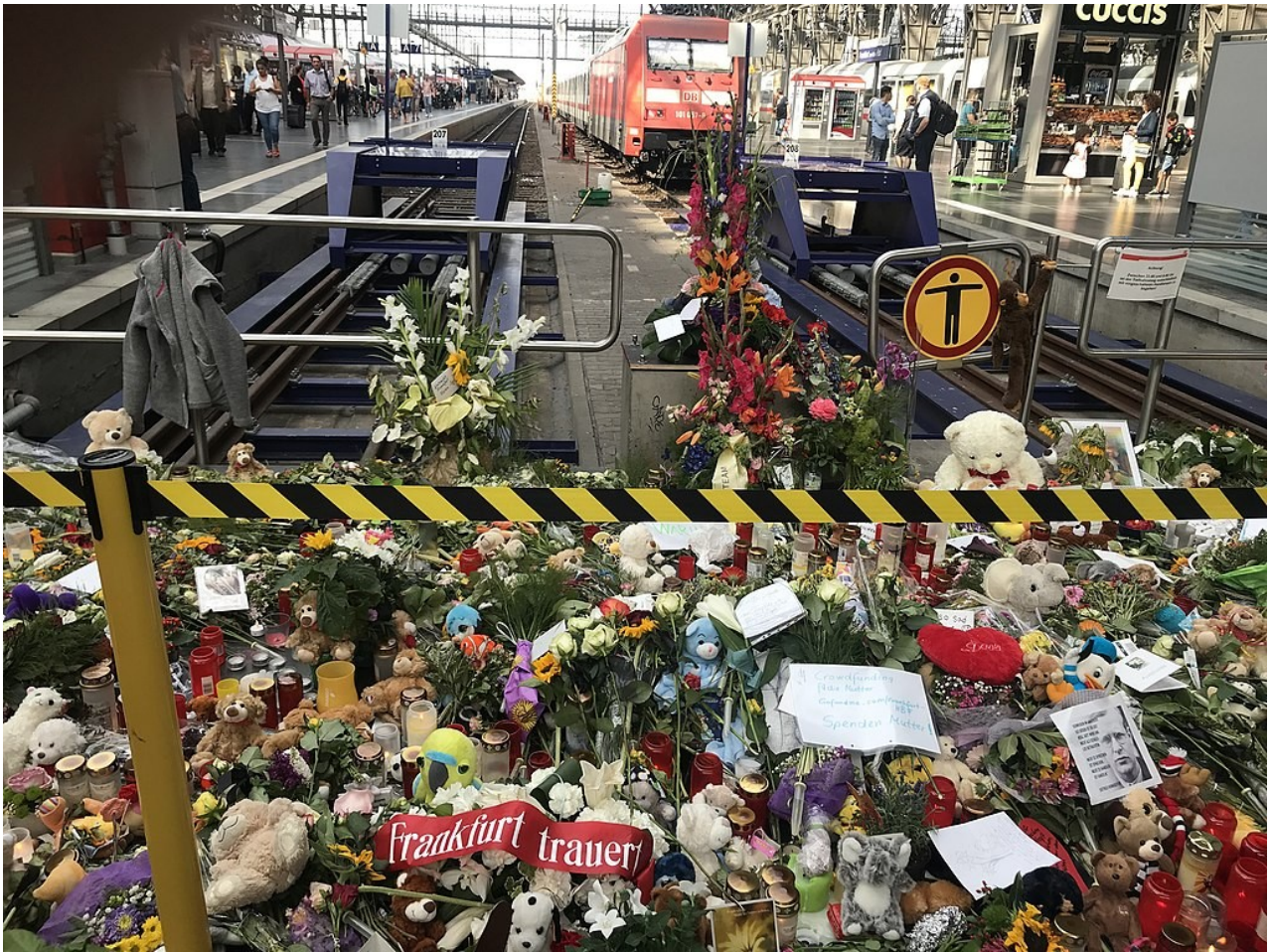


Trauma, Empowerment, and Compassion

Wolf Jung

Project paper accepted in 2021 for completing the basic training
“Prozessorientierte Beratung und Gruppen-Facilitation nach Arnold Mindell”
at Institut für Prozessarbeit Deutschland.



Tracks 7 and 8 of Frankfurt main station, photographed Friday August 2, 2019. (From [Wikimedia](#).)

This paper is dedicated to Leo S., the boy who was killed.

Abstract: Processwork (or Process Oriented Psychology) is a method of awareness training with various areas of application, including psychotherapy and facilitation. Here tools and attitudes from Processwork are illustrated with my personal process of dealing with a traumatic experience: On July 29, 2019, a boy was shoved onto the tracks in Frankfurt main station, and killed by the incoming train. Witnessing this, and hearing the mother cry out in agony, I felt horrified like never before in my life. At the same time, I felt determined to work through it as deeply and consciously as possible; I came to find a deeper sense of love and compassion for my fellow human beings, as well as self-compassion and empowerment, and I am still learning to speak about this process.

Here are a few words of caution and perspective to the reader:

- Although the overall theme of the paper is a message of hope, there are parts dealing with extreme violence, cruelty, suffering, and despair. So please be compassionate and take care for yourself while reading. And if you are disturbed by fears or triggered to remember your own traumatic experiences, please talk to your family and friends, or seek professional help.
- I hold a deep respect for Leo's untimely end of life, and for his family's suffering. And I know that their agony must be infinitely deeper than my horror and it will take a much longer time to heal only in part. Being aware of this, I also want to speak about what I have learned.
- The perpetrator, Habte Araya, was convicted of murder on August 28, 2020. Due to a diagnosis of paranoid schizophrenia, he probably will be spending the rest of his life in the high-security wing of a forensic clinic, never again seeing his children either.
- Since both the murder and the trial received extensive news coverage, detailed information on very personal experiences of identifiable persons is available publicly already. Therefore I am not attempting to disguise the actual event. On the other hand, people I spoke with shall not be identified from recounting the interaction here.

Zusammenfassung (German summary): Prozessarbeit nach Arnold Mindell ist eine phänomenologische Methode zur Vertiefung von Bewusstseinsprozessen mit Anwendungen in der Psychotherapie und Beratung, sowie in der Arbeit mit sich selbst und mit Gruppen. Eine Grundhaltung ist es, den natürlichen Prozess zu amplifizieren (verstärken): Die Klient:innen erforschen weniger bekannte Seiten ihrer selbst, die als Störung oder Bedrohung erscheinen, und oft erwächst gerade aus der Störung eine Bewältigung des ursprünglichen Problems.

Diese Haltung wird hier am Beispiel meines persönlichen Prozesses veranschaulicht, insbesondere der Verarbeitung einer traumatischen Erfahrung: Ich habe miterlebt, wie ein Kind ermordet wurde, und dann den verzweifelten Schrei der Mutter gehört. Seither weiß ich, was Entsetzen ist. Zugleich hatte ich den Drang und das Vertrauen, zu erforschen, was der ursprüngliche Schockzustand und das unmittelbare Wahrnehmen des Leidens bei mir ausgelöst haben. Ich glaube dies hat dazu beigetragen, dass ich bewusster mit dem Thema Trauma umgehe, mehr in meine Kraft komme, einen klareren Zugang zu meinem Mitgefühl habe und auch mir selbst gegenüber mitfühlender bin.

Mit der Projektarbeit am Institut für Prozessarbeit Deutschland vertiefe ich den Prozess für mich selbst und stelle ihn für interessierte Leserinnen und Leser dar, die bereits Erfahrung mit Prozessarbeit haben oder sie hiermit kennenlernen möchten. Zugleich ist dies ein Schritt, über Trauma und Mitgefühl ins Gespräch zu kommen. Und ich arbeite daran, Mitgefühl und das Bewusstsein über mögliche Traumatisierungen in den Umgang mit meinen Schüler:innen einfließen zu lassen.

Table of Contents

1 Introduction.....	5
2 A child is killed in Frankfurt main station.....	7
2.1 What happened in Frankfurt.....	7
2.2 Train ride to Freiburg and testimony to the police.....	9
2.3 The first evening in Hinterzarten.....	10
2.4 Shock as an altered state of consciousness.....	11
3 Trauma and empowerment.....	12
3.1 Trauma theory and therapy.....	12
3.2 Experiencing trauma reactions and flashbacks.....	14
3.3 Working with the traumatic experience and recovering from it.....	16
3.4 A constellation work.....	18
3.5 Nighttime dreams.....	19
3.6 Finding my power.....	20
4 Finding compassion.....	22
4.1 Empathy and compassion.....	22
4.2 Self-compassion and therapy.....	23
4.3 My own struggle with compassion.....	24
4.4 Finding my compassion.....	25
5 Bringing it into relationships.....	27
5.1 Talking about the incident.....	27
5.2 Giving testimony before the court.....	28
5.3 Speaking about trauma and compassion in public.....	29
5.4 Finding my voice.....	30
5.5 Compassion and relationships in school.....	31
A Processwork.....	33
References.....	36

Acknowledgment:

Throughout my life I have learned from friends and relatives, various teachers and therapists, and from my students. Over the last two years in particular, several people have supported me in my personal process, in learning, and in dealing with difficult experiences; I am grateful to my partner, family, friends, and fellow students for their compassionate listening, offering ideas and suggestions, or working with me.

And thanks to Peter Ammann and Kirsten Wassermann for personal support, for their teaching, and for developing this training program. Recently, Kirsten and I have started to work on my role as a teacher in case supervision sessions. Peter has been my training therapist for two and a half years, and worked with me on the experience in Frankfurt in several sessions; he is my role model for being compassionate, and he helped me to discover self-compassion.

Moreover, Peter has encouraged me and accompanied the process of writing this paper, which turned out longer than expected; he provided detailed feedback on the ideas and their presentation, on aspects needing deeper processing, and also by pointing out my secondary processes slipping in at various places.

About the Author:

Wolf Jung is a mathematician, a teacher, and a processworker in training. He lives and works in the city of Aachen, Germany. Your feedback to jung@mndynamics.com is invited and appreciated.

This project paper is available as a pdf-file from Institut für Prozessarbeit Deutschland, www.institut-prozessarbeit.de, and from the author's home page, www.mndynamics.com.

1 Introduction

Processwork was developed by Arnold Mindell and his coworkers in the 1980s in Zurich, Switzerland. Originally a method for working with a client in therapy, it has evolved into an awareness-based approach to work on oneself or with small and large groups as well. The facilitator aims to follow and to amplify the client's process in various channels of perception, including speech and emotions, body sensations and symptoms, movement, dreams, and relationship signals. In this phenomenological approach, experiences are described in a sensory-grounded manner and processes are considered in relation to the client's identity: often there is a polarity between a primary process, which is closer to the person's identity and consciousness, and a secondary process, which is farther away from the identity. Inner critics, belief systems, and fears form the edge against the secondary process. Personal development of the client happens, when they can integrate a portion of the secondary aspects.

The solution to a problem is often found by embracing disavowed aspects of yourself, which are suggested by the problem itself. For example, if you feel bothered by noisy neighbors, and in a therapy session you work on your own edges and explore being noisy, then afterward you may experience the neighbors as less bothersome, or you may have more courage and at the same time detachment to confront them. So a basic assumption of Processwork is that we can find meaning in difficult experiences, and a problem contains its solution implicitly; by unfolding disavowed aspects, maybe an unexpected solution is found, or the client gets a new perspective on the problem.

The aim of the present paper is to illustrate this attitude and some basic ideas of Processwork with my personal process over the last two years: Waiting on a platform in Frankfurt main station, I witnessed the murder of a child, who was shoved onto the tracks and overrun by the incoming ICE train. In a state of shock, I walked around the train to find out what had happened and whether I could help, until I saw the dead body. Hearing the mother cry out was even more horrific. Following this traumatic incident, I experienced challenging times with compulsive ruminations, flashbacks, and ideas of blaming myself for not having prevented the attack. At the same time, I followed my experiences closely and trusted the process; I worked on this alone and in sessions with the training therapist Peter Ammann, as well as in seminars. Repeated processing of this experience supported me to cope with it and resulted also in a deepened access to compassion and to my personal power.

I found it hard to speak on the incident, feeling ashamed and afraid to be criticized for learning about myself from an incident that was devastating for the boy and his family. And I was unsure about how to deal with the fact, that the murder received a lot of media attention; probably it has touched many people, because the victim was a child, and this was a meaningless act against an arbitrary victim, while Germany has low rates of violent crime in general [35]. What I find most shocking and touching is the mother's suffering: she was shoved onto the tracks first, rolled away from the oncoming train, and did not know that her son had been shoved, too. Only after hurrying back to the original platform, she realized that he had been killed.

Writing this paper is the final project in a training of two and a half years at Institut für Prozessarbeit Deutschland, the German Processwork institute. By suggesting this topic I have challenged myself to recall, explore, and deepen the processes associated with the experience in Frankfurt. Also I hope that a few of my fellow processworkers will read the paper, and may feel touched both by the horrific incident, and by the learning process that came out of a traumatic event. Maybe other readers will get their first impression of Processwork here? Moreover, I believe there is a collective edge

against acknowledging trauma and dealing with it; in my highest dream, this paper is a small contribution to raising public awareness.

Self-reference is observed frequently in a therapy session: what the client speaks about, happens between therapist and client in the moment as well. This applies to the process of writing, too: As I wrote about empowerment and compassion, I needed my power to tackle difficult passages, and I needed my self-compassion when I failed to write. Writing about not speaking, I came forward. Writing about relationships, I tried to have an idea of the relationship to the reader. And compassion entails a balanced distance, feeling with someone but not being overwhelmed; likewise, writing about painful memories and disturbing experiences, I had to balance reliving the emotions and thinking about a coherent presentation.

I opted to write the paper in English, instead of my native German, for a number of reasons: Hoping to find readers within the worldwide Processwork community, although unfortunately this may exclude a few possible German speaking readers; I am used to write papers on mathematics in English; and I enjoy doing Processwork in English, ever since I have attended the 2001 intensive course in Portland, Oregon. Well, I came to realize that choosing the right nuance in writing is not the same thing as paraphrasing ideas in simple words while speaking. Working harder to find appropriate wordings may have helped me at times not to drown in feelings. On the other hand, again and again I sensed my body to access deeper feelings more easily; otherwise I have a tendency to speak from memory on what I have been thinking about my emotions earlier, not feeling them in the moment. – Here is an overview of the following sections. In general these track the order of events in time, while focusing on particular aspects of my inner processes and learning:

Section 2: My observations, actions, and feelings in the train station are described, leaving out only details of the boy's injuries. That day was marked by ruminations and first flashbacks. I attempt to analyze the state of shock: the curtain separating me from the world was ripped away.

Section 3: In a traumatic situation, the person is overwhelmed and the defense mechanisms of the limbic system are disturbed; harmless triggers may be perceived as threatening for a long time afterward. Mainly in the first week, I experienced various flashbacks, and started to work on the process. Two figures emerged from an innerwork: a disturbing powerful figure, and a figure of divine love. Over the two years, I feel empowered by working on the former figure and on various dreams, and by remembering my decisive actions right after the incident.

Section 4: Compassion is distinct from both empathy and sympathy; it involves feeling with someone suffering while retaining a somewhat detached position, and aiming to help while believing in the person's innate ability to heal and grow. Many people find it easier to be compassionate with someone else, while falling prey to their inner critics themselves; training compassion consciously is a way to access self-compassion as well. I believe my sense of compassion and self-compassion has increased during the training therapy; the process was supported by the experience in Frankfurt, where I felt an immediate intent to help the child, a strong sense of empathy for the mother, and a sense of love for human beings in general right afterward. This attitude was deepened by working on the inner figure of divine love.

Section 5: So far I have spoken only to a few people about the incident, due to personal and collective edges. After giving testimony before the court, and reading about my flashbacks in the newspaper, I feel more inclined to go public; putting this paper online is a first step. Increased awareness of trauma provides new perspectives on my long-term process of not writing and not speaking up. Building on all of this, I have started to explore the role of compassion in my work as a teacher.

Appendix A gives a brief introduction to Processwork. Throughout the paper, *examples of working with a facilitator and of my innerwork are formatted in italics*. Techniques for interventions are mentioned sparingly, since the main topic of this paper is the fundamental attitude of Processwork: we can find meaning in difficult experiences by embracing and unfolding them..

2 A child is killed in Frankfurt main station

On Monday July 29, 2019, we made a train ride from Aachen to Hinterzarten, changing trains in Frankfurt and Freiburg. Here I shall describe what I saw, heard, did, felt, and thought on the first day. The occasional “we” refers to my partner; to protect her privacy, I will not go into details of our interaction and her experiences. The state of shock is discussed further in Section 2.4.

Right now, before starting to write this section, I do an innerwork. The structure roughly follows the “earth spot” innerwork given by Lane Arye in the seminar [2]: I feel in need of support to relive painful and shocking feelings (my primary process). To find resources within myself (secondary process), in my imagination I connect to a spot in nature and speak from the position of a tree, thus bypassing my ordinary ideas somewhat.

I am sitting slumped down, being cramped, having goosebumps, feeling cold. Remembering the events in Frankfurt, I feel tears accumulating behind my closed eyelids. I am touched and also sad.

I recall my favorite tree, a big Thuja in the Aachen city forest, and imagine to hug it, touching the soft bark and smelling it. Standing behind my chair and shape-shifting into the tree, I feel big, grounded, and powerful.

Putting “my hands” on Wolf’s shoulders, I affirm him: “you are strong and compassionate, remember me, feel the ground, trust yourself to keep the right distance. Just show your feelings openly, being connected to compassion, trust the readers to connect and care for themselves.”

Sitting down again, I let the tree’s words sink in, feel both touched and detached.

For a moment I am surprised, because I remember an old and deeply ingrained belief system, that being strong means to feel less, to be above emotions. More and more I have been opening up to a new experience, that feeling deeply, joining in feelings and showing them, is supported by being strong and grounded in fact. – Nevertheless the following description may read quite distanced in places, because I have tried to stay close to the original emotions on the platform: I acted in a state of shock and fight mode, which afterward turned into a deep recognition of suffering, and empathy.

2.1 What happened in Frankfurt

We arrived in Frankfurt around 9:30 AM and our connecting train to Freiburg was due around 10:10 AM on track 6, delayed by a few minutes. As I walked along the platform between tracks 6 and 7, the previous train departed on track 6, going very slowly. I walked close to it, thinking that doing so was not dangerous because of the slow speed, and no one would be pushing me. As the train began to accelerate, I took a step back and turned around to my partner, checking that she held a safe distance from the train, too. We walked to segment F at the very end of the platform, put down our luggage and waited patiently for our train to arrive on track 6.

Now another train is arriving on track 7, going slowly, since Frankfurt main station is a terminus and incoming trains are restricted to 30km/h. I am facing the main hall and the ICE comes from behind on my left hand side. The first car passes by and I let my gaze follow it without paying much attention. For a split second, there seem to be two human bodies suspended in midair, a few meters in front of the moving train. A split second later, the train has moved forward, claiming this space.

I wince and I hear myself yelling, “No – this cannot be.”

And I say, “This cannot have gone well.” I start to move forward. I am shocked and horrified that a severe accident may have happened. And I want to know what has happened. I did not see any movement of the bodies, neither to the left nor to the right, but I am guessing that teenagers crossed the tracks and tried to jump onto the platform from the left. I suspect that something very real and totally unexpected has happened. My sense of reality is shaken by the illusory perception as well, that bodies are in a position of space for a split second and then they are gone without moving.

A man goes quickly in the opposite direction, approaching and passing me, and we look into each other’s eyes for a moment. His eyes are wide open, and from his gaze and facial expression I feel that he is somewhat confused, surprised, and maybe also satisfied. An older man follows him, shouting “Hey, stop, stay here.” I think that the first man may have done something bad, maybe even contributed to the accident, and I wonder whether I should stop him. But I let him pass by, because I do not know what he may have done, and because to me it is more urgent to find out what has happened in the first place. Both men jump onto track 6, the former starts to run away at a moderate pace, and the old man seems to have hurt his ankle and does not pursue. Someone takes a photograph of the man running.

So I walk briskly along the train, which has come to a halt in section E. About ten meters past the front of the train, I turn around and climb down from the platform onto the tracks. Crouching down, I can look through between the wheels, seeing the space under the train, which is visible for the length of several cars. The space is wide enough and high enough for persons to lie unharmed. But there is no person to be seen.

I start to walk along the strip between the train on track 7 and the empty track 8 on the other side. From platform 8, a lady tells me “the mother has got only a sprained wrist, and she is being escorted back already.” I say “but I have seen two people?!” and continue along the train, crouching and looking under the cars again and again. Nothing is there.

Yes there is. A few meters from my crouching position, there is a hand. Under the train. A small, pale hand with a part of the forearm attached. No, this has not gone well.

I turn toward the people on platform 8 and say “there is a hand.” The lady from before answers, “and there are more.” I wonder, more people?, more body parts?, and continue along the train, hoping to find the child alive. Passing the third car, I realize that I have gone back too far and turn around. The lady suggests to climb up on platform 8 to be safe, which I do. But this does not make sense, because my partner and my luggage are on platform 7, and I am still worried about the child. So I climb down again, cross the tracks 8 and 7 in front of the train, and climb up on platform 7.

There are people crying, people hugging each other, some have collapsed to the ground. I pass a guy speaking into his phone, “again, someone has shoved persons onto the tracks.” Two conductors are on the platform as well, standing by the door of the first car. They seem to be in their twenties. The woman is crying, the man is smoking. I approach them and say, “there is an injured child, we need to find him.” The man answers, “we have reported the accident already, and an emergency ser-

vice is on its way.” I urge, “they have been called but they are not here yet, we need to find the child now, he may be bleeding to death.” I take a step back, wondering where to look for the child.

Then I see the body. He is on this side of the train, on the ground between the platform and the train. Lying next to the undercarriage of the second car, so that he was not visible when I looked under the cars from the other side. I approach him, and from a few meters away, I see a large gaping wound and I am convinced that he is dead already. He had been run over and then somehow has been pushed off the rail to the side. I am not sure, whether he is lying on his back with the head turned left, or on his stomach with the head turned right; I do not see the face, only the back of the head. His hair is blond and curly.

I return to my partner. A loudspeaker announcement orders people to leave the platform. After picking up my luggage, I notice a woman and a big man standing on the platform, next to the first car. He is holding her tight and blocking her view.

She cries out, “my child is dead.”

Her voice conveys utter dismay and sheer agony. I could never have imagined a horror so deep. Not imagined the horror. Not imagined it to be expressed in a single sentence.

People in blue uniforms arrive, probably firemen. Our train has been redirected to depart from track 2. So we walk toward the main hall along platform 6, and back outward on platform 2. Two boys play around close to the edge of the platform, and I tell the father, “I do not like to see children so close to the tracks, just now a child was killed over there.”

2.2 Train ride to Freiburg and testimony to the police

As our train departed, I looked out of the window and saw police officers arrive on platform 7. I realized that I should make a statement, since I had seen the perpetrator up close. My back hurt, and I followed the urge to move and walked through the train from end to end. Then I sat down on the floor, with my back against the wall, and phoned my training therapist, giving a short account of my experiences.

Throughout the ride, I remembered what had happened and told it to myself again and again. I was touched in particular by imagining what the mother had experienced: she hit the ground and rolled away from the track in the last moment, was helped onto platform 8, and hurried back to platform 7. She did not know that her son had been shoved as well, assumed him to stand alone and frightened on the platform. And then she realized, that he was dead.

While telling this to myself again and again, I sometimes imagined telling it to someone else, for instance a colleague or a friend, and I expected them to be touched deeply as well. I observed my thoughts going in circles and did not try to stop this. I realized that my perception of reality had been shaken, and that witnessing an actual murder was totally different from reading about it in a newspaper, or from watching a movie. I was unable and unwilling to distance myself and to control how deep I would be touched.

On the one hand, I knew that the experience was horrifying and it would be a painful, maybe even traumatic, memory for a long time. On the other hand, in these hours already I felt confident that I would be able to work through it, to cope with it and to learn from it. I noticed a stronger sense of love for human beings in general, and a desire to learn about and to work with people.

At one point of the ride I had a fantasy of pursuing the attacker, knocking him down and dragging him back, to confront him with the dead child. Apart from this moment, I did not feel any rage or have an idea of revenge toward him; he was obviously very ill.

Amidst painful memories and circling thoughts, struggling to stay present with these disturbing experiences, I actually tried to sense what was most difficult:

5. Finding the hand under the train;
4. Not stopping the perpetrator from fleeing and not pursuing him;
3. Seeing human bodies in the air in front of the train;
2. Seeing the dead child; and
1. Hearing the mother cry out.

I was grateful that I had not seen the child being run over. I knew that others may have seen this, standing in sections A – D, which was confirmed later [15]. And I had not noticed the child before; if we had looked and smiled at each other, seeing him dead a few minutes later would have been even more shocking and painful.

I also speculated about a few aspects: did he die immediately? Why had I not seen any blood? Did the perpetrator push both mother and son at the same time? (According to several witnesses, he shoved the mother first. So when I had seen two bodies in the air, I probably saw the child twice due to a rapid movement of my eyeballs.) I suppose the child was not hit by the front of the train, but he fell flat to the ground and was run over immediately.

In Freiburg I walked a few blocks to the office of the federal police, and made a statement. The officer was friendly and calming, supporting my decision to look after the victim instead of following the perpetrator. He asked whether I had children – “no, but I am a teacher, I have a lot of students.” Moreover, he suggested that witnessing the murder had been traumatic, and offered to organize counseling. I declined, saying that I had contacted my training therapist already. Waiting in the lobby, I had the idea to use a punching bag in their gym, but I did not ask.

My partner and I were driven to the building of the state police, and separately made statements to the criminal division. The detective repeated my sentences in his own words and recorded this to be typed later; at a few points I corrected him and he rewound the tape. Again, I was informed of possible counseling, and a letter with contact information arrived two weeks later. For the interview in Freiburg, the police in Frankfurt had sent specific questions in addition: whether the perpetrator had worn a cap, or carried anything in his hands. And I was photographed together with my luggage, in order to identify me on surveillance videos.

2.3 The first evening in Hinterzarten

In the afternoon we arrived at the station of Hinterzarten, a small town in the Black Forrest, for two weeks of vacation. After dinner I watched the news on TV [22] [40]: the child was an eight-year old boy. Tracks 4 – 9 of Germany’s busiest railway station had been closed off for several hours, leading to trains being delayed throughout the country. Hundreds of people had assembled to show their empathy, and started to put down flowers, candles and teddy bears at the platform. The perpetrator had been arrested soon, which brought relief to my doubts about the decision, not to pursue him. He was a Swiss resident, originally a refugee from Eritrea. On social media and in political statements, some people had used the opportunity to criticize immigration politics [21].

In the evening my thoughts kept circling around the events in Frankfurt, and my heart rate was around 120 beats per minute. We sat on the balcony of our rented apartment, looking over the landscape and later watching the nighttime sky, eating fresh cherries, soft jelly fruits, cookies, and potato chips. When my partner put down her glass and inadvertently crushed a potato chip, and when a bear-shaped jelly fruit was torn apart as I retrieved it from the package, the image of the dead boy came up immediately in my mind. I was frozen for a moment, then sad, and then also interested in understanding the experience, which I labeled as a flashback.

2.4 Shock as an altered state of consciousness

Compared to the experiences in Frankfurt, my everyday perception of reality appears to be somewhat filtered and overshadowed by preconceived notions, internal dialogue, habits, and automatic responses. For a few minutes, the curtain was ripped away, unveiling a bigger and deeper reality. There is a world outside of myself, which I cannot control with my thoughts. A few aspects of the original experience are:

- Something very big and totally unexpected has happened.
- My sense of geometry and physics is irritated by human bodies in midair.
- Witnessing a real murder directly is extremely shocking, and totally different from anything I had known before. Thinking about it later in the train, I compared and contrasted this to accessing media; for example, I had not felt strongly when I had read about a similar murder in Voerde the week before, and I enjoyed to watch violent action movies.

- Being touched and empathic is immediate, I do not have a choice of distancing myself. More precisely, I acted confidently and immediately, and became aware of suffering more and more. This is not the same thing as compassion, which means to recognize suffering and then to act on it, but looking back, the experience strengthened my interest in compassion.

– So in my mind, this altered state already initiated a pathway into greater empowerment and compassion. What is harder to grasp, is its significance as a kind of meditative state, a way of being in the world and connecting to the world. I find it difficult to access the state again at will, and to describe it precisely. Which is to be expected, since this goes beyond my ordinary state of mind.

Moreover, I probably was in a kind of psychological shock, a fight reaction with a high excitation of the sympathetic nervous system, accompanied by a high pulse and high levels of cortisol, adrenaline, and oxytocin [27]. I observed what I did and committed everything to memory, made fast decisions after short deliberation, which felt rational in the moment, and acted on them immediately. With hindsight, I see that my deliberations were also incomplete and the thinking not so rational. In particular, I started to go to the front of the train immediately, neither thinking of the braking distance traveled by the train after possibly hitting someone, nor thinking that a person might have been dragged along by the moving train. Likewise, I walked too far back on the other side of the train. And although I was careful to keep a safe distance from track 8, I did not realize that the driver of an incoming train would have made an emergency halt upon seeing me between the two tracks.

I have some tendency to feel like passing out when seeing blood or thinking of an injury. Due to the high levels of adrenaline, I probably would not have passed out. But in fact I did not see any blood on the boy's clothes. Is it possible, physiologically and physically, that a large quantity of

blood flowed to the ground without splattering? Or did my brain turn off red vision to protect my mind?

There are still some aspects, where my memory is incomplete, or inconsistent with statements made by other witnesses: I remembered my initial yell for the first time on the second day. I do not remember the train braking. I am unsure, whether I approached the conductors once or twice. My partner and I made different statements regarding the perpetrator's skin tone, and the color of his shirt. And I did not see the man who continued to pursue him according to the news. I am not sure, whether the child's body lay next to the front undercarriage of the second or third car. And I used to believe that we had been waiting in segment E; maybe we were supposed to board our train in segment E, but found it more comfortable to wait in segment F.

Apart from my own perceptions, some questions remain open even after the trial: what was the attacker's motive, if it makes sense to speak of a motive at all? When he pushed an old lady to the ground, did he try to shove her onto the tracks as well, or did he just push her out of his way? And did the mother see her dead child?

3 Trauma and empowerment

Working on these horrifying experiences brought both a sense of compassion, see Section 4, and of empowerment as well. This section gives some interpretations of my own experiences regarding trauma and describes how I tried to deal with them actively.

Today I have visited my favorite tree in person. I say that I am about to write the section on trauma, and the Thuja reminds me of Chapter 6 in [27]: a stressful or even a traumatic experience may contribute to increasing the person's resilience.

3.1 Trauma theory and therapy

In everyday German, and probably English as well, a very painful or frightening experience can be called traumatic. In psychology, trauma means that the person was overwhelmed by the experience, totally unable to fight back [25] [39]. Typically this occurs with violent assaults, in particular sexual violence and abuse, wartime experiences, accidents, and sometimes medical procedures. Witnessing or hearing about traumatic experiences may be traumatizing as well [11]; the latter is called secondary trauma or vicarious trauma. When traumatized parents are fearful or less available emotionally, children may be affected by transgenerational or historical trauma [10] [37].

The traumatized person may experience frequent intrusions, for example compulsive ruminating, and flashbacks, for example visual memories coming up suddenly. The world does not feel safe, and the person feels threatened and is hyper-aroused or hypo-aroused in reaction to harmless triggers. The memory of the traumatic event can be implicit: the person feels threatened now and does not recognize this as a trauma reaction, or does not remember the original incident at all. Suffering is perpetuated by cycles of shame about not having fought back, or fear of one's own aggression [26]. This may lead to a numbing of feelings, losing the sense of self-worth, isolation, depression or anxiety, self-harming behavior, and drug overuse. In the terminology of [ICD-11](#), the International Statis-

tical Classification of Diseases, a traumatic event results in an acute stress reaction, which may be followed by a long-term PTSD: a posttraumatic stress disorder, or rather an injury. When this is prolonged and affects the person's self-concept and development, it is called complex PTSD.

In the original threatening situation, the person experienced a fight or flight response, which was initiated in the limbic system of the brain and involved a shutdown of higher cognitive functions; it may have turned into a freeze response in addition. Fear, helplessness, and horror are further risk factors for developing trauma [11]. Peter Levine [25] [26] explains this in comparison to animal behavior: while an antelope shakes off the stressful reaction after escaping the cheetah, a human being may be afraid to fight an overpowering adversary, or unable to flee; tonic immobility can be caused in certain kinds of animals as well, and it is harmful only when combined with inducing fear.

What happens during trauma can be described in terms of neurobiology. The brain has three collaborating parts: the brain stem, the limbic system, and the cortex. The latter two consist of several anatomical and functional units [36] [39], for example, the prefrontal cortex is involved in conscious decision making, and threat assessment is accomplished by the amygdala, assisted by the thalamus and hypothalamus. The autonomous nervous system tunes the body for action (sympathetic) or rest and digestion (parasympathetic). A fight / flight response is organized by an excitation of the sympathetic nervous system together with the release of stress hormones, accompanied with an inhibition of the prefrontal cortex. In trauma, prolonged exposure to stress hormones may re-calibrate the system, so that triggers or minimal threats result in an over-excitation; in the long term, brain parts related to the integration of memory, emotions, and sense of body may deteriorate [39].

Over-excitation of either system means that the window of tolerance is left, losing a state of conscious overview, emotional regulation, and social engagement. In Porges' polyvagal theory [26] [36] [39], a third branch of the autonomous nervous system is proposed to mediate social engagement, which is inhibited together with the prefrontal cortex during a defense response. Apart from the arrest stage of orienting, freeze responses may be differentiated further as follows [14] [26] [36]: an alert immobility with high tonus and sympathetic excitation, a feeling of entrapment and paralysis with possibly combined excitation, and a third type of feigning death with a trance-like feeling, low tonus, and high parasympathetic excitation. A more active appeasement or submission may happen as well. The various defense responses during the traumatizing incident are correlated with later patterns of aggression, ambivalence, fear, shame, compulsive obedience, and helplessness.

Retraumatization means that trauma reactions may be reinforced by strong triggers, including directive behavior of the therapist, or incident debriefing without consent and bodily grounding. Classical methods of trauma therapy, like psychodynamic or cognitive behavioral therapy, work on current emotions and thought patterns, as well as exposure to remembering the traumatic incident in a safe environment. In Sensorimotor Psychotherapy according to Pat Ogden [36] or Somatic Experiencing according to Peter Levine [25] [26], the present is emphasized more, and defense responses are completed and re-calibrated by exercises of sensing the body; as the client becomes aware of small pendulations between sympathetic and parasympathetic arousal, pleasant and unpleasant sensations, the window of tolerance is expanded, and immobilization is decoupled from fear.

Janina Fisher [14] describes the split of self into a younger part stuck in trauma, and an adult part going on with life. Since the adult part tends to be shut off when the limbic system reacts to a perceived threat, the client trains to identify less with the younger part and more with the wise mind, which shall stay present in a trauma reaction and comfort the younger part without blending. The client is educated to speak to parts and to view trauma reactions as messages from a younger part.

And what about Processwork? On a first sight, the techniques of amplification may seem to pose a danger of retraumatization, but these are used while observing the client's feedback; when the client shows signs of passive compliance or dissociation, there is no positive feedback for pursuing an amplification; negative feedback also provides information on the direction of the process. Especially with traumatized clients, it is important to go slow and work feedback-based on unfolding the process from moment to moment; ask whether and how they want to work on this, whether it is okay to use touch, or what physical distance feels safe. Lane Arye has studied with Janina Fisher and incorporated her grounding techniques and approach of parts into Processwork [2]. Concerning the process structure, he explains that the wise mind is more secondary than the traumatic memory and the victim suffering from trauma reactions; so identifying more with this adult part means integrating a secondary process. The original energy of the offender is even more secondary and working with it is way down the line. If and when this feels right, it may be accessed to integrate its essence. For example, the client may have lost access to their power, because it became associated with a violent perpetrator, and they need to reclaim it. Or an overcritical parent has turned into an inner critic, which needs to be confronted, and finally turned into an advisor, if possible.

Trauma therapy has existed for thousands of years in the form of shamanism. Eduardo Duran [10] combines Western psychology with traditional indigenous healing; he describes clients visited by the spirit of alcohol, or the spirit of suicide, for example, and trauma is framed as a soul wound. Concerning stressful reactions in general, our legacy as social primates entails that watching another one being threatened or hurt is stressful in itself. Conversely, reaching out to others in a difficult situation, either to help them or to be helped, is relieving according to Kelly McGonigal [27].

3.2 Experiencing trauma reactions and flashbacks

Speaking diagnostically, I believe the experience in Frankfurt resulted in an acute stress reaction, possibly followed by a mild form of PTSD. On that Monday I had seen the child in the air, his severed hand under the train, and the dead body next to the train. And I learned that this had not been an accident, but a murder. Then I heard the mother cry out in agony. Probably witnessing what happened both to the child and to his mother was directly traumatic; this is somehow intermediate between witnessing violence and seeing an injured person. In several books, I have not seen any discussion of defense reactions in the case of witnessing violence, but it seems appropriate to label my reaction as a fight response, since I moved toward the place of danger. I am unsure, whether this fight reaction remained incomplete in the sense of Levine [25] [26], but I believe it did not turn into a freeze response. So why did I develop trauma at all? Probably the horror I felt contributed to this process, horror about the child in the air, the injuries, and most of all when I heard the mother cry out [11]. – So here is a description and interpretation of my various trauma reactions:

In the days after the incident, my thoughts and feelings circled around it most of the time. Sometimes I wondered, whether I should stop this, and I did not try to. I am not sure, in how far I could have stopped it, or whether ruminating was compulsive.

On Monday evening, when potato chips and bear-shaped jelly fruits got broken, the image of the boy's dead body flashed up in my mind. I felt shocked for a moment, and also curious: so this is what a flashback is like. And I took it as a confirmation, that I had experienced trauma.

On Tuesday, we made a long walk around the mountaintop at Thurner, as pictured below. For several hours, I constantly saw the boy lying on the ground on my left hand side. He moved in parallel as I walked straight ahead; I do not remember what happened when I turned around. This unusual perception felt like confirming a deep connection with the boy: I honored him by taking him with me, and he accepted me by being with me. I also did not expect this altered state to be permanent; if it had lasted for weeks, I would have sought specific therapeutic help, like eye movement desensitization and reprocessing. Probably the image was on my left hand side, because this side is represented in the right hemisphere of the brain, which is more intuitive and imaginative; according to [39], brain scans show increased activity in the right hemisphere during flashbacks.



A week later, in a restaurant, at one point the cook poked his hand through the kitchen's door frame. As I saw the isolated hand in a white rubber glove, the image of the boy's pale hand lying under the train popped up in my mind; for a moment I felt shocked and threatened.

A few weeks afterward, on the first day in school, I saw a colleague at the paper guillotine. She asked "Hi Wolf, did you enjoy the summer break?" At the same time, she cut a stack of paper sheets with a fast and forceful motion, making a banging sound. "Did you regenerate well?" Another cut, another bang. I felt threatened and stared in horror. Noticing this, she asked whether I had feared her to cut her fingers. This time, I did not have any explicit memories or images, only a feeling came up. I believe the trigger was not so much the sharp blade, but the forceful movement. – By way of contrast: Some weeks later, a few students and I waited on a platform in Cologne central station,

and I asked a student to step back from the edge. But I did not feel threatened at all, when another student laughingly made a gesture alluding to push the former student. I knew she was only joking.

Unlike some other witnesses [15] [18], I never felt unsafe in a train or on a platform after the incident in Frankfurt. I often think about it and look at incoming ICE trains with curiosity, but I do not feel threatened. However, in the summer of 2020, when my partner and I were on a train from Aschaffenburg to Cologne, I suddenly realized that we had made a stop in Frankfurt main station, on track 7. I looked around, feeling touched, and then I noticed I was breaking out in a cold sweat.

3.3 Working with the traumatic experience and recovering from it

Right after the incident on Monday, as our train departed from Frankfurt, I walked through the train from front to back and then phoned the training therapist, getting some initial relief from his compassionate listening. On Tuesday I texted a few friends, relatives, and fellow students, and spoke to some of them on the phone. I noticed a completely new attitude toward community: until then I had been afraid that I would be giving up responsibility for myself, if I relied too much on the help of others. Now this did not seem like a contradiction anymore. I felt completely responsible for myself, and at the same time, I felt assured that I did not have to walk the path alone.

On Tuesday evening, I went to a clearing in a small wood on the outskirts of Hinterzarten, to work on my experiences. *I had planned to do a kind of constellation work, see below, and started by asking the trees for protection. The work turned out differently: I walked through various positions, as I had walked around the train on Monday. Remembered my observations, actions, and feelings. Spoke them out loud. And I cried a lot. This felt immensely relieving.*

On Wednesday, I did the constellation work and found two inner figures, one powerful in a shocking way, and a loving one. A detailed description is given in the following Section 3.4.

On Thursday, my partner and I made a walk through the Ravenna Gorge. I sat on a boulder in the middle of the stream, as pictured below, where I used to meditate. Water helps to regulate my feelings: at a lake I get calm or meditative, and I imagine a river can take things with it. *So in a spontaneous ritual, I felt the force of the water with my hands, addressed the Ravenna stream, “you have cut this gorge into the mountain, you flow into the ocean ...,” and asked it to take ... what? ... with it. I noticed that I was unclear and unsure, what I wanted to get rid off. I wanted to retain my memories, being touched, and what I had learned already. I did not want to be suffering or to ruminate compulsively for a long time. After short deliberation, I asked the river to help me transform the experience, to take away the grave aspects of the situation. I got up, pointed with my arms, and felt connected to the water flowing.* – I felt good about being connected to nature, and at the same time I criticized myself for being unclear in the middle of the ritual.

On Friday, I had a session with the training therapist on the phone. I told him about the incident in greater detail, and what I had done and experienced throughout the week. At one point I asked why his voice was so low, and he said that he had taken off the headset to dry his tears. We were both touched deeply. Peter shared that he had cried on Monday and dreamed about the incident, and he spoke of his own past trauma.

Since that day, I have been happier again and thought of other things as well. Only for one day, on the following Friday, I ruminated with self-blame: Usually I believe that I am observant of my surroundings, but I had not noticed the perpetrator hiding nervously between the pillars on the plat-

form. And I had looked for the child in all the wrong places. If I had found him immediately, I might have stopped the bleeding, or at least blessed him. See also Section 5.2.



At this time, I did have some training in Processwork, but I did not know anything about trauma. With hindsight, I believe it was good to share the experience with other people, to observe my thoughts and feelings, and to seek solace in nature. I might have done more bodywork to ground myself and to access feelings better, and I should have run a few kilometers on Monday evening.

Now almost two years have passed. Writing this paper, I think a lot about the incident in Frankfurt, usually not so much in a compulsive way. I am still touched by the boy's death and his family's suffering. The feelings are deepened by sensing my body. Working through my much less severe trauma, I have found some relief, and also some empowerment, see Section 3.6, and a deepened sense of compassion, see Section 4.4. We have worked on these aspects in several training therapy sessions, as well as on altered states and various inner figures, and on self-blame. After the trial, questions of speaking about my experiences privately and publicly became more and more obvious, see Section 5. Writing this paper is part of the process.

In 2020, I attended four Processwork seminars on trauma as well: two at the Institut für Prozessarbeit Deutschland, and two by Lane Arye [2]. These seminars happened online due to the pandemic, and for reasons of safety, participants were asked to work on mild traumas. Nevertheless I did a few of the exercises on the experiences in Frankfurt, for instance the "earth-spot" innerwork. The aim is to identify more with the wise mind, less with the traumatized part: *I recall the feeling of dismay, and being overwhelmed. I go to a favorite spot, sense it, become one with it. A Koala*

appears, munching its Eucalyptus leaves. It tells the traumatized part to go step by step, thinking only of the next move. I relax a bit about wanting to understand and to solve everything at once.

3.4 A constellation work

After discussing some theoretical and practical aspects, the actual innerwork is described, and followed with some remarks on its interpretation and ethical issues. In Processwork, different roles in a group, or different processes in a client, can be represented by different persons: for example, participants in a seminar, or therapist and client in a session. Or you can do it by yourself in an innerwork, switching between different positions in the room. The persons express both their ideas and their feelings, sense their bodies, and may interact in movement. They speak from their actual personal perspective, or try to feel into a role, or find a part of that role within themselves and go from there to be more authentic. So a person is bigger than a role, and also the role is bigger than a person. In a group process, participants may swap positions to explore different roles, or when their feelings have changed. In a conflict work, it is a good idea to express one's own side fully, and then to open up organically for seeing the other side, instead of looking for a compromise too early.

So on Wednesday evening I tried to sort through the horrific experiences by doing an innerwork, which was influenced both by earlier ideas from family constellation work, and by recent training in facilitating a group process. I stood in different positions in the wood corresponding to different persons, sensed my body and emotions, and spoke spontaneously without much deliberation. I tried to be in a dual state of awareness, on the one hand immersing into the experience, on the other hand being present and recording the process from a detached viewpoint.

I walk back to the clearing and ask the trees for protection. Not sensing any answer, for the first time in my life I feel alone while being among trees. A crow is calling. I hear a gunshot in the distance. Feeling unsafe, I consider to abandon the work, postpone it to the training therapy session. Touching a few trees, I get the idea: life is not simply good, it is a cycle of becoming and passing, and a struggle. I think of my teachers and fellow students, and feel supported enough to continue.

- *The first position: I am hate, absolute destruction.*
- *I am lost completely, wonder what would be a complementary position, do not have any idea.*
- *The child: I am a child, play a lot, like to be in school. There is a whole life before me, I will experience so many things ... no, I am dead now.*
- *The mother: My child is dead. From one moment to the next ...*
- *Witnesses: A child was killed. So suddenly, such a meaningless act ...*
- *The ICE train: I transport passengers, many passengers, transport them safely, but whoever gets in my way, will die.*
- *The perpetrator: I hold power over life and death, absolute power, I decide who may live and who must die.*
- *And then another position comes up, surprising me:*
- *I am divine love, connected to everything, and everything has its place ... Blessing the child and the mother by laying my hands on their heads ... feel compassion for the perpetrator as well ...*
- *The perpetrator kneels down, acknowledges his immense guilt, breaks down in despair, promises to hold the memory and responsibility for the rest of his life.*
- *The role of witnesses, and I personally, feel connected to divine love and sense its healing energy.*

The constellation work is closed by thanking the trees and the world at large. I walk back to our rented apartment with a sense of connectedness, and with a grave feeling as well.

So two complementary figures came out of this work, one with a horrifying form of power, and another one with a supreme form of love. These will be considered further in Sections 3.6 and 4.4. Castaneda has introduced the concept of an ally [7], which was reinterpreted by Mindell [30]. Later on I shall explore these inner figures as my allies and as complementary archetypes. The figure of the killer is shocking to remember for me, and probably shocking for the reader. Well, I did not plan to witness an actual murder, and I did not plan to encounter this figure. Nevertheless life confronted me with this experience and I feel challenged to deal with it and to learn from it.

When a constellation work is done in systemic family therapy, it is assumed that the family system of the client may be healed and secrets may be discovered. In Processwork, a group process or a constellation work is used to become more conscious of what is happening in the moment, or what is trying to happen. I do not believe that the above work had any healing influence on the mother, nor did it elucidate what the actual perpetrator felt: was it power, fear, envy, rage? The aim of the constellation work was solely to understand what was going on inside of me after witnessing the incident. Although we have shared a short intense moment, the information I received from registering signals of the other persons is probably too little, and anyway I do not have their consent or mandate to explore their process. – To illustrate this point with a less charged example, consider working on a conflict between two partners A and B. Partner A may work on this conflict alone or with a therapist, to prepare for an actual encounter with B, or if B does not agree to work on the conflict. Then the idea is that A shall become more conscious about their own process, their edges and unconscious rank, and what they project onto B, that is, what do they see in B that they need to see as a part of themselves. The aim is not to analyze the unconsciousness of B or to manipulate them in any way. Experience tells that most of the time, A and B have shared edges or complementary edges, so any relevant role can be found in either person. The conflict shall be transformed when A brings more consciousness into the common field.

3.5 Nighttime dreams

Usually I remember and write down fragments of my dreams. On the day after the incident I dreamed of two balls being destroyed; I believe this referred to an illustration of Earth Overshoot Day in the news and not to the horrific incident in Frankfurt. On the following days, I did not remember my dreams at all, or forgot them right after waking up. Only ten days afterward I dreamed of people standing around a train, and from time to time I had dreams that seemed to refer to Frankfurt: a train derails and bursts up in flames, a woman tells that she still remembers images from the incident.

I wonder why I did not dream more and immediately of the traumatic experiences, or why I did not remember the dreams. Generally I believe that dreams can be helpful to come to terms with difficult feelings. So, was this experience too strong to be handled in dreams? Or was it stored in different parts of the brain, hardly accessible to the parts making dreams? Or did I dream of the incident and forget it immediately?

Dreams of Frankfurt became more frequent again after my testimony before the court in August 2020. Over these two years I remember only one dream where a person was killed by a train, which came in November 2020. And there are a few dreams referring to compassion, which are discussed in Section 4.4.

In a training seminar and under supervision, a fellow student worked with me on a dream of January 2021: “A few pupils and I board a two-part railcar. I am unsure, whether these are my students and I am responsible for them. The train driver or conductor is not on board, but he stands at a dis-

tance on the tracks and waves his hands, because the brakes are off and the train starts to move by itself. I get up immediately to walk to the driver's cabin and pull the brakes. But an old lady and two other people get up as well, blocking the aisle. I give up and sit down again."

In the session I tell the dream and illustrate the train's movement by thrusting my right hand forward. I say that I am interested in this dream because of associations to the incident in Frankfurt: there is a train, the energy of taking the initiative, and a person on the tracks. I break out in a cold sweat, which I take as a confirmation: this is about Frankfurt.

At one point during this work the trainee facilitator confers with the supervisor, and noticing that the work is recorded on Zoom, I interrupt them to ask why.

As the session is resumed, there is a strong cramp in my upper right back, which feels like a piece of steel rail within my body. Repeating the thrusting motion more energetically, I imagine the train to start rolling forward. I am the train and the tracks at the same time. Supported by the facilitator, I intensify the movement, add sound, sense the unstoppable power of movement and the coldness of the tracks. At one point I ask the facilitator to slow down, to make fewer interventions.

Then I know abstractly that a person has been overrun, I am somehow touched and confused.

We return to sensing my power, wondering about its meaning and its essence. I remember that restraining my energy is connected to difficult childhood experiences. The facilitator remarks that I have restrained them in asking about the recording and slowing down his interventions, and notices me smiling. I feel superior for a moment, and then I look at him more directly: both of us feel good when I am more present energetically in our relationship as client and facilitator, he trusts me to stop him if necessary, we are both strong.

Arnold Mindell once said that he believes in the interpretation of a dream only, if he can see it happen in the moment. Here the power of the moving train is found in my interaction with the facilitator. The supervisor remarked that overrunning a person is part of my conscious associations to Frankfurt, and not necessarily found in this dream. I was not convinced, until I remembered my confusion at this point. My power is related to taking the initiative at the beginning and to the motion of the train; this energy is productive, when it is freed from negative judgments and feelings. The restraint is seen in the dream as well. And the train starts to roll after the driver has got out.

3.6 Finding my power

Since childhood days I found it hard to express what I want and to go for it, to assert myself and to defend my boundaries. As a young adult, I would not show a friend when I felt hurt, and I started to write many papers on mathematics, which I have not finished. At the same time, I was fascinated by martial arts, enjoyed watching action movies, and I liked Castaneda's concept of a warrior [7]: to feel responsible for my decisions and for what happens to me, to take every problem as a challenge.

Frequently I felt unsafe when meeting a group of loud men in the street, suspecting them to be violent. So I did not feel able to assert myself in a conflict, and this is also a projection: a secondary part of me wanted to be loud and assertive, but I feared that this would be hurtful.

Over the years, I have started to express more directly what I want and what I do not want, with colleagues and in private relationships. Working as a teacher was healing in two ways: on the one hand, I am supported by having a high contextual rank, and on the other hand, I am challenged to be authentic in the position of authority, because otherwise the students occupy the leading role. And in

Processwork seminars, I have learned about conflict work and experienced empowering figures again and again; for example, I turned into powerful animals and into a Native American warrior – or the romanticized image appropriated by Western writers like Karl May.

The powerful figure need not be romantic. I also turned into a sadistic prison director from a dream, into a volcano, and into Covid: In a training therapy session, *after recalling my worries about the split occurring in society and the ever-changing rules in school, feeling helpless and overwhelmed, I took the role of the pandemic itself, asserting its destructive power, penetrating every place. This evolved into a feeling of being connected to everything, which I let sink in and felt empowered.* Often in Processwork, exploring a disturbing figure yields an unexpected helpful quality. This quality is in general easier to integrate, when it is a non-polarizing essence; for example, a destructive force turns into a drive to be direct and to express oneself. Conversely, when a helpful quality is repressed, it may turn into a frightening figure.

In a seminar of 2019, *I was a hyena asserting its α -position in the pack: a fellow student and I were fighting by pushing against each other with the top of our heads. At some point she expressed feeling pain, and I instinctively stopped pushing.* This means that I do not need to be afraid of hurting others by being more assertive. More and more I understand that a relationship works best when all parties feel strong, acknowledging their rank and expressing directly what they want.

And I believe the experience in Frankfurt, horrific as it was, also contributed to empowerment: I started to act immediately and confidently, when I looked for the child and even tried to tell the conductors what to do. Although I was in an altered state of shock and fight response, having taken the initiative courageously is a kind of model for living with a more direct access to my power. This view is supported by the dream work described in the previous Section 3.5.

Even a horrific figure may be explored in Processwork. For example, a client dying of cancer may take the role of the tumor, and Arnold Mindell once stepped into the figure of Hitler [37]. In a reconciliation work in Rwanda, a breakthrough came about when Arlene Audergon spoke from the perspective of inciting genocide [3]. – For two years I have been unsure about the role of the perpetrator: On the one hand, I believe that healing trauma may involve exploring this energy; on the other hand, the idea felt too shocking. Although both Hitler and Covid have killed millions of people, this feels abstract compared to the murder of a single child, which happened a few meters away from me. But in a recent training therapy session, I stepped into the inner figure of a powerful killer, which has appeared in the constellation work according to Section 3.4. This is still quite shocking, and may be hard to read; although I am not a killer and I am not trying to represent the actual perpetrator, this inner figure came up after I witnessed an actual murder:

So after some hesitation, and recalling the constellation work, I step forward and repeat: “I hold power over life and death, absolute power, I decide who may live and who must die.” I break out into a cold sweat. The training therapist and I repeat the sentence, trying to find its essence. It turns into “I decide, and nothing can stop me.” I notice that my upper torso is breathing in addition to my diaphragm, I am big with broad shoulders. “I decide and then act accordingly. I know what is right for me and good. – I remember that as a child, I was not asked what I wanted and whether I agreed. I need to get rid of a part of myself that does not see my decisions. By taking my side fully, I can be in a real relationship and acknowledge the other’s side, without repressing anyone.

So after all, the essence of a horrific inner figure turned out to be non-violent. It can be destructive only when it remains unconscious. Still there is work to do, to find out how to bring this energy in, and getting out of the grip of partly unconscious, traumatic experiences. See also Section 5.4 for empowerment regarding speaking and writing.

4 Finding compassion

Here some general notions and ideas around compassion are discussed, and my own struggle for compassion and self-compassion is described and related to the experiences in Frankfurt.

Before starting to write this section, looking at the full moon in a clear nighttime sky, I feel connected and detached at the same time.

4.1 Empathy and compassion

In everyday German, the words “Mitfühlen”, “Mitgefühl”, and “Mitleid” are used imprecisely, with overlapping meaning. Maybe the same is true for everyday use of the corresponding words in English: empathy, compassion, and sympathy. Empathy means to recognize what someone else is feeling, and it usually involves feeling with them to some degree. The recognition may come from common knowledge, for example that people suffer when they experience bereavement, physical pain, job loss, or go through a divorce. And it comes from an intuitive understanding of body signals, the observation of which can be made explicit and trained. In my experience, the capacity for empathy may be reduced by stress, hurry, angry mood, feeling let down, and fear. Moreover, a position of high rank and power may contribute to a trance of diminished empathy [9], if you are not aware of this tendency.

Several definitions of compassion are found on the website [38] of Stanford CCARE, the Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education. Generally, it involves the following aspects:

- You recognize that a person is suffering and feel touched by it. You join them in their feelings to some degree, but retain a somewhat detached position at the same time; you are not overwhelmed but keep the ability to assess the situation and to act appropriately.
- You wish to see this suffering relieved and show a readiness or responsiveness to act; you support the person to cope with a difficult experience, which may be meaningful in their overall process. By way of contrast, in sympathy you feel pressed to fix it for them because you cannot bear it yourself, or you consider the person suffering as a helpless victim stripped of their responsibility and dignity.

Helpful action may entail anything from tending to a wound, feeding the poor, to social activism. Compassionate listening has healing power already. You support the person by listening with fully accepting the feelings shown, not wishing to make them go away by premature consoling or advice, assure her or him that you are here as long as it takes with full attention and without judging. Compassion entails a recognition of common humanity: everyone wants to be free from suffering. It is probably a key concept in every religion, in particular in Mahayana Buddhism [24].

According to neurobiological research on compassion meditation, the frontal and motor cortex is activated, which enables you to make distinctions and to draw boundaries, while being ready for action and responsive. By contrast, empathy activates the limbic system, and you may become burned out from being overwhelmed by joining too deeply in feelings of suffering. Compassion is rather energizing according to McGonigal [4] [27]; compassion fatigue in helping professions comes from a lack of regeneration, struggle with bureaucracy and being underfunded, and from moral distress due to acknowledging what harm people do to each other.

4.2 Self-compassion and therapy

When a person makes an error, does not succeed in meeting a goal, fails their moral or professional standards, a frequent reaction is to put themselves down with a harsh, judgmental, condemning criticism. In Processwork terms, they are victimized by an inner critic, probably siding and identifying with it. According to the Buddhist *Sallattha Sutta*, the first arrow is pain from a real misfortune, the second arrow is suffering from related self-criticism. As Seneca wrote to Lucilius (78:13): “But do not of your own accord make your troubles heavier to bear and burden yourself with complaining. Pain is slight if opinion has added nothing to it; [...] It is according to opinion that we suffer.” – Self-compassion is an attitude, capacity, and practice of loving kindness toward oneself. You experience your shortcomings as an aspect of common humanity, you do not need to be perfect, and you are not special and isolated in this. Moreover, painful thoughts and feelings are regarded from a somewhat detached position according to Kristin Neff [34].

Your belief system may be wary of developing self-compassion: I do not deserve it, I will not change when I am compassionate with myself, I must be accountable [6]. Allowing your own failings, and hurtful behavior of others, here means you accept the fact that the world is what it is. You decide to change without condemning yourself, and you protect your boundaries without condemning others. As Carl Rogers put it, “the more I accept myself just as I am, the more I can change.” Self-compassion provides care and safety as a basis for change and growth, while judgment provokes a rebellion against change. In neurobiological terms, the brain tends to remember a new pattern of action more, if that feels safe and comfortable. Moshe Feldenkrais [12] [13] has illustrated this principle with the way infants learn to move: by trying out many different kinds of movement playfully, more effective movements are found without feeling under pressure. In Feldenkrais work, participants re-access this way of learning by making variations of small, slow movements and noting how they feel.

Tara Brach [4] [6] teaches the practice of RAIN for dealing with difficult feelings; the acronym means Recognize, Allow, Investigate, Nurture. Self-compassion is related to mindfulness, being present without judgment with what is happening right now. She explains how problems arise from defense mechanisms against feeling some deep pain. By allowing yourself to feel the pain, you can liberate yourself from the restrictions by defense mechanisms, and develop a courageous non-defending heart.

In Processwork, arising self-criticism is perceived as a negative, mostly hurtful message by an inner dreamfigure called the critic. Identifying the inner voice as a critic is a first step to acknowledge that the message is not necessarily beneficial or true; the client is free to explore this and to decide, how much they want to listen to the criticism and to form their own opinion about it. In an innerwork or in a role-play with the facilitator, the message of the critic is amplified and often the client fights against it, for example by wrestling with the facilitator. Besides protecting against the critic and sending it away for now, the work may include a long-term process of negotiation and transformation, which turns the critic into an advisor providing greater awareness.

Training programs for compassion and self-compassion are available. For example CCT, the Compassion Cultivation Training, was developed by Thupten Jinpa in collaboration with Stanford CCARE: <https://www.compassioninstitute.com/the-program/compassion-cultivation-training/> . It is described in [19], and references to evaluating studies are given. The program includes theoretical input, exchange in small groups, guided meditations, and instructions for a daily practice in each

week. Compassion progresses from loved ones, to oneself, to other people and living beings. The MSC program, Mindful Self-Compassion, was developed by Kristin Neff and Chris Germer: <https://centerformsc.org/train-msc/> .

For many people, self-compassion is much harder to access than compassion with others. Maybe this is related to the fact that we have observed our own failings so many times before and suffered from the consequences. In her video talk at the summit [4], Kelly McGonigal explained that: all instincts and hormones are concerning relationships, when you are strong and witness suffering outside of yourself. When you are in the middle of your own suffering, it is very hard to activate that instinct. So you invoke sadness, grief, depression, shame, or self-criticism instead. – Therefore CCT practices compassion with a loved one before strengthening self-compassion.

In therapy, compassionate listening and compassionate interventions by the therapist are crucial. This creates an atmosphere of trust and openness, the client may access their feelings more easily and engage better in the relationship. The therapist trusts in the client's process, and believes that the momentary suffering may be meaningful for the client's growth. Amy Mindell [28] explains that compassion with all parts is needed; the therapist shall not be hypnotized by the primary process and side with it, but support secondary, often disturbing, processes with compassion as well.

Maybe the most important aspect is: by showing compassion, the therapist models self-compassion for the client, the client learns to view their parts with more openness and less criticism. By increasing their capacity for self-compassion, the client feels better and grows more at the same time. However, clients with traumatic experiences and attachment issues, for example if they have been abused by a supposed caregiver, may misread compassion or feel threatened by it, which requires extra care and compassion; this was discussed in talks by McGonigal and Germer at [4].

4.3 My own struggle with compassion

When I was about nine years old, I did not feel seen and receiving compassion in the areas where I needed it, and at one point I decided not to cry ever again. As a teenager, I believed my decisions were based on rational thinking, and I tried to ignore my feelings and pretended not to read the feelings of others. I was comfortable in nature, mourned every fallen tree, and saved rain worms from puddles of water. I was less comfortable dealing with people, for example in situations where I was supposed to help someone in need. I was too shy to approach them, I was unsure whether I felt empathic with their suffering and how to express this, and I wondered whether there was something wrong on my part, or whether the idea of joining feelings was wrong. Moreover, I imagined that I should say something to console them and stop their weeping as fast as possible. I did not know about the concept of compassion, and I had a vague criticism of the concept of sympathy: it may include seeing someone as a helpless victim, denying their dignity and capacity to help themselves.

As a young adult, I had rare moments of empathy, when someone told of a suffering I could relate to from personal experience. Also I felt with a few inanimate things: when a driver mis-shifted, I cringed upon hearing the grinding of gearwheels in the transmission; when a car was parked such that only a small part of a tire was supported on the kerb, this seemed painful to me. I opened up to look into the eyes of people I met on the sidewalk, and wondered why they did not look back in general. In my friendships I had a deeper sense of connection and acceptance, which I had not known before. Feldenkrais work taught me to move more spontaneously and to enjoy it. I became

interested in psychology and wanted to open up to feeling emotions; I felt satisfied having wet eyes at the end of a movie.

When I read about the concept of compassion, I was surprised that it did not seem to be widely known, and I felt support for my former uneasiness with the notion of sympathy. I learned that in general it is not welcome to give premature advice instead of listening. Still I was judgmental toward other people, especially when they represented a shadow aspect of myself, and I gradually accepted more kinds of people. One afternoon several years back, I sat on the marketplace for an hour and had a kind, non-judgmental attitude toward every person going by. More and more I refrained from killing mosquitoes, blowing them away or catching them alive instead.

Until recently I did not accept myself as I am. I noted the contrast to accepting other people, but I was in a circle of wanting to change, not changing enough, and putting myself down for this. For example, I have started to write several papers on mathematics, and most of these remained incomplete and unpublished: through Processwork seminars and individual therapy, I learned about myself and opened up in many ways, and found many ideas to overcome the procrastination of writing. But most of the time I could not bring these into practice; I constantly put myself under pressure, believing that it should be easy and straightforward to write – which is part of the problem.

4.4 Finding my compassion

In recent years, I am less judgmental toward other people, in particular toward my students in school, and toward my clients in training as a facilitator. When someone speaks about a painful experience, I am not touched automatically; I feel with them if I notice bodily signals of suffering, or when I put a hand on my heart to connect more with my own body and feelings. And usually I can be detached at the same time, I do not feel uncomfortable being with someone weeping, I do not need to fix it. Maybe once or twice a year I lose the detached viewpoint and feel helpless about the life situation of a student. As a facilitator, I aim at supporting all parts, but I may be hypnotized by the primary process and side with it inadvertently. I am unsure how I want to deal with reading the news in the long term: I do not want to be unmoved by the many forms of suffering, and at the same time I do not want to be overwhelmed at the discretion of the editor. And I still like to watch action movies, unless there is too much blood.

So for me, the biggest challenge in compassion is not to avoid being overwhelmed, but to feel with the person. After witnessing the incident in Frankfurt, I used to believe that I had experienced deep compassion immediately, but with hindsight it was more of a shock, horror, and then empathy. Nevertheless, this experience has motivated me to be more conscious of compassion and to cultivate it. Already in the train from Frankfurt to Freiburg, I had felt strong love and interest for my fellow human beings; witnessing deep suffering was horrific, and it also opened me up to my feelings. A few dreams, and working on the inner figure of divine love, confirmed the connection between compassion and the incident in my mind.

In one dream, a baby was in danger of falling off the bus, and I was unsure about when and how to intervene. A few days after making the statement in the trial, I dreamed of water gushing from a broken pipe in the wall, and trying to stop it by pressing my thumb against the opening. Probably this referred to my renewed idea, that I could have saved the boy from dying, if I had found him earlier and stopped the gushing blood. A few months ago I had the following dreams: “A child

wants to visit a playground in the Eifel mountain range, and I provide a necessary permit. – I walk along a stream with a child, holding his hand in mine, thinking that I need to protect him. There is a small replica of a water mill, which I start up to turn. An older relative of mine comes by and we have a discussion.” In a brief dream work during a seminar, *I felt touched by the association with the Ravenna stream (see p. 16). The fellow participant facilitating my work suggested that I had enabled the water to flow through the mill, which may symbolize emotions. On the other hand, the relative is more detached, rational, and critical from my perspective.*

In a recent training therapy session, *I recalled how I love to look into the deep blue sky contrasted by yellow flowers of a Forsythia shrub, and that these days I rarely took the time to do so. Now I visualize this and become quiet inside. I feel connected to and conscious of the space in front of me, which expands to a big ball around me, and to the whole universe. I hear a pigeon coo outside; I used to strongly dislike this sound, but now I do not feel disturbed at all. A bee flies through the open window into my room, and I welcome it happily.*

In this session I want to deepen my experience of the inner figure of divine love, which has appeared in the constellation work described in Section 3.4. I recall how I moved and spoke spontaneously, following my impulses, and how the figure arose unexpectedly. Now the feeling is similar to the work above; I visualize a landscape with hills of different sizes, which are just there without being rated and compared to each other.

I can appreciate individual hills as well as the whole of the landscape, feel connected to it. The pigeon is cooing again and there are people talking outside, which does not bother me at all. The training therapist suggests that the figure of divine love was needed badly after the traumatic experience; the state of present awareness lays the ground for dealing with difficult things, finding compassion, and healing.

And what about self-compassion? For a long time I have had an open and curious attitude toward myself, I enjoy discovering new aspects of my process in general, and I am able to laugh about myself. At the same time I used to criticize myself and to put myself under pressure, for example about not being able to overcome procrastination. The process toward unconditional self-love proceeded slowly. It was supported by working as a teacher: not feeling ashamed when being seen by the students, and being liked and accepted by students in general. In Processwork training and therapy I dealt with inner critics again and again, and the training therapist modeled self-compassion by being compassionate; whenever I complained about not having written what I planned to write, he acknowledged the pain and also supported and explored the side that failed or refused to write.



A turning point came about after a training therapy session in December 2020: we had discussed ways to reflect on my experiences, and I walked through the town and formulated a few questions to structure these reflections, including also the topic of compassion within a session. At one point I realized that now I am able and willing to regard myself with loving curiosity and kindness.

In a recent session we explored my blockage in writing the present paper, *and I accessed a deep state of pain, which felt as a lonely infant, invoking my compassion. When I tried to embody an adult part looking at the young part from a distance, this did not feel right; rather than imagining two figures, I feel that I am lonely in part and I am compassionate toward myself.*

Afterward I was able to feel compassion toward my parents' traumatic childhood experiences as well; I imagined my father as a young boy, fearing to be killed as Red Army tanks approached his home town in Silesia. And I imagined my mother as a teenager, being buried in rubble, as an aerial bomb exploded in their apartment in Berlin and killed her father.

5 Bringing it into relationships

For some time I found it very hard to speak about the traumatic incident and what came out of it; I am learning to speak about compassion, and to rely on compassion to speak.

5.1 Talking about the incident

During the two weeks in Hinterzarten, in our vacation following the horrific incident, I spoke on the phone to the training therapist and to several friends, relatives, and fellow students. When I came back to Aachen, I spoke to no one else about my experiences. I had wondered whether I was going to have flashbacks in lessons, and had imagined to talk to colleagues in school, but I did not. Somehow I waited for someone else to bring up the topic from the news, and I would not. – Here are some of my concerns and inner critics, as well as interpretations and answers found by working on them:

- I was afraid to be seen as boasting about having witnessed a highly publicized incident. This means that I have a secondary part of myself, which needs desperately to share experiences more and to be seen more, and to be perceived as important; see also Section 5.4.
- I feared to be judged for learning from the agony of fellow human beings. So in part I judge myself for this. And I can answer that I am deeply touched by what happened to the boy and his family, and I honor his memory. I did not choose to be there, so I am doing the best I can, to take care of myself, to heal and transform from this experience instead of suffering. And by learning to be a more compassionate teacher, I give back a small contribution to making the world a safer and healthier place; see Section 5.5.
- I wanted to describe the incident in a way touching the person I share my experiences with, at the same time fearing them to be overwhelmed with empathy. This is caring somehow, but it can be somewhat patronizing and viewing myself in a superior position. Instead, I want to focus on the relationship, observing both my feelings and the other person's feedback.

- And I feared people to become protective, feeling responsible for me, not wanting to remind me of the experience. So maybe I need to be more caring with myself also? – In writing this paper, I have seen again and again that working on the traumatic experience is not finished; at times I noticed writing from a greater distance than expected, at times I consciously tried to go deeper into the feelings, at times I noticed that I need more grounding for this. – In a conversation, if either I feel protective for the other person, or vice versa, we probably need to go slower and both of us need to care more for our feelings.

There are more levels to these considerations: I feel shy to speak in an open social situation in general, and feel more comfortable to speak in small groups of friends, or in the contextual role of a teacher or presenter, or in a seminar. And beyond the personal level, I believe there is a kind of collective edge against speaking of the reality and prevalence of trauma, the need to reduce violence and to work with traumatized people; see also Section 5.3.

Moreover, a fellow student had suggested that trauma may be connected to shame. At first I did not see how this applies to me, because I had not been victimized and overpowered, but then I realized that I do feel ashamed in the context of the edges described above. Well, maybe the best way to deal with shame is to speak or write about it openly, not following its impetus to hide.

When I prepared the presentation for a Processwork seminar in 2019, the training therapist suggested that while speaking, I should be aware of the relationship to the other participants, be compassionate with them and with myself. And in this case I managed to be connected to my own feelings, and at the same time to notice that some of my fellow students did not feel well. After a more recent presentation of the present paper, I realized that the considerations above can be helpful to be more aware and to protect others from possible secondary traumatizations, as well as protecting myself from being seen as either helpless or disturbing. – Here are a few ideas for the future:

- I shall not try to bring up the incident in small talk. When, for example, a discussion turns to topics like trauma, empowerment, or compassion, I can speak about it.
- Then I will focus on these topics and not on the incident itself.
- I shall take care of my own feelings and observe the other person's feedback.
- I can go deeper only step by step, as long as there is positive feedback.
- And if any of these ideas fails in practice, I shall be compassionate with myself.

Writing the present paper and putting it online is a step toward sharing my experiences with more people as well. At the same time, having people read it is not the same thing as a personal encounter, and it does not automatically make it easier for me to speak openly.

5.2 Giving testimony before the court

In August 2020, on the first day of school, I was sitting in my favorite cafe, when I received an unexpected call: a lady from the state court in Frankfurt informed me that I was summoned to testify before the court on August 20. Apparently my postal address had been messed up in handwriting, so the letter arrived later. I thought a lot about the incident again, and hoped not to be retraumatized. With special leave from school, I took the ICE train from Aachen to Frankfurt, reading my diary of July and August 2019 on the way. I went to platform 7 and was surprised that it felt quite narrow. In the court I was searched thoroughly for weapons and waited in a corridor, sitting on a bench with two other witnesses, probably police officers, and a photographer from a news agency.

In the hearing room I stated my profession as teaching mathematics and physics, and the judge joked that this brought back bad memories from school. I had planned to ask whether there were relatives of the dead boy in the room, and whether the perpetrator was able to understand things with his current state of mind and medication, but I did not. I spoke about the events in the train station in a rather distanced way, not feeling the horror in the moment. And I spoke about my flashbacks and my innerwork in the first week after the incident. The psychiatric expert asked why I believed the perpetrator had been confused, which reminded me of Processwork: provide sensory-grounded information instead of an interpretation. The old lady, who had been pushed to the ground, asked whether I had seen her on the platform, and we disagreed about whether I had been in segment E or F. And someone asked if I knew, whether the mother had seen her dead child. I was surprised that I had not wondered about this myself, and why they did not ask the mother directly; slowly I realized that the mother had been unable to speak about this for a year [5] [15] [23].

On the following day, in another cafe in Aachen, I leafed through the local section of a newspaper, something I do very rarely. I noticed a small article on a teacher from Aachen giving testimony in Frankfurt [1]. At first I wondered whether there had been a reporter from Aachen in the court; later I understood that there was a longer article by a news agency in the background. And I had conflicting feelings, a part that wanted and enjoyed to be seen, and a part that did not want to have a detailed description of my flashbacks in the newspaper. Moreover I wondered, whether colleagues or students would guess the identity of the witness from my age and the fact that I had been absent from school the day before.

In the evening I searched for newspapers online and found a few more extensive articles [16] [17] [18]; the latter remarked that I had spoken from a “seemingly cold distance.” In the days following I received further information [5] [15] [23], which made me feel more with the boy’s family, especially the mother. And I felt with the train driver, who had seen the boy fall onto the tracks a few meters before the train, at the same time knowing that there was no way to stop the train in time, and who had looked into the boy’s eyes. The perpetrator was convicted of murder, as opposed to manslaughter, and found not to be criminally responsible; he was confined to a psychiatric clinic. I felt with his family as well, who were facing a push off from Switzerland to Eritrea. I started to draw scenes from my own experiences and from my imagination, but did not pursue this.

And I had renewed ideas of self-blame: I had been watching excerpts from NCIS in the night before the incident; maybe if I had been less tired, I might have prevented the attack. And if I had thought coherently about the geometry, I might have found the child immediately and stopped the bleeding. I described the boy’s injuries to the training therapist for the first time, and he explained that I would not have been able to save the boy’s life.

5.3 Speaking about trauma and compassion in public

A year before I was surprised to find it difficult to speak privately about the incident, see Section 5.1. Now I had the idea of speaking publicly, which was supported by several observations:

- I had felt relieved and in a somewhat altered state, a bit turned up, after speaking before the court, describing very personal experiences to complete strangers;
- I felt in part seen, in part exposed by the articles in newspapers;

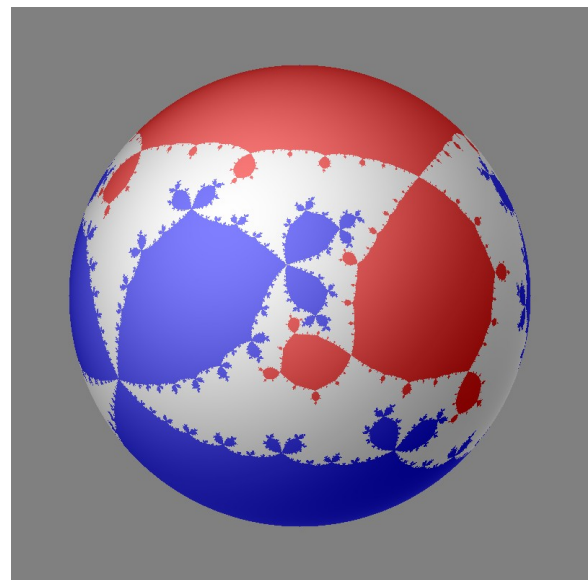
- When I expected colleagues to ask about the article in the local newspaper, I was in part afraid, in part looking forward to it, and disappointed that it did not happen;
- This experience is an important part of who I am and needs to be seen more, not hidden out of shame;
- And I believe there is a collective edge against speaking about individual traumatic experiences, against acknowledging trauma as a problem in society, and against implementing more preventive and curative measures; by speaking up I hope to make a small contribution toward raising public awareness.

So I thought about writing a book or making a film, for example, or to be interviewed on TV. And I suggested this topic for the present paper, as the final project in the basic training in Processwork. Putting this paper online feels like a big step toward going public, but I have no idea of how many people from the global Processwork community will be reading it, and what will happen when a colleague from school or a student discovers it on my home page accidentally; this feels okay for now. At one point I had planned to interview colleagues about their reactions to the original news, but I refrained from this for various reasons.

5.4 Finding my voice

In Section 3.6 I wrote about my long-term process of leaving research papers unfinished, and about empowerment to act on my decisions and to speak up for myself; self-compassion is crucial for healing as well, see Sections 4.3 and 4.4. Here I shall describe how increased awareness of trauma contributes to work on another aspect of my long-term process.

As a child I rarely spoke up to my parents, and as a teenager I was an outsider in school: it was very painful to realize that the pecking order was determined by who played soccer well, and not by who had read more books. I did not deal with this by training to play soccer, but by telling myself that I did not need to have many friends, and that anyway I was more intelligent than the people who did not accept me for who I was. In Processwork terms, I suffered from having low social rank in the context [9], and I focused on developing my competence in science; on the one hand this has aspects of compensation, and at the same time it was a first step toward owning my personal rank.



As an adult I planned and tried to pursue a career in mathematical research. This did not work out because of my very short list of completed papers, and also because I did not deal well with the prevailing culture in the field: Based on my earlier experiences, I did not realize that a high level of personal relationships and collaboration was practiced and valued, while socially and emotionally I was not up to participate in this; I learned the mathematical techniques from books instead of work-

ing with established researchers, and I presented complete results instead of sharing ideas in earlier stages. If I had worked more with fellow researchers and opened up to them, I probably would have had more motivation to write, obtained more results, would have enjoyed it even more, and found a position within the community.

Not finishing papers has many aspects: I need to balance the motivation to come forward with the need to relax and be without pressure, and I also need to be more aware of the relationship to my peers and to prospective readers. Often I try to work on a topic alone, ignore my loneliness and forget about my need to collaborate and to reach out; often I lose my motivation to write when I have fantasies that no-one is going to read my papers anyway. I can see more and more, how this is a continuation of my experiences as a child and as a teenager: Part of me believes that I am capable of doing research on my own, and wants to show this to the world. And part of me does not believe that I am good enough to be part of the community, and I withdraw from immersing myself and expressing my ideas. Now I hope to reconcile these two sides, to really believe in my abilities and to bring them in, and at the same time, to truly open up to collaboration engaged at eye level.

Until recently I did not fully acknowledge the split between believing that I have important things to say, and fearing that no-one will be interested or take me seriously. Due to being more aware of trauma after the incident in Frankfurt, I sometimes notice that a simple act like reading or writing is accompanied by a feeling of existential threat. So this seems to be a triggered reaction, which refers to an earlier isolation and traumatization; the idea of traumatic childhood experiences becomes more tangible, and I may employ grounding techniques, for example, and be compassionate toward the traumatized part. I became aware of this for the first time, when I prepared a presentation on Processwork and physics in 2020 and recalled that I had felt uneasy reading about this topic a few years before: Now I realized that I had felt threatened in fact, and I wondered why I should feel so strongly about a possible dispute between different interpretations. But such a dispute can trigger the childhood experience of believing to be right or to have something important to contribute, and at the same time not daring to speak my truth. When I learn to speak for my side without feeling threatened in the background, I can open up to listen to another side, and the question of whether someone is right and who is, will lose its charge and will shift from a polarization into a potentially fruitful discussion and relating.

5.5 Compassion and relationships in school

For a long time I have identified as a teacher: whenever I learned something interesting about mathematics, Feldenkrais work, or Processwork for example, I also imagined to teach it to other people. At the 2004 Worldwork in Newport, Oregon, a [Siletz](#) woman told me that the wolf is a teacher in Native American mythology; I was touched deeply and felt seen. In 2005 I gave up working in academia and decided to become a teacher in school. The first years were quite challenging, with a lot of internal and external criticism and unresolved conflicts. Now I enjoy it very much and consider the interaction with the students to be rewarding and a healing experience in fact, see Sections 3.6 and 4.4. – There are different levels of bringing in my compassion and my awareness of trauma in school:

- Many students have had traumatic experiences earlier in their life, or they are dealing with depression or anxiety, which has become even more common during the Covid pandemic.

By being compassionate and more aware of my structural rank in the interaction, I hope that students do not feel threatened in general. They may come forward with their personal situation, and from the interaction in class they may learn about how to deal with conflicts and rank issues in a less hurtful way. In my highest dream, they get an idea of self-compassion as well.

- And many students feel threatened by mathematics itself, which has been used to put them down and which invokes their inner critics; sometimes this seems to be similar to a traumatization. I try to support them in believing in their own abilities, and to be more relaxed with mathematics. When someone declares themselves to be “stupid”, I am challenged to call for more compassion without putting the person on the spot. A concrete idea, which I have not tried out yet, involves a meditation on the two arrows according to Section 4.2. In a recent case supervision session, I realized how tricky these ideas are, and the supervisor remarked that by becoming aware of my difficulties with practicing Processwork in school, I may get an idea of how the students feel about mathematics.
- Although students will forget the details and specific contents of what they learn about mathematics, I believe that by struggling with it, they also learn basic things for life: for example how to deal with inner critics and with their fear of the unknown, as they understand a topic more and more by dealing with it, not giving up upon not understanding it immediately. I hope that along the way they learn how to process and facilitate inner struggles, instead of identifying as “stupid” and developing negative patterns and attitudes toward learning, which is a widespread experience.
- I also envision a project, where interested students are taught about Processwork explicitly, for example about channels, primary and secondary processes, and rank issues. Again, this requires extensive planning and processing in preparation, to avoid students going too deeply into difficult feelings or revealing too personal details to the group.

Being more aware in the interaction with students is an ongoing work in progress; for example, I may miss signals of someone suffering, and I am unsure about how to deal with silent students: are they introverted, and should not be put under too much pressure to adjust to the mainstream, or are they shy, and need to be supported to speak up? Of course, observing feedback is important here. Being silent is also part of my own experience; although as a student I regularly spoke in lessons, I did not speak much to other students and in my private life, and for a long time I was silent in Processwork group processes. Incidentally, it was not helpful for me when a well-meaning participant asked the silent voices to speak up at the end: I felt rather put down, not supported. – Well, I hope that by working through my own experiences with being silent, silenced, bullied, or traumatized, I can deal with my students in a way that supports them in their own process.

In a seminar of April 2021, Amy and Arnold Mindell [29] introduced exercises to work with our fear of death, by exploring an altered state, finding a new access to our creativity, and contribute to develop our communities. In a guided innerwork *I explore the fear to lose my abilities with aging, deepen the imagination, let go, let me be breathed and moved. I shiver, feel tears coming up. By swaying for a few moments, this develops into a more upright posture, and I feel more open to relating. I visualize teaching, and I want to teach from my heart. The left hand goes to my heart and the right hand moves forward and back, which turns into a wavelike ∞ -shaped motion alternating with a more direct straight movement. Now the aim is to get new perspectives from this altered state: I can relate fluidly, be creative in mathematics, choose to be detached, write articles when feeling connected, and teach as a contribution to the world.*

A Processwork

Processwork is a method for deepening awareness of what is happening and meaningful in the present situation. It is applied to work with individuals, small and large groups and organizations, and on oneself. This includes personal therapy, counseling, and coaching; maybe the most general and neutral term is facilitation. Arnold Mindell worked as a training analyst at the C. G. Jung Institute in Zurich, Switzerland, in the 1970s, when he noticed parallels between his clients' dreams and body experiences, and related his observations to Daoism, Shamanism, and physics. These ideas were explored further in the 1980s with a group of first students, and the approach became known as Process Oriented Psychology or Processwork. The second training center was founded in Portland, Oregon, and today there are centers in several countries, which are organized in the [IAPOP](#) and offer diploma programs according to shared standards. The legal status depends on the country: for example, the master programs are recognized as an academic grade in Oregon, and Process Oriented Psychotherapy is covered by public health insurance in Switzerland; in Germany, only a few methods based on behavioral therapy or Psychoanalysis are supported by the public health system, and graduates of medicine or psychology may call themselves psychotherapists.

The *process* is everything a person does and experiences, what is meaningful in the present moment and what is developing. Usually there is a polarity between a *primary and a secondary process*, such that the person is more identified with and more conscious of the primary process, they are the agent of it and intend it. As an example, suppose a client identifies as being peaceful, and he does not defend against colleagues overstepping his boundaries. His primary process shows when he speaks of his convictions, and in his low voice and hunched over position as well. At the same time, he makes a fist inadvertently, or speaks of violent dreams or fantasies disturbing him. From these *double signals* the facilitator gets the idea, that there is also a secondary process of being more powerful and defending his boundaries; the client is less aware of these qualities, and does not identify with them. There are several ways to *unfold* the process by *amplifying the secondary signals*, for example the facilitator may touch the client's fist, or suggest to play a figure from a dream, and when there is movement, suggest to make it bigger or faster, join him, maybe add a roaring sound. Suppose that in this case, the client comes to move like a big bear and to visualize it, then the next step is to explore this quality and connect to it, so that he can use it with his colleagues. Of course, this does not mean to beat them up, but to develop a demeanor such that people do not even dare to behave disrespectfully, which may be framed as integrating 1% of the bear's energy. Usually, the client will encounter an *edge* during the work, for example claiming that he is unable or forbidden to go further, that he will be hurting people or will be excluded, if he starts to protect his boundaries. The facilitator nudges or provokes him to step over the edge, maybe models it for him. If this does not work, the underlying *edge figure* or belief system can be explored further.

The facilitator listens to the client and observes their body signals, noting what the client experiences in four sensory *channels* of perception: speaking and hearing (including thoughts and inner voices), seeing (including inner images and remembered dreams), proprioception of feelings in the body and emotions, and movement (including posture). Smell and taste may be relevant as well. Sometimes an experience is attributed to the composite relationship channel or world channel: we get an idea about the process from something happening in the room or the world at large. Using careful observation, thinking, their own feelings, and intuition, the facilitator forms a hypothesis on the *process structure*: what is primary and secondary, which signals belong to which process, what

are the signals' qualities, and the preferred channels of the primary and secondary process. The facilitator supports the client to amplify these signals and experiences, in particular the secondary ones, and watches for new signals and for *feedback*: the client's reaction guides the direction of the work, what they want to experience more and how deep, and how this is achieved. At the same time, the facilitator constantly checks their hypotheses and tries to base them on sensory-grounded information. Here *positive feedback* does not necessarily mean saying yes, but it is a reaction to the *intervention* with high energy or a signal with a similar quality; when there is no reaction or a weak yes, this is *negative feedback* in fact. See [8] for a detailed discussion and many examples of possible signals and interventions.

The emphasis on feedback is at the heart of Processwork: the facilitator does not believe in overcoming the client's resistance, but the client's process guides the work, the secondary aspects want to be seen. In the example above, the client is supported to defend his boundaries not because this is the conviction of the facilitator, but because this quality showed up in his signals and he gave positive feedback to amplifying them. By unfolding the process, especially amplifying disturbing qualities, the client is assumed to grow by getting access to a larger part of their potential, and also to find a solution or at least relief to the problem presented. The quality seems disturbing mostly because it is unknown. Along the way, the client trains their ability to *meta-communicate*: to notice what is going on within themselves or in an interaction, and to bring it in.

In addition to techniques (skills), facilitation is based on feeling attitudes or *metaskills* [28]: these include compassion, going into the unknown with courage, curiosity, and a beginner's mind, as well as humor, playfulness, and creativity. Although the basic ideas of Processwork can be described in a few sentences, several years of training are required to apply them reliably; some fine points are as follows:

- Compassion is required for all parts and processes. Acknowledge both the suffering of the primary process, which is not fully conscious either, and support deepening the secondary process. Especially in a long-term process, the secondary aspects cannot be integrated directly; the client shall become aware of their emergence from day to day and their interaction with the primary process, negotiating at the edge.
- In unfolding the process, amplification in a channel, adding a channel, and shifting the channel happen organically. Note when the quality of the signals has changed, for example, an energetic movement is followed with a quiet image: probably this is not an amplification, but a derailment at an edge.
- Become aware of the client's para-linguistic signals and the choice of words, which may indicate feeling, movement, or inner images; then invite these channels in. Speak to the active channel: for example, when the client tries to deepen their proprioception, say "feel this more," not "what do you feel," because the latter invites thinking instead of feeling.
- Notice your own inner experiences and bring them in, trust that this will be meaningful for the client's process. Even if it is an inner criticism of failing as a facilitator, boredom, or being shut off from your feelings, not being able to join the client.
- Self-reference is a frequent phenomenon: aspects of the problem presented by the client are apparent in the present situation, it is happening here and now. For example, if the client speaks about feeling oppressed by their partner, the client or the facilitator may be suppressing an aspect of the process right now. Look out for these parallels and use them con-

sciously. Conversely, when the client speaks about *third parties* (absent people), they probably speak about an inner experience or a present issue at the same time.

- *Innerwork* is trained in Processwork as well, for personal development of the facilitator, in preparation for working with a client or a group, and even in a difficult situation during that work. You are working with yourself alone, using all of these techniques and attitudes, being aware of your own signals and at the same time letting them unfold organically.

A *projection* means that the client, or anyone for that matter, sees unacknowledged secondary aspects of themselves in another person or group. *Dreaming up* means that other persons, including the facilitator, react to secondary signals picked up unconsciously, thus bringing in secondary aspects. (Compare the concepts of transference and counter-transference in Psychoanalysis.) The facilitator shall notice when they are dreamed up, maybe what signals caused this, and bring it in consciously [20]. They may even invite it by practicing a kind of dual awareness, going into a somewhat foggy state and at the same time observing their experiences. In a conflict, and sometimes in facilitation, the persons may have *shared edges or complimentary edges*; instead of discussing who projected what or dreamed up whom, it will be more helpful to frame what aspects are present in the *field* shared by the people involved.

This applies to conflicts within a group, or between groups, in particular: the various aspects are framed as *roles*, and they may be represented by different and changing participants in a conflict work or a *group process*. All conscious viewpoints and parts are welcome, as well as feelings, secondary processes, and unrepresented *ghost roles*; this attitude is called *deep democracy*. Frequently conflicts are related to *rank* issues: people and groups have various privileges in a given context, due to their position, their social status, and their personal abilities and experiences. Often both sides see the high rank of the other side and their own low rank, sending signals of their high rank unconsciously, which may be hurtful and causes or escalates the conflict [9] [31] [33].

To unfold a process, amplification of secondary processes is complemented by *essence* work: in the introductory example of the peaceful client, the movement may be made smaller and smaller, until he gets an idea of the essence behind it, for example a tendency to express himself openly or to be seen with his feelings and needs. An essence is never polarizing, so the edge against acknowledging and integrating it may be smaller. This approach is illustrated with a model of tendencies arising in the essence level, becoming polarized in the emergent level of dreams, and causing conflicts in the level of consensus reality. There are many more techniques to become conscious of processes and tendencies, and to integrate them: represent them by different movements, sounds, vectors, or mythical figures and let these interact; invite spontaneous fleeting perceptions (*flirts*) in a foggy state, imagine to be guided by the process itself or to be moved by gravity ... [32] [33].

So far for a brief introduction to basic ideas and some advanced aspects of Processwork; see also the discussion of trauma therapy in Section 3.1 and of roles in Section 3.4. Examples of working with my own process have been shown in *italics* throughout this paper; here the emphasis is on the actual process, not on the signals and interventions appearing in the work. Hopefully the reader has got an idea of the basic belief and experience in Processwork: usually something meaningful and helpful comes from exploring disturbing, possibly painful and frightening, experiences.

References

- [1] Aachener Zeitung, dpa, Aachener Zeuge im Prozess um die Gleisattacke, August 21, 2020.
- [2] Lane Arye, video of the seminar: From Trauma to Resilience During the Pandemic, April 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OqLznu92Jbw> . And in Zürich, August 2020.
- [3] Arlene Audergon and Jean-Claude Audergon, For the Next Generation – Worldwork in Rwanda, including perpetrators and survivors of the 1994 Genocide against Tutsi. <https://vimeo.com/242964439> .
- [4] The Awake Network and The Center for Mindful Self Compassion, Compassion in Therapy Summit, Jan. 30–Feb. 2, 2020. <https://www.compassionintherapy.com/summit-home-2021/> .
- [5] Heike Borufka and Basti Red, Horror an Gleis 7 | Verurteilt! – Der Gerichtspodcast, in the HR Fernsehen on September 23, 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=277rIUL8TwI> .
- [6] Tara Brach, *Radical Compassion: Learning to Love Yourself and Your World with the Practice of R.A.I.N.*, Rider 2020.
- [7] Carlos Castaneda, *Journey to Ixtlan: The Lessons of Don Juan*, Washington Square Press 1972.
- [8] Julie Diamond and Lee Spark Jones, *A Path Made by Walking: Process Work in Practice*, Lao Tse Press 2004.
- [9] Julie Diamond, *Power: A User's Guide*, Belly Song Press 2016.
- [10] Eduardo Duran, *Healing the Soul Wound: Trauma-Informed Counseling for Indigenous Communities*, Teachers College Press 2019.
- [11] Ask Elklit and Sessel Kurdahl, The psychological reactions after witnessing a killing in public in a Danish high school, *European Journal of Psychotraumatology* 2013, 4: 19826.
- [12] Moshe Feldenkrais, *Body and Mature Behaviour: A Study of Anxiety, Sex, Gravitation & Learning*, International Universities Press 1992, originally: Alef Limited 1949.
- [13] Moshe Feldenkrais, *The Potent Self: A Guide to Spontaneity*, Harper & Row 1985.
- [14] Janina Fisher, *Healing the Fragmented Selves of Trauma Survivors: Overcoming Internal Self-Alienation*, Routledge 2017.
- [15] Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, Anna-Sophia Lang, Eine unvorstellbare Tat, August 19, 2020. <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/rhein-main/prozessbeginn-zu-gleis-attacke-am-frankfurter-hauptbahnhof-16912612.html> .
- [16] Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, Anna-Sophia Lang, „Ich habe was im Kopf“, August 20, 2020. <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/rhein-main/zweiter-verhandlungstag-um-den-tod-eines-jungen-am-frankfurter-hauptbahnhof-16914114.html> .
- [17] Frankfurter Neue Presse, Tobias Möllers and Sophia Lothar, In Frankfurt sagt Gutachter aus: Der Tatverdächtige vom Frankfurter Hauptbahnhof sei schuldunfähig, August 20, 2020. <https://www.fnp.de/frankfurt/frankfurt-hauptbahnhof-gleis-attacke-familie-ermittlungen-verfahren-gericht-landgericht-zr-90011522.html> .
- [18] Frankfurter Rundschau, Stefan Behr, Augenzeuge im Prozess um Hauptbahnhof-Attacke: „Überall habe ich den toten Jungen gesehen“, August 21, 2020. <https://www.fr.de/frankfurt/frankfurt-prozess-attacke-hauptbahnhof-zeugen-leiden-angst-trauma-90027567.html> .
- [19] Philippe R. Goldin and Hooria Jazaieri, The Compassion Cultivation Training (CCT) Program, in: *The Oxford Handbook of Compassion Science* 2017.

- [20] Joseph Goodbread, *Radical Intercourse: How Dreams Unite us in Love, Conflict, and Other Inevitable Relationships*, Lao Tse Press 1997.
- [21] The Guardian, Kate Connolly, Far-right AfD criticised for exploiting death of boy at Frankfurt station, July 31, 2019. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jul/31/far-right-afd-criticised-for-exploiting-death-of-boy-at-frankfurt-station> .
- [22] Hessenschau, Mann stößt Mutter und Kind vor einfahrenden ICE, July 29, 2019. <https://www.hessenschau.de/tv-sendung/mann-stoesst-mutter-und-kind-vor-einfahrenden-ice,video-98130.html> .
- [23] Hessischer Rundfunk, Prozessauftritt um Gleis-Attacke am Frankfurter Hauptbahnhof | Hessenschau, August 20, 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OVXAwRmeHAQ> .
- [24] Dilgo Khyentse, *The heart of Compassion: The Thirty-seven Verses on the Practice of a Bodhisattva*, Shambhala 2007.
- [25] Peter A. Levine with Ann Frederick, *Waking the Tiger: Healing Trauma*, North Atlantic Books 1997.
- [26] Peter A. Levine, *In an Unspoken Voice: How the Body Releases Trauma and Restores Goodness*, North Atlantic Books 2010.
- [27] Kelly McGonigal, *The Upside of Stress: why stress is good for you, and how to get good at it*, Penguin 2015. – And TED-Talk <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RcGyVTAoXEUA> .
- [28] Amy Mindell, *Metaskills: The Spiritual Art of Therapy*, New Falcon Publications 1995.
- [29] Amy Mindell and Arnold Mindell, seminar: How Fear of Illness and Death Can Help You, Our Countries, and Planet, April 2021.
- [30] Arnold Mindell, *The Shaman's body*, Harper 1993.
- [31] Arnold Mindell, *Sitting in the Fire: Large group transformation using conflict and diversity*, Lao Tse Press 1995.
- [32] Arnold Mindell, *ProcessMind: A User's Guide to Connecting with the Mind of God*, Quest Books 2010.
- [33] Arnold Mindell, *Conflict: Phases, Forums, and Solutions*, World Tao Press 2017.
- [34] Kristin Neff, *Self-Compassion: The Proven Power of Being Kind to Yourself*, William Morrow Paperbacks 2015.
- [35] The New York Times, Melissa Eddy, A Summer of Angst in One of the World's Safest Countries, August 18, 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/18/world/europe/germany-crime-migrants-anxiety.html> .
- [36] Pat Ogden, Kekuni Minton, Clare Pain, *Trauma and the Body: A Sensorimotor Approach to Psychotherapy*, Norton 2006.
- [37] Gary Reiss, *Healing History: Breaking the Cycle of Individual and Historical Trauma*, Changing World Publications 2018.
- [38] Stanford Medicine, The Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education, Compassion Wiki. <http://ccare.stanford.edu/research/compassion-wiki/> .
- [39] Bessel van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Mind, Brain and Body in the Transformation of Trauma*, Penguin 2014.
- [40] Die Welt Nachrichten, Tödlicher Zwischenfall in Frankfurt am Main: Mann stößt Acht-jährigen und dessen Mutter vor einen Zug, July 29, 2019. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wUTFcVFOPAc> .

References to internet resources have been checked again on June 21, 2021.