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1985), 86 "The skin of the face is that which stays most naked, most destitute...[T]here is an essential poverty in the face; the proof of this is that one tries to mask his poverty by putting on poses, by taking on a countenance."

⁷¹ Bert Hellinger, *Rachel Weeping for Her Children. Family Constellation in Israel*. (Heidelberg: Carl-Auer-Systeme Verlag, 2003)

⁷² Melissa Raphael, *The Female Face of God in Auschwitz. A Jewish Feminist Theology of the Holocaust* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2003)

⁷³ Compare to Melissa Raphael's argument that she "synthesizes the ethical and the aesthetic, linking the experience of divine presence to human ethical vision (not as choice, but as having acted because one has seen and known." Melissa Raphael (2003), 9

the response to, and the call for, an abstract transcendental deity but, importantly so, manifested in long remembered particular faces, as much as in viscerally embodied, tender caring actions. Human ethics, then, remained alive through the physical presence the women extended and received while soothing defiled bodies and mending trampled souls. Again, on this side of contemplating an abstract female god face, they knew particular others through hearing, touching, cleaning, feeding, comforting, and holding, which had made them known to others in turn.

In SCW a particular other comes to be known by a particular representative by similarly embodied processes of sensing, seeing, touching, holding, confronting and protecting an other. Representational encounters are of course comparably short, yet nevertheless are, as Levinas so fittingly writes “inter-subjective experience [which] proves ‘ethical’ in the simple sense that an ‘I’ discovers its own particularity when it is singled out by the gaze of the other. This gaze is interrogative and imperative...[T]he face is what forbids us to kill.”⁷⁴

The first glance at the Other is the very place where the *pièces de resistance* of Emmanuel Levinas and Martin Buber touch and, as said before, intertwine into the taproot from which embodied practice of ethical comportment can be explored, grounded, and nourished. SCW participants gather temporarily, dwell with the other and embody (albeit contained by time and space) relational responsibility for each other. All participants collaborate in *Gestaltung* (shaping) of a live-giving, more robust we-experience, even if it is one particular person’s question/issue which cracks the hidden systemic narrative open and — to speak with Leonard Cohen — “lets the light come in.”⁷⁵ This light manifests as a spark of hope — even joy! In the end, all in the constellation are partaking in that particular system’s well-becoming and take embodied

74 Emmanuel Levinas (1985), 86

75 Web: <https://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/leonardcohen/anthem.html>. Accessed: August 10, 2017

echoes away into their own lives. At the core of SCW, to summarise, lies the opportunity to ritually practice alternatives to hating, disdaining, or killing the particular other while presence, inclusion, and protection of non-particular others are felt as well. Of course, both of these claims parallel — not replace — the validity of SCW for suffering clients and their family system as an impactful therapeutic modality.⁷⁶

On the Narrow Ridge

A selective gaze into Martin Buber's life reveals him as a Jew born into and profoundly formed by intellectual late 19th-century German culture. He spent his formative years on the polish estate of his grandparents, surrounded by his Grandmother's love for German classics and his Grandfather's notable scholarship in modern *Midrashic* tradition. The early 20th century saw the young Buber in Berlin, immersed in Germany's pre-war *Aufbruchstimmung* (get-up-and-go-mood). He envisioned the rise of a better world and a place for the Jewish people, all anchored in the vastness of his cosmopolitan heritage. The following, then, is a survey of Buber's *Sitz im Leben* and the part of his thinking that adds itself to the pincers manoeuvre, announced earlier. Maurice Friedman, an eminent Buber scholar, and biographer asserts that Buber's early seeking for unity and his later focus on dialogue can only be properly understood through his early traumatic bereavement. Buber was born in Vienna. He was three years old when his mother disappeared without a trace and did not return for many years.⁷⁷ The child was taken to to Lemberg/Poland (now: Lviv/Ukraine) to love with

⁷⁶ Weinhold, Jan, et al. "Family Constellation Seminars Improve Psychological Functioning in General Population Sample: Results of a Randomized Controlled Trial." *Journal of Psychology*, 60, no. 4 (2013)

Weinhold, Jan, et al. "Mid- and Long-Term Effects of Family Constellation Seminars in a General Population Sample: 8- and 12-Month Follow-Up." *Family Process* 54, no. 2 (2014).

⁷⁷ Buber would see his mother once more, in 1911, albeit in a much disappointing *Vergegnung* (mis-meeting.)
Web: <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2014/entries/buber/>>. Accessed: July 3, 2017

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his grandparents, Adele and Solomon Buber. In stark contrast to Martin's mother, they were wellsprings of deliberate, engaged, reliable, and heartfelt relationality.

He remained a lone and lonely child on the grandparent's large and busy estate, populated by adults. The brilliant *Wunderkind* early on recognised (and assumed) that opposing relational experiences are part of every human's condition. His tension between the poles of connection and loneliness became fertile soil in which eventually the seeds for 'I and Thou' would grow. Maurice Friedman tells us that Buber in essence "is really saying that if we don't allow a genuine 'We' to life, we will destroy ourselves. 'We' meaning community, fellowship, the social principle."⁷⁸

I-Thou is a well-known icon and Buber's emphasis on 'we' is urgently needed to become known, today. He conceived of community "as a type of plastic shape, an object (or subject) of *Gestaltung* and hence [ongoing] realization."⁷⁹ The German word *Gestaltung* means to give shape to something. This implies that somewhere in the process of creating communion and community human agency is — must be — involved. He adds, as if describing a systemic constellation process, "Everything starts from the most basic facts of human existence: the body and motion [by way of which ethical] life remains inextricably linked, within the world of space, to the human body and to physical sensation as they reach across the divide toward an unmitigated *Erlebnis* [experience]."⁸⁰ Moreover, any representative will soon learn that "The inmost growth [and healing] of a person does not occur, as people like to suppose

⁷⁸ Web: <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/06/books/maurice-s-friedman-martin-bubers-biographer-dies-at-90.html>. Accessed July 4, 2017

⁷⁹ Michael Zank and Zachary Braiterman. "Martin Buber", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2014 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.),
URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2014/entries/buber/>>. Accessed: July 3, 2017

⁸⁰ Web: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/buber/>. Accessed: August, 17. 2017

today, through one's relation to oneself but through being made present by another and knowing that one is made present in turn."⁸¹

This correlates significantly with *representing* as a practice of supporting both, differentiation and 'we-ness', albeit an important distinction between Buber's experience of I-Thou spontaneous occurrence and constellation experience of the other must be noted: In SCW pivotal moments of one knowing and one being known are invited and nourished by inviting and processing *Begegnung* (meeting). They are not expected to simply, spontaneously arise. Walter Kaufmann, Buber student, translator, and notable philosopher in his own right, seems to think the same, when he cautions that it is insufficient "to divide the world into two basic 'word pairs' (I-Thou and I-It, respectively.)"⁸² SCW agrees with him and adds, it is likewise insufficient to wait for the less likely one — I-Thou — to magically occur. Kaufmann aptly suggests "The more others mean to me, the more needful is it for me also to think about them, sometimes in an effort to understand better how they feel and think. Such thoughts are not a fall from grace, a relapse into inauthenticity, or a betrayal to be atoned for in another more ecstatic encounter."⁸³ Representatives are with Kaufmann. They put themselves in a position of the needful, painstaking experience of another's feelings and, most importantly, sensations. They deliberately slow down, still, turn toward, or reposition themselves in spatial relation to other(s); all, while being gently poised and guided for I-Thou moments to arise. Buber's insistence on the ephemeral nature of I-Thou, then, maybe more about his relational agility than about the necessity of happenstance. This

⁸¹ Martin Buber in Maurice Friedman, *The Outreach of Dialogue*, *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 2009, Vol.49 (4), pp. 409-418

⁸² David Pickus, "The You that Wasn't enough: Walter Kaufmann and Martin Buber." *Shofar* 29, no. 4 (Summer, 2011): 98-VII, <http://du.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.du.idm.oclc.org/docview/887717355?accountid=14608> (accessed July 4, 2017).

⁸³ Walter Kaufmann. *Discovering the Mind. Nietzsche, Heidegger, Buber*. With a new introduction by Ivan Soll, (New York: Routledge Company, 2017), 263

does not deny that ephemeral mystery is at play in SCW, nor does it suggest that a meeting in the between can be willed.

To summarise the two parts of this pincers manoeuvre: The philosopher Emmanuel Levinas speaks of a comportment of accountable 'intersubjective meeting.' The religious philosopher Martin Buber speaks of I-Thou, a particular moment and quality of *Begegnung* (meeting). Meeting, in Levinas' work, means being singled out by the face of an other and held accountable by a priory responsibility for the other. Meeting, in Buber's work, means a presencing which arises within a spoken or silent dialogue. Both equally enable and offer the experience of not just an other, but *the* other to whom we are accountable. As stated above, my reading of both Buber and Levinas may be naïve. Nevertheless, I confidently see a successful pincers manoeuvre in their respective philosophy aspects meeting.

Soul Work

Philosopher and theologian, Sarah Pessin, director of the Center for Judaic Studies and the Holocaust Memorial Social Action Institute (HMSAS) at Denver University, invites us into a paradox. I reference her scholarship on non-forgiveness as experienced in several lectures. She holds that wounds of potentially *unforgivable* magnitude exist; in the following named (by me) 'soul wounds'. Such wounds fester yet hide behind illness, depression, failure, addiction, numbness, despair, and more. They are passed on from one generation to the next. Sarah Pessin — passionately so — advocates for the negotiation of trans-generational soul wounding in her unique non-forgiveness paradigm and insists that perpetrators must hold *their need* for forgiveness, reconciliation, or mending in a delicate manner. Perpetrators need to expect that one grievously wronged may not ever be willing, nor able, to grant *the gift* of forgiveness.

Perpetrators need to remain (or become) aware that a shift may — and *only* may — be possible. Moreover, the resentment, refusal, even hatred harboured by those wronged, needs to be given an initial uncontested place in the discussion.⁸⁴ SCW likewise insists that the culturally 'agreed-upon un-includables' need to be represented and embodied in any given systemic gestalt. This is especially true in the relational processing of soul wounds. How, then, is soul in my context here to be understood?

I borrow the definition of soul from senior master SCW facilitator and clinical psychologist, Hunter Beaumont. He makes the term soul 'usable' again by defining it as the human experience which dwells in the fluid space between our mental and our physical being. Soul, then, are everyday sensory occurrences; observable, describable, in reach of awareness, sense-able, and above all, relational. Soul uses (is, according to Beaumont) sensation, emotion, and yearnings of the heart to explore, repair, and (re-)generate relational affectedness.⁸⁵ Experiencing all this, he claims, lets the soul's original beauty shine through because "This soul is not eternally unchanging, but rather, learning, growing, and maturing. Soul knows hurt and pain as well as joy and serenity. [She] can remember long after conscious mind has forgotten. If we respect her, soul can guide us and teach us, and she thrives with our respect."⁸⁶ Equally so, wrongful loss of loved ones, war, torture, genocide, and intersectional oppression — all devastating — leave soul wounds in their wake. They have the power to overwhelm resilience and, wounded soul-deep, leave us with doubting life itself.

⁸⁴ Notes taken at Sarah Pessin's lecture "Jewish and Christian Perspectives on Forgiveness," a 4-part series, co-sponsored by Iliff School of Theology and St. John's Cathedral, (Denver, St. John's Cathedral), February 17, 24, and March 2, 9, 2016

⁸⁵ Hunter Beaumont. *Toward a Spiritual Psychotherapy: Soul as a Dimension of Experience*. (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 2012), 5-9

⁸⁶ *ibid.*, 2

A core observation in SCW processing recognises life-limiting loyalty as unhealed transgenerational entanglement with soul-wounding.⁸⁷ Entanglement with ancestral history and fate suggest that such soul wounding resides somewhere in the ancestral narratives. Suffering in the family soul (and in her members) comes to light through the voices and bodies of representatives. Once the wounds are visible (as Pessin suggests), we can with careful humility offer rituals and connecting gestures and sentences that *may* balance give and take and foster life-giving loyalty and belonging. Then, ancestors may release descendants from bearing what is not, or no longer, theirs to carry. Sometimes, actually too often, the magnitude of the soul wound was not enough acknowledged and hardly honoured. Yet, hearing "Now I see you!", often makes a difference in a frozen soul-wound entanglement. One wonders, if it is our 'soul-ears' that hear such simple, albeit powerful offerings of connection.⁸⁸

Jakob Schneider, a German first generation master practitioner, nests individual and family soul 'layers' within the Web of Life when he writes "[soul] is not some mystical otherworldly power. It is the whole of individual, collective, and cosmic existence that animates and carries us, that binds, and perhaps even leads us. In this concept of soul there is a 'knowing' that connects us."⁸⁹ When things go well, expressions of the family (or any systems) gestalt are seen as strength, resilience, or heirloom. When descendants identify with and carry forth painful, unresolved, even

⁸⁷ The notion of entanglement in Family Constellations roots prominently in Ivan Boszormenyi-Nagy's *Contextual Therapy*. See: I., & Spark, G. *Invisible loyalties: Reciprocity in Intergenerational Family Therapy*. (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1973)

⁸⁸ In a soul-wound-constellation non-forgiveness will be represented through the voice of an actual representative. While non-forgiveness does not meet the desire for 'reconciliation' (which may likewise be represented), the constellation will still be useful in slowly deconstructing lofty but insurmountable ideas of forgiveness as being a spiritual accomplishment, or worse, a perpetrator's entitlement.

⁸⁹ Jacob R. Schneider. *Family Constellation. Basic Principles and Procedures*. (Heidelberg: Carl-Auer-Systeme Verlag, 2007), 35

destructive ancestral patterns, SCW calls it (as mentioned above) entanglement.⁹⁰ The experience of representing in SCW, then, can be described as embodied participation in a soul field which Albrecht Mahr, MD, another senior German SCW facilitator, and theorist, named *Wissendes Feld* (Knowing Field); a 'space' that surrounds and connects us at all times and is accessible through ritual context and intentional receptivity. In this field, then, representing is seen as 'soul at work' within a ritual process.⁹¹

Soul Language

Not surprisingly, many thousand representative expressions have developed into a language, signified by sensations, feelings, and impulses. This sign language can consistently be translated by a trained SCW facilitator. The dead want to lie down. The dead can not lie down if something is unfinished (e.g., the great-grandmother in the opening case example). Survivor guilt and loyalty with dead ancestors (even if a client does not know them) has representatives stare at the floor, mesmerised and oblivious to the living. Others stare outside the circle, equally unaware of others, indicating someone/something is missing. At large, representatives sense danger, have sudden physical pains, want to lie with the dead, feel compelled to honour life, parents, ancestors, utter words or bow (*verneigen*), are genuinely moved to tears of sorrow, given to outbreaks of rage, or begin to beam with joy.

Representatives also sense the right proximity to others, are certain about relational exchanges, and feel some positions are more adequate than others. In a lineage constellation, for example, a child stands in front of the parent (the reverse is known

⁹⁰ Another source to develop a sense of generational links (or 'entanglement') are the well researched generational transmission case studies in Anne Ancelin Schützensberger's work. Anne Ancelin Schützensberger *The Ancestor Syndrome. Transgenerational Psychotherapy and the Hidden Links in the Family Tree*. (London, UK: Routledge, 1998), 17-26

⁹¹ Web: http://www.collectivewisdominitiative.com/files_people/Mahr_Albrecht.htm. Accessed: August 15, 2017.

as the parentification of a child). In a family of origin, children feel best to the left of the parents and when siblings are lined up in birth order. Stillborn and aborted children mostly belong to the parents (not in the sibling order) and feel most at peace on the floor in front of the parents, often leaning against their knees.⁹² This occurs over and over; a readable body-soul language. The use of structured 'responses', then, moves SCW into the realm of ritual, as asserted by Wilhelm Sax, who compares the SCW process with ritual healing he experienced and researched in the Himalayas.⁹³

Part IV: Human Horizons Meeting

Sensing Knowing

The following are a few musings how representatives might temporarily receive another's experience and how that affects facilitation. Stepping in another's shoes might be considered a kind of dialogue between two 'bodies' in the field: the represented's and the representative's, respectively. 'Fusion of horizons' is Hans Georg Gadamer's ideal resolution of a dialogue.⁹⁴ He states "[a] horizon is the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular standpoint."⁹⁵ Edward Hirsch, Jr., founder of the *Core Knowledge Foundation*, cautions us that therefore

⁹² Note that it is important to ritually include them. Many not completed pregnancies burden the parents (be it as a couple, or as individuals, often with the advent of later partners.) The loss can generate diffuse grief in a constellation and its expression elicits profound relieve and overall integration of the unborn into the system.

⁹³ About the comparison of religious ritual and constellation work see W. Sax, J. Weinhold & J. Schweitzer, 2010. Ritual Healing East and West: A Comparison of Ritual Healing in the Garhwal Himalayas and "Family Constellation" in Germany. *Journal of Ritual Studies* 24 (1), 61-77.

⁹⁴ Essay, David, 2009. In "Gadamer and the Fusion of Horizons," *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, 17/4 (2009), 531-42.
"Hans-Georg Gadamer's account of dialogue is distinctive in three ways: it embraces the possibility of dialogue with texts, it takes dialogue to be the model of language at work, and it considers dialogue successful when there has been a "fusion of horizons." This last view—that dialogue, when successful, resolves itself in a fusion of horizons—is one of his most controversial claims as it suggests that conversations are only successful if they end in mutual agreement."
<http://www.davevessey.com/> Web Access: October 2020

⁹⁵ Gadamer, George, *Truth and Method* (New York: Crossroad, 1989), p. 302.

resolutions may need to be considered carefully, since the *Sitz im Leben* matters to how we even *can* interpret information. He states "If the interpreter is bound by his [or her] own historicity he cannot break out of it into some halfway house where past and present are merged."⁹⁶ This remark begs the question, who's past and whose present (if at all) a representative experiences. That is certainly always a consideration and requires some training for the facilitator. It is noteworthy that 'reading an other' in the Knowing Field, indeed many times has later been backed historical accuracy in family narratives and research.

Are an other's sensation a phenomenon of embodied experience in the place where horizons have fused? Well, possibly, it is. The notable distinction to Gadamer is that representational information (generally and preferably) is not best gleaned from language and dialogue, but from the representative's sensations, hunches, and impulses. If Gadamer's meeting and engaging at the horizon of two or more individuals apply to SCW, it may be a sensory field that contains trans-individual information; two 'fields meeting' by way of proximity, touch, smell, sight, proprioception, our social nervous system, a sixth sense, and other sources of information that afford communion; much of it unconsciously.⁹⁷ They seem to, as it were, transfer information, just as we do when holding another's hand or gazing in another's eyes.

German Psychologist, Insa Sparrer, co-founded Systemische Strukturaufstellungen (SySt®) with philosophe, SCW theorist, and husband, Varga von Kibéd. She notably asks "humans are first and foremost connected, upon which the question arises what separates them?" and goes on to say "if we were, the question [of] how we receive information [if we stop long enough to sense/listen] becomes

⁹⁶ For an in depth discussion of how Gadamer's fusion of horizons see:
http://www.davessey.com/Gadamer_Horizons.htm. Web Access June 17 2021

⁹⁷ For in depth introduction to social nervous system see
Stephen Porges, 2017. *The Pocket Guide to the Polyvagal Theory: The Transformative Power of Feeling Safe*. New York: Norton Series on Interpersonal Neurobiology.

obsolete."⁹⁸ Native Indian scholar, Vine Deloria Jr., knows the innate human affordance of connection across time and space and species, no less, taught and transmitted by belonging within communities that teach and practice indigenous philosophies and skills. Members of the Algonquin tribe, for example, "habitually repair to the woods, set up a log shelter about the size of a telephone booth, get inside, and, when the generated power is sufficiently strong they can make contact with a friend or relative who may be hundreds of miles away."⁹⁹ To be sure, such skill must be passed on, diligently practiced, and intentionally implemented.

The dialogue in the case study constellation between a long denied great-grandmother, her representative, and her great-grandson's representative, if judged rationally, is as unlikely as a wooden phone booth. And yet, representing in a constellation affords a foray into states of expanded knowing, as representatives routinely report and the Algonquin routinely use. A degree of expanded knowing is accessible to any beginner, according to educator/ SCW facilitator Alison Forness.¹⁰⁰ Practice, however, as Varga von Kibéd observed, eventually affords reliable accuracy of discerning ones' personal experience from the experience belonging to the one we represent. Albeit, he considers neophyte representational perception as commonly meaningful.

This all suggests that the contemplative practice of representing is a formidable tool to expand culturally defined boundaries; possibly meet at horizons and contribute to mending contested, even broken connections. I-Thou moments exercise our 'seeing-

⁹⁸ Insa Sparrer. *Wunder, Lösung und System. Lösungs-fokussierte Strukturaufstellung für Therapy und Organisationsberatung*. (Heidelberg: Karl Auer Verlag 2001.) p.106

⁹⁹ Vine Deloria .Jr., *The Way We Used to Live. Remembering the Powers of the Medicine Men*. (Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishers 2006.), 99.

¹⁰⁰ Alison Fornes, URL: <https://expandedknowing.com/about/>. Accessed: August 15, 2017.

muscles' as an embodied experience of really seeing particular otherness. Moreover, service to another and their system is participation in mending the world.¹⁰¹

This hears and answers Buber's longing for communion and community and grounds us in Levinas' call for de facto ethical commitment to a priory responsibility for the other. Representing, then, is nothing short of courageous whole-bodied exposure to the fullness of the human condition. An individual's social action potential stemming from greater relational agility is the long-lasting byproduct.

This rings in the voices of participants at a 2016 workshop with German facilitator Stephan Hausner in California¹⁰². "When I represent ... when anybody represents" one participant shares "it's like walking 10 000 miles in someone's shoes in the blink of an eye." Another — much moved — adds "The generosity of people to take on sometimes incredibly traumatized human experience for somebody they just met 15 minutes before, and work it through physiologically, emotionally, energetically, and give that to somebody, is just exquisite."¹⁰³

Conclusion: Here We Come!

Ordinary people are traumatised and have suffered soul wounds inflicted by historic and systemic trauma and live disconnected from origins and place. Oppression, violence, disenfranchisement and blind loyalties are the mechanics handed on and on. Whole

¹⁰¹ Mending (especially as in darning a garment) is a slow process, which results in *visible* care for a ripped fabric. While *Tikkun Olam* is usually translated as 'repairing the world', I prefer to use the less mechanical language of mending, i.e., the meticulous effort of one involved in the process to re-member by spanning threads over a rift until the hole is bridged, then weaving threads at a 90 degree angle until the ripped garment holds firm once more — without hiding what had been broken.

¹⁰² Hausner, Stephan, *Even if it Costs Me My Life. Systemic Constellation and Serious Illness*. (New York, NY: Routledge, Taylor, & Francis Group, 2011). Stephan is a German naturopath and SCW facilitator. He specialises in working with serious, often intractable illness.

¹⁰³ Both women were interviewed in 2016 by Alison Mezey, the director of a documentary filmed at a constellation retreat with Stephan Hausner near Los Angeles .
See: URL: <http://alimezey.com/film/> Accessed May 29. 2017.

populations are kept from a meaningful belonging to (their) societies.¹⁰⁴ Dissemination of knowledge about the intricacies of the 'mechanics' of trans-generational and intercultural trauma is urgently needed. Alas, it is prominently missing in the medical model of trauma-as-disorder. Since we can safely surmise that no lineage was and is spared from the woes of historical situatedness, the medical model, unfortunately, misses deep systemic and historical currents of trauma in the ocean of ailing human lives. This generated silence in my own experience and system, expressed in depression, despair, and tenacious perseverance to find solace in more or less blind loyalty with family, ancestors, collectives, and institutions.

Mindfulness practices, like meditation or yoga – often rather solitary pursuits, even in a group – is well established, yet the practice of shedding blindness in systemic relatedness (outside of therapy process groups) is hard to come by. Constellation workshops offer just that. SCW becomes method, tool, and ally rolled into one as we show up to participate. Representation can, one representation at a time, unpack ignorance, shed preconceptions by stepping straight into the brokenness of an other, and, collaterally, into our own. We unveil relational mechanisms of blind loyalty and blind love and experience how these powerfully have taken and take charge. Importantly, we practice all this in connection with others. A temporary heterotopia shifts according to who shows up, the place, or the focus of a workshop, and the *Anordnungen* (configurations) which emerge from relational collaborative group processes.¹⁰⁵ Each heterotopia invites participants into co-experiencing and unique co-

¹⁰⁴ See: Stories of murderers sentenced for life in Booth Cohen's *I Carry Your Heart in My Heart*, 2009.

¹⁰⁵ I suggest *Anordnung* as a replacement for *Ordnung* to see and respond to what 'makes love work'. The German word *Ordnung* translates to order. This suggests a settled destination or specific pattern. *Anordnung* translated as configuration is closer to the process oriented looking-for-a-place for everyone/thing in a system. Where does a representative (or several) experience greater, belonging, ease, and wellbeing? This can be guided by the classic phenomena we all studied but allows new configurations to suggest themselves in an emergent process.

Also see my blog: From Ordnung to Anordnung: Who Is Father, Mother, Child?

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mending in the given temporary relational field. Regardless of a constellation's content, the service of representing gradually mends and weaves brokenness into connection.

I have argued that group participants heed Emmanuel Levinas' call, and pick up the gauntlet he threw to each human. Participants in all roles practice responsibility with and for Other and they tend to come back for Martin Buber's tangible experience of the *Zwischen* (between); a compelling and nearly predictable experience in the work. Over time, embodied study and practice of ethical beholdenness to otherness and Other, can and will connect participants cross time and space with every human and non-human being in the living web. While representing, touching and being touched, seeing and being seen, hearing and being heard is a contemplative practice of expanding to the edge of one's knowing. We respectfully meet familiar and foreign others in expanding and differentiated we-spaces.

The hope is that increased 'we-logic' literacy equals expansion of our personal epistemology and adds new angles to our ontology. We are invited to be drawn and guided beyond the narrow confines of our *Sitz im Leben*, i.e., beyond our familiar horizons. Deeply visceral exploration of the human condition and expanded relational literacy nourishes nothing less than the human capacity to stop short of harming ourselves and others. This will serve ourselves, Other, and the world at large, one representation at a time.

May it be so.

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Endnotes