

“ET phone HOME”, Reconnecting to Inner Life Force

**Exploring experiences of trauma and alienation and
witnessing their relationship to personal/cultural/world history**

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To my grandfather Diogenis and my grandmother Argyro, for their amazing courage to fight with terror and their dignity in suffering the losses of this battle. To their artistic, leading, unconventional and humane nature that remained alive despite the challenges, to be passed onto me.

To my parents, Dimitri and Anna, for their aliveness, enthusiasm and drive. For carrying the seeds of life through a field of pain, poverty and despair and for their longing for light and prosperity. Following this dream they gave birth to me.

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To all of us fighting to keep the flame alive against fear and division.

We are all one team.

Abstract

This is a personal testimony, a heuristic research on exploring personal feelings and body experiences with the use of Processwork techniques, and uncovering their relationship to personal history and collective trauma. Following closely and unfolding my experiences for five years now, I have arrived to some personal revelations, reaffirmations and conclusions regarding the relationship of what I was experiencing as disturbances, illnesses or annoying moods and behavior in my everyday life, to what was finally organizing these experiences and lying in the background of their existence.

My primary aim when I started this research was to help myself find ways to deal with what was really challenging my wellbeing. As I was moving through though, my passion became to speak about this disorienting place, the sensation of it, its intensity, its threatening quality; to uncover the mechanism that supports and sustains the suffering, promotes alienation even from one's own self, and imposes silence and marginalization.

My hope is that this material can be useful to both individuals and practitioners who are struggling in the blurry atmosphere of trauma. My aspiration is to offer some description and structural explanation of experiences that remain in the margins of our acceptance, in order for others to acknowledge and stand for their own feelings without shame, self-blaming and a one sided pathological explanation of their experiences. This is for me the first step towards healing and, according to my personal belief, this basic step is rarely reached, thereby prolonging and intensifying the suffering.

Traumatic experiences can create wounds difficult to handle and accept, and thus

create alienation and loneliness. Primarily self-protecting barriers can lead to the creation of a closed system that is hard to penetrate. My wish is that by naming and opening to my own experiences I can bring some knowledge that can cross those barriers, reach into that lonely place, and bring healing a step closer. The healing of the wound should actually be a community issue, the same way as was its creation. I wish that no individual should have to carry this heavy burden alone.

At the same time, tracking and writing about this deep and mostly scary journey is also healing for me. It helps me ground some of the knowledge accumulated through experiencing and to finally move myself into a place of voice. I feel blessed and lucky to have survived. Sometimes I feel as a messenger of the pain and the difficulty I sensed, witnessed and inherited from people around me and whose suffering unconsciously fueled my progress with a burning urge for freedom and compassion.

Acknowledgements

Although this part is placed in the beginning of this essay, in reality this part is the last one I write, giving a closure to this five year long journey. It was almost the same time of the year when I struggled to decide weather I should depart on this adventure or not, and I was on the same earth spot I find myself in the moment. This is the Greek island of Kythera. I am grateful to this land for the nurturing and healing that provided me all these years and for the unconscious support of its spirit to open my wings and expand my horizon in order to meet my deeper self.

Looking back in the moment and realizing what has happened is almost difficult, while the intensity has not settled yet. My mind moves in such an unstructured way... and like all the big adventures, there are so many heroes behind the scenes, each one of them making her / his unique contribution. I wouldn't have been able to walk this path alone.

The first super hero I want to name is my therapist Rhea Shapiro, who has been my teacher, friend and a constantly present ally during all these years. Rhea, thank you for believing in me and for trying to help me in any possible way. Your faith, endurance, generosity and fearlessness to explore with me all the difficult and dark places and approach them as "just life", as you say, has been the best companion I could ever have. You always knew when we should dive into dreamland and essence world and avoid the big waves of consensus reality that created nausea and disorientation. My spirit has felt uplifted, safe, happy and met by yours.

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Why I want to write

The reason I chose to write this essay is because I want to speak in public about the marginalization of traumatic experiences and the social and political contexts, the way it was revealed to me. Although trauma is usually lived in a very private and lonely way, trauma itself is mainly a wider social issue.

By studying my symptoms, dreams, and moods, as well as the field I was born into, I have found that nothing of what I have been experiencing throughout my life was without reason or meaning. My symptoms were not my pathological destiny, but the outcome of dynamics starting long before my birth.

The marginalization and disrespect of my traumatic experiences have intensified and prolonged my suffering and trapped me in vicious circles of re-traumatization. I want to use parts of my story to show how things get entangled in action and how difficult it can be to stand for oneself in a trauma field.

I want to speak about things that were crucial for my survival but were not obvious and the things I've learnt that I wished someone would have told me or at least understood in order to help me.

Finally, I want to use my own experience to elucidate the parts of Processwork theory that have been a priceless ally to finding the way home. Processwork is based on the belief that there is hidden wisdom in the marginalized and disturbing parts of ourselves and our environment, and uses different ways of unfolding these experiences in order to reveal their inner wisdom. These disturbances are mainly approached as the system's efforts to promote its wholeness. I want to echo back that embracing our ostracized parts and starting to listen to their messages is walking the way home.

I would like to speak on behalf of all these uncanny parts of ourselves that we are quick to condemn as “crazy” or even punish ourselves in an effort to change. I want to wholeheartedly support our relationship to all the dreamlike experiences that live in the periphery of our everyday awareness.

All these years of work helped me witness how one experience lives not only in our psychology, but also in our body and our dreams. So I feel I can now use my versatile nature to become a meta-communicator between body and mind. I will use my own story and experiences, just to speak from the body’s perspective, and show how bringing voice to “suffering” can have a transformative effect and a different kind of diagnosis. In everyday life this meta-communicator is usually missing and these same experiences feel like no man’s land.

My writing is a personal sharing and reflecting upon reality based on my own experiences and learning. One reason is because this is the type and the nature of my research but it is also the approach I consciously chose. The lack of personal expression and sharing in my world made me feel alien and intensified my anxiety, loneliness, fear and pain. I struggled alone with these feelings, looking for answers in books and therapy. I deeply missed human models of how to handle the challenging circumstances I was facing. I was in an agonizing search for some company to share life’s mystery and intensity.

Chapter Outline – Essay Overview

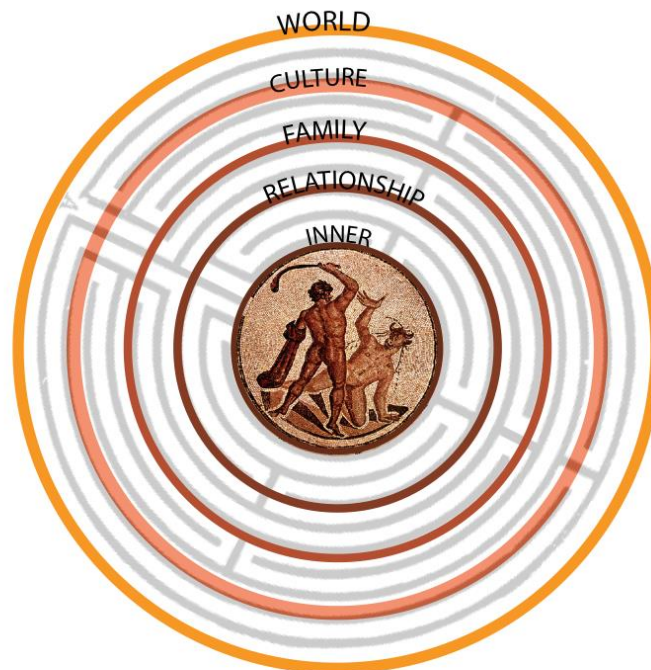
Throughout the chapters of this essay I will try to address the following:

1. The marginalization of trauma experience in the general social spectrum
2. The two-way relationship between the world and the individual. How can trauma from a field phenomenon become a personal experience? How, through working on these personal experiences, can the individual discover the dynamics of the broader field within themselves, and understand the ways she is also a role in a wider scene.
3. How trauma is a rank issue. The main oppressors, which stand in the way to feeling one's wounds and healing and their relationship to the prevailing mind oriented culture.
4. The ways someone can start working against inner and outer oppression and healing trauma.
5. The contributions of Processwork in working with trauma and internalized oppression.
6. Literature review

I will use my personal story as an example, in order to connect facts, symptoms and roles and show the movement of the traumatization and its silencing, from the wider cultural field and history, to my inner family dynamics and finally to my own body and my own internalized marginalization of my experiences.

The relationship between the outer and the inner is very important because it shows how we are both victims and co-creators of the field, and shows us the potential for freedom. Our experiences are just natural phenomena. By unfolding them we can gain awareness of what is hurting us and can move towards setting ourselves and the world free from repetitive and painful inter-generational patterns.

Unprocessed history lives in our systems and our bodies, unconsciously organizing our lives until it is addressed and processed. The marginalized experiences and feelings keep playing out in our actions and interactions and the field gets polarized, until people get trapped internally in these polarizations and start working on the polarities in their own self. Mahatma Gandhi said “be the change that you wish to see in the world”: my experience is that this happens almost organically when we process our own stories and triggers. The change we aspire to see can start from working within and with our relationship to the “other”.



Preface

The starting point of my personal journey back home is marked with a dream, a near death experience of losing my senses and collapsing on the floor with my jaw broken into pieces and the precise synchronicity of both occurring at the starting point of my Diploma Program in Processwork. This program that I am just completing started with my absence during the very first residency.

Looking back now seems like nothing was incongruent. My mind just needed all these years to perceive the whole picture and put the fragmented pieces together. My dreaming was turning me in a completely new direction of which my consciousness was unaware. This time my learning had to do mostly with following inner worlds and sensing and being less externally focused.

In Processwork we believe that the dreaming reality of a person is manifested in all the channels, meaning body symptoms, dreams, relationships and synchronicities in everyday reality. I share here my dream of that time as my unconsciousness' preface to my story.

In my dream, my grandfather Diogenis, who is suffering from Alzheimer's disease, is locked in a room of our house. The rest of us are going to leave the house and my grandmother feels it isn't safe for my grandfather to be free in the house. I react. I can no longer bear the locked door. It is too harsh on my heart. So I decide to stay in the house and unlock the door. I am also afraid of being alone with him, as I cannot be sure of his behavior, but I decide to trust my love for my grandfather.

As the dream continues, my grandfather climbs with a ladder to the attic and sits there, down on the floor, in the midst of books and old things. He looks like an old wizard. The attic is full of light. Rays of sun are coming through. I stay down at the foot of the ladder looking up at him. Then my grandfather starts giving me books. He is choosing them for me and as I am taking them in my hands I can see they have no clear title. It feels like I can understand what they say and I try to remember them for when I wake up. I knew they were precious. In reality the titles were “foolish”, words with no sense; they were essence-like, closer to mythic keywords and symbols.

Introduction

ET phone home

For as long as I can remember, there has been one voice inside me constantly present that I have failed to silence with any treat I have tried. No matter what I was doing, a little child in me was crying nonstop asking to get home. This “crying” has taken different forms through the years. Sometimes it was disguised in symptoms, other times in moods, but the thing that remained unchanged was its intensity.

I have been desperate and drained, like a mother with a newborn child, sleepless for years. I didn't know what to do with this kid. I was pretty much pissed off with my behavior. For the first one and half years of my life I was literally crying nonstop, depriving my parents of sleep. I had restless nights. Doctors said I was suffering from colic pain.

After I started “understanding”, I behaved myself, trying to follow the rules that were sending me to bed on my own and asking me to sleep as a good child. I remember nightmares visiting me, as well as my initial refusal to go to bed. When I conformed and stopped crying on the outside, it seemed like the whole system around me fell deeply asleep and since then my crying became internal.

My parents divorced when I was five years old. After their divorce I stayed in my grandparents' house till the age of 14. As a child, I felt when I grew up this internal upset would go away. Adult life seemed more spacious and interesting. I thought I would mingle with others, and somehow in this mingling, my sadness would fade away or be forgotten. I would create my own routine, my own life, and break free from this suffocating feeling of being closed in a box with no air, coupled with

uncontrollable panic. The outside world seemed to have some structure and interest, so my life would change by the time I could be more part of it. Clothes and a fancy routine!

My first panic attack came at the age of 11. I literally could not breathe. I was lying below a fan but even that air was not enough because it couldn't come into my system. As the years passed, suffocation, anxiety and a feeling of darkness embodied my internal crying. Only when something reminded me of "home", "family" or "mum" did real crying happen and pain felt. My normal state became one of intense generalized fear and anxiety. My predictions that time would save me were totally wrong.

I started not being able to use public transportation, go to cinemas or discos because of panic attacks. I wouldn't be able to breathe, and I felt intense anxiety and worry about dying. My heart might race at times, but it was mainly a state of my mind that was driving me crazy. The more the outside environment imposed upon me with music, darkness and moving figures that made communication difficult, the more my panic would rise. I needed someone more self-assured to be with me and move to a place of minimum action in order to help me temporarily calm down.

I had no space for peace, pleasure, dreaming or setting goals about my life. It was only about survival. I was trying to escape myself in any way possible. People around me seemed to be living their lives and I wanted to live like them, but it felt impossible. It was difficult to be present to my everyday tasks like school, social encounters and reading. I felt fear about my life and shame about my addictions to food, self-criticism and worry. I felt guilty for my "loser" attitude towards life.

I had to refine my adaptation skills in order to look normal. I so much wanted to be accepted, to belong, to be desired and loved. I craved to be chosen. I craved to be “the one” for somebody. But I was in such a mess. I felt I could go nowhere like that. I was wondering all the time “why doesn’t this restless beast inside me leave me alone? What is this all about?”

I tried to push the panic and the crying away as far as I could. I spent as many hours as possible with others and in activities. Being alone was not good. I needed to be in relationship to something external. It loosened my anxiety and my panic attacks. As long as I was out of the house and in company, I was safe. I became the most flexible and adaptable being. I could adjust to anything and ask nothing back, just the permission to be included.

In a split second I could sense the atmosphere and figure out the rules: What is allowed and what is not. When to speak and when to remain silent. What is the prevailing belief system and who is the enemy? What the people around me need and how can I deliver it. After all, I had the best training for becoming versatile. Since the age of five I changed sleeping places every five days, across four or more households, with no room of my own in any of them. Now I know that these conditions can provoke exhaustion and personality splitting. I felt spun around, losing my own sense of direction.

My inner sense of belonging was also fading away. I was splitting apart. I was trying to look better and at the same time the pain was deepening. One side of me was trying to retain a desirable and functioning image at any cost, and another one grieving more and more.

“Come on, be beautiful, fix your hair, control you weight, be sexy, stay in fashion... keep going for God’s sake! Look around you and check how teenagers are! Come on,

you are a lazy coward fat cow! Where is your vitality? You are dreadful! You look worse than an old lady, like you are already dead”.

To my misfortune, all the above messages were echoed by my parents, close friends, partners, even in the therapy setting. To differing degrees, the people around me were suffocated, tired and critical of my perceived victimization. Same message again: “Come on”!

Individuation was the goal, everybody was asking me to become a healthy, strong, assured and promising young woman. I had to stand on my own two feet. What was done was done. I had to grow up. Shit happens, but “it is our own obligation after we turn adults to fix our lives”. As I write this sentence, I see myself strangling this voice. This seemingly caring booster has been the biggest oppressor in my life.

The accusation of being already dead was not far from the truth, but the lack of awareness and meta-skills makes this accusation a killer. A part of me was dying quietly indeed and without being noticed. The difference is that this part was not failing to live because of the low performance that my critic was indicating, it was completely uninterested in all the things I was pushing her to achieve. It was just begging for acceptance, attention and care. An extremely feeling person with deep need for connection was left alone in intense pain, loss and deprivation.

In the vista of personal determination, responsibility, and achievement that my oppressor was interested in, I have done pretty well. I made all possible efforts to stay alive in the way life was modeled to me and I managed to put up with severe suffering for years. I did all kinds of therapies to deal with the constant crises I was facing, spending countless hours, money and effort. I have had a total of 17 years of psychotherapy, three years of acupuncture, many years of homeopathy, regular visits

to mainstream doctors and hospitals, with new symptoms always a part of life. In the meantime I managed to graduate high school, acquire the highest diploma in two foreign languages, two university degrees, one in statistics and one in graphic design, work an average of nine hours a day for eight years, in between studying and manage a household on my own since the age of 23. Not bad.

At the age of 34 I crashed. I finally collapsed. I could hold no more.

I was lucky that my physical body didn't die, but what I did manage to severely wound is my scared self that is constantly running away from my trauma. There is a part in me that pushes me endlessly, to try, to work, with no compassionate ear for my feelings. In its efforts to avoid pain, it is also avoiding me. This part notices only my whining and my imperfections, and points out my "duties" even when I am breathless. It pushes me to perform, no matter how much I am bleeding. As I learned later, this voice is what we call in Processwork, an internalized critic.

- "Come on, wake up, keep moving, try harder... COME ON!"

- "Fuck you! I'm pulling the plug."

Blackout

Breakdown is like a blackout. After a blackout there is only darkness. Vision, which is the primary channel of relating to the external world for many of us, is not working any more. In the beginning there is intense insecurity, loss of direction and a new kind of alienation. The outside reality is exactly the same, but the internal experience is like watching everything from a distance, muted and retarded. Like being at the

bottom of the sea.

It takes a while for things to shift. Other channels of experiencing come slowly forward and this leads to an interesting expansion of consciousness. You start hearing subtle sounds, sensing slight movements, feeling your neighbor's breathing, smelling the thickness in the atmosphere. You can feel the tiredness from effort and the healing impact of silence. The mind becomes secondary, as you start following more sensory-grounded information in order to "see". The perception of life changes drastically.

What literally happened to me is what we call a "near death experience". My heart stopped beating and I fainted on the floor, breaking my jaw into pieces. I was in deep altered states for a long time and I had to quit everything and stay distant in my own world. Staying present for long in any social interaction was extremely upsetting. I needed silence, sleep, food, and some sense of care and safety. Nothing of my old, known world felt good. Being in this blackout space was soothing.

After three months of recuperation, my prescribed healing time had expired and my old routine was waiting for me. Deep down though I knew that there was no going back. At that point I took the revolutionary decision to quit my day job and enroll in the Processwork diploma program, even though I only had enough money for half of it.

One part of me had to die so that another one could come forth into existence. My symptoms were pulling me down to surrender for a very long time, but the ties with the known world and the fear of what lies beyond it are both enormous. The moment my symptoms' grip was loosening, I was standing back on my feet and returning to my usual routine. I was trapped in Sisyphus' torture. Pushing life forward was becoming too hard, and ending in pieces felt like fate. I had to get out of this endless

cycle.

Home

Now I smile with gratitude, because I discovered that home is always here. It radiates through dreams, symptoms, flirts and weird synchronicities. It never really leaves us. We are the ones who are not paying attention to its signals. All these disturbances we usually override are just echoes from home, generous in their repetitive callings. We are still wandering around feeling lost because our attention is wired to look out. The journey home starts by looking in. Pain is generated not because we miss others, but because we miss ourselves.

Home exists and reaching this place depends on us. The more I realize this, the more my joy intensifies and strengthens. Ultimately, home cannot be deprived by anybody. There is a sacred, intangible way of connection to which nothing can intervene. There is finally some safety. Whatever is ours cannot be lost, the same way our spirit cannot die. Ghosts hunt and scare us, shrink our vitality, but can never really win. The bonds that connect us with our heart are permanent. They just get pushed further away from our consciousness.

What is extra fascinating is that getting home is also “eco friendly”. The more we relate to ourselves, issues like comparison and jealousy that feed our unhappiness and create tensions in our relationship world seem to fade away. There is something more desirable than comparison and insecurity to pay attention to. There is a unique love affair that is rising and is solid in order to hold and secure us in the world. It is even better than chocolate. It’s the relationship to our own selves.

Chapter 1 - Marginalization of the experience of trauma, a social and political issue

“There is more hunger for love and appreciation in this world than for bread”

Mother Teresa

Psychological Trauma is just... trauma

Trauma is a Greek word and means *wound*. Although trauma is used both in medicine and psychology with a relevant definition in each field, the common thread is the meaning of the word itself, which states that something is injured. Being Greek, I have the privilege to have a dual relationship with the word. I can relate to it both as a simple everyday word in my mother tongue, as well as a formal psychological term. This duality helped me come in touch with a personally healing revelation around trauma experience itself.

I was fascinated when I realized that although “trauma” is such a simple and accurate word to describe a phenomenon, we don’t really use it in our everyday language to describe our condition. We say “I am depressed”, “I feel sad”, “I feel worried with no apparent reason”, and the list can go on, without realizing we have an open wound that is creating symptoms, looking for caring and healing.

In contradiction to the inner world, when the injury is on external and tangible parts of our body the word trauma and its synonym “wound” are the ones we use to describe the condition. When the injury is visible we know there is trauma, while we witness it, and a tangible cause to relate the pain with.

Our visual contact with the wound helps us understand what is happening, as well as give indications about what to do to heal it. The body's messages are beyond doubt. Things feel and look painful, congruent and simple to comprehend. We can even become irritated to the question "what happened" that asks for more information in the moment of pain. "Don't you see, I'm bleeding!"

However, when we move to the less tangible and visible world, to that of the inner physical body or the whole world of feelings, sensations, moods and behaviors, we suddenly lose track. We struggle with sensations that seem scattered. We cannot easily put them under one theme, relate them or communicate what is happening. We get worried and start to look for a kind of diagnosis.

Internal trauma is more unknown while it remains "invisible". We don't relate to it with the same ease as we do a physical trauma. I have never heard anyone say: "I have a psychological trauma" or "wound", as we would say for a physical injury. The word "trauma" in psychology is perceived more as a term than a real fact.

It seems like when the cause of our distress is not obvious, we don't perceive our wound or trust there might be a connection between sensations and facts. Things feel more mysterious and threatening. Truth is not tangible anymore and seems to be based on interpretations we doubt. We need proof. "Who proves that what I feel is related to a previous experience? And what does this mean? Do I have a "wound" and how big is it? Will I have a problem from now on? What is the cure? Does it mean I did something bad? Is it related to my behavior or my personality?" Guilt, shame and fear rise from the absence of linearity and the lack of a sense of control over one's truth.

Things seem more “unknown” and unknown usually equals “not a friend”. Especially when what knowledge there is, is limited, complicated and usually in the hands of specialists. Psychological trauma turns out to be something weird we’d better negate. Being “psychologically traumatized” is usually translated as having “psychological problems”, which then means you are crazy. “Normal” people are not supposed to have psychological trauma. Instead of reclaiming the help and the care we deserve, we are usually hiding out of shame and fear.

Up to this very moment I am still surprised that I lived 37 highly uncomfortable years, without the word “trauma” ever coming to my conscious awareness. It feels almost unbelievable that I first conceptualized the experience of trauma, while I was trying to frame the topic of this paper, right before being taught about it in my studies. I was passionately trying to express in different ways the state I wanted to write about, which was one of low rank and disability, without having a name to describe it. And then suddenly “traumatized” came to my mind as a simple word... and then...shock! This word already exists in psychology as a term... Why didn’t occur to me before? This is what I struggle with all my life... I am dealing with trauma!

I realized that although I was working on experiences of my life I was aware they were “traumatizing”, the outcome of them I usually perceived and approached as “my symptoms”. It is not that I have never heard the word trauma before, but in my mind there was a split happening between the term and its common meaning.

As a term, it was related in my mind to a general description for “traumatizing” experiences. Or the expression “you suffer from trauma” meant for me that something traumatizing has happened to me. But the wound itself was lost. I have never stated and experienced my state as one of being “wounded”. There is a difference between

“she suffers from trauma” and she is “traumatized”. This is a sly marginalization of trauma experience.

Somehow the traumatic experience is named and is out there, but until I turn my gaze to myself the “trauma” has transformed to “my symptoms”. The general state of being hurt, related to an external cause, and the need for care and healing that the word trauma indicates, are skipped. The word “symptoms” suddenly turns the attention more towards the doings of the self, leaving aside the fact of the pure traumatization that may fuel the whole inner dynamics.

According to Processwork theory, someone has a primary identity, which is constituted by the parts of himself he identifies with, and a secondary identity, which are the parts of him that are present but he doesn’t associate with. When we say someone “suffers from trauma”, which is the way we usually use it, trauma remains secondary for the person and for the field. Only when we say someone is traumatized, trauma is acknowledged and present and becomes part of his own experience.

This simple example of the splitting of the word “trauma” between a scientific term and a real experience is a good representation of the marginalization of natural experiences from our perception of life and their approach as separate parts from our selves, calling them our symptoms. They become things that “happen to us” or “we suffer from”. This brings the disbelief mentioned before, the fear to associate with them and the beginnings of a split self. Trauma in the way it is used as a scientific cognitive description made me lose my contact with the experience itself. The same thing happens with all the experiences we name but we disassociate from experiencing them.

Processwork theory, which is based on working with sensory-grounded information, is a real asset at this impasse. By working directly and unfolding the present experience, we bypass the intellectualization of the experiences, diving right into their core, beyond “good” and “bad” preconceptions. It allows us to approach things just as facts and reveal their truth and meaning ourselves. The access to knowledge is immediate through our senses and the meaning of our experiences is revealed to us by the opening of our awareness. This creates enough safety to approach the “unknown” part of our selves with love, compassion and curiosity.

In my case, while the word “trauma” came out of my own experiencing of my state, the naming of it brought me only relief. By sensing the overall “weakness” I wanted to write about I connected for the first time with the actual fact of being wounded. Through my senses, the message was really felt and realized for the very first time. I was finally “in contact” with my reality and what was behind years of agony. Realizing and feeling my wound and my accumulated pain helps me focus on the missing loving and nurturing of myself instead of just dealing with “symptoms”.

What I have been experiencing through my life as a deadly nightmare is the natural outcome of a deep internal wound. I was happy and shocked at the same time. Happy that my experience is so physical, but shocked of the degree of its marginalization.

Psychological trauma needs treatment like any injury

When dealing with an external injury we know that if a person escapes danger and survives, there is a process of recuperation that follows afterwards. The injury needs time to heal. The size and the complexity of the injury will define the time needed and the appropriate treatment. The patient often needs a whole team around her for support and care.

The paradox with inner trauma, according to my experience, is that this stage of treatment is usually missing. The injury is not getting healed not because of the difficulty of the case, but because both the injuries and the people carrying them become more and more marginalized and uncared, even from their own selves. The traumatic experience is not addressed and the internal wounds remain unattended. Repetitive, disturbing experiences are often a calling for this missing stage of healing, for attention, help and care. The story is asking for its completion and the soul for the retrieval of it's wounded parts.

Joy DeGruy speaks about this exact absence of opportunity to heal or access the benefits available in the society, analyzing the consequence of multigenerational oppression of Africans and their descendants resulting from centuries of chattel slavery (Leary, 2005).

Traumatic experiences are hard to witness. Staying close to life and accepting our finite limits, our human insufficiency and vulnerability is hard. The moment the "bad" experiences end, we have a tendency to forget they ever happened. We try to avoid noticing, naming and processing any sign that will connect us with painful memories. "Trauma begins with an event or series of events that is too much to bear. The experience is beyond the "edge" of what is possible to perceive and respond to, beyond what we are able to include in our identities, as individuals or communities" (Audergon, 2004 p19).

But the unresolved issues remain with us in the form of ghosts. They become what we call in Processwork "ghost roles". As Reiss defines in "Families that Dream Together", "Special roles that are mentioned and felt but not directly represented are called ghost roles. Ghost roles have great power until represented directly and shown

and then can be worked with and transformed. Common ghost roles include the addict, the abuser, playfulness, the child, death, the dead, and whatever else is around but marginalized by the family” (Reiss, 2013 p32).

The roles and the voices we think we have left behind are present in our dialogues, our silences, our dreams and symptoms, organizing, as I will show later on, our decisions over generations. Internal experiences are fuelled by trapped feelings and the unfinished dialogues replay in an ongoing inner theater. The drama gets replayed in an unconscious way until we decide to unfold it consciously.

The roles carry an energy we cannot ignore or make go away. On the contrary, they need expression, release and to be used wisely in order to transform the present disequilibrium to something more harmonious. “A ghost role experience for a family is like a member, or the whole family, being punched by someone who is invisible. No one can really stop or deal with the puncher until the one throwing the punches becomes visible. Often, it is still very difficult to stop the puncher” (Reiss, 2013 p32-33).

I could never understand as a child how no one told my parents that I was sad and suffering from neglect. No one stood for the severity of my mal-treatment nor wake my parents up from their unconsciousness. I kept visiting doctors and hospitals, and only in two cases did I feel the doctors tried to really touch upon what was happening to me, but still without naming anything directly.

The first doctor asked me questions about the situation at home, but never spoke to my mother. I was only 11 years old. I still remember my own upset as I felt he was approaching my truth. It was similar to the feeling of my panic attack. I was feeling my heartbeat rise, suffocation and sweat.

One part of me was alert and in agony, trying to shout out loud “help”, like a castaway in the sight of a boat. The other part though, was terrified, sensing possible punishment, betrayal or hurt of my parents, plus feeling ashamed about aspects of my own behavior that I didn’t want to reveal. One part wanted to be seen and the other wanted to hide. Urge and fear mixed, fighting each other.

The second doctor was a random one at the emergency department. I was 19 by then and he just said that it might be good for me to seek psychological help. I felt relieved hearing that. He was the first one to stand for the psychological side of my symptoms and their seriousness, proposing some help to this direction. He was my passport to therapy.

For years, something prevented the verification and healing of my inner, non-pathological wounds. Every time my suffering managed to find a way to come to the surface, it was temporarily calmed down with a superficial medical treatment that hypnotized the system for a while.

I was just a kid, panicked from my symptoms, waiting for someone to help me and calm my fear down, but I was repetitively confronted with the denial of relatives, friends and specialists, to come closer and be interested in what was really going on.

“Keep going, you are fine” was the basic message, patching me up roughly and sending me back into the ring. Many people, in many contexts denied the reality, the same way the part of my own self wanted to hide from the doctor’s recognition. This denial is finally not personal but cultural.

Seems like there is a shared cultural difficulty in slowing down and witnessing the wound and its causes. Looking back in history with compassion and focus on healing is not really happening. The wound instead of being cleaned, cared, and held in a

recuperation place is roughly closed and sent away. Audergon writes “Collectively we participate in dynamics of trauma by both silencing and cutting off the unspeakable events of our history and continually repeating them” (Audergon, 2004 p19).

Healing is projected on “time” and “forgetting”. Even when the wound is suspected, the reason and its nature remain vague and surrounded by a kind of hesitation and silence by the witnesses, which only intensifies the fear and loneliness of the wounded. Feelings of blame and guilt hover around adding more agony to the suffering and turning the experience into one of shame.

My suffering and all the factors that created it remained unaddressed, living in my head and body, ready to attack me again with the slightest trigger. The same was also the reality for each person in my family. The house I was living in was crowded with silence and lurking health issues. No one could ever relax. All the accumulated tragedies from the past were living underneath our effort to live a regular life. It is like trying to rest on a boiling volcano.

Entering my first therapy setting, I felt unlucky again. During the first few months in therapy I asked for a session with both my parents present, while they didn’t speak to each other since they divorced, and the system around me was shaped in such a way through the years that I had difficulty reaching them. I needed help to relate with them and speak my truth. The feedback I received though was negative, while I was 19 by then and I wasn’t supposed to intervene in their relationship. I had finally found access to therapy, and actually to a systemic approach, but I had lost the privileges of a child just for one year.

From the place I stand now, I believe there is a necessity to face the social level of trauma and use interventions that address and can hold and help the whole system that

is affected by it. Like Audergon writes “An orientation to understanding trauma is needed that is at once personal, communal and political” (Audergon, 2004 p16).

Unfolding my personal experience helped me realize this importance even more and brought me across the teachings of my teachers. The need for community based healing is really high. The issues we deal with are bigger than personal and we need to see how we are all in this together. We need the holding that community can provide, while it is difficult to provide it to ourselves in our small intimate groups when we are caught in the vicious cycle of hard times (Reiss, 2013).

Traumatic experiences tend to have a strong freezing effect on the whole field that imposes silence. “So many of us have frozen off part of ourselves to brace against the shock and trauma and horror of what has happened to our family and to our people that this also numbs us to the suffering of others, especially others who threaten us or scare us or remind us of our past” (Reiss, 2013 p165). It is difficult to connect with each other, relate our suffering with facts and look upon the systems we create while we don’t have help to deal with what has happened.

In the case of an event that feels irrelevant to our personal wounds, like a car accident, it is easy to talk about. The incident would be on the first page of the newspaper with detailed analysis of the factors that caused it. We would be full of blame for the car driver and the conditions, and talk about it for hours. Even though we did not suffer directly from the accident and we not witnessed it either, they we would easily have a strong opinion. It is like we finally find a safe place and a not complicated story to free ourselves and express our accumulated discomfort.

What enables this strong opinion though, is exactly this relating distance. We can crucify and blame a person when we see no relationship between his behavior and

ours, while we remain silent witnesses of all the oppressors we can't name in our own lives and fields, and especially in ourselves. What happens with all the experiences in our lives that are far more painful to ourselves? Why do we become silent around them? Why do we let our poor bodies react alone through suffering, only to oppress them further afterwards for reacting "with no apparent reason" and medicate them to stop?

Mindell talks about this role of the one we usually blame, criticize or turn to the identified patient of the community as the "city's shadow", pointing out that "This shadow is like the city's dream portraying its neglected gods, the hopelessness it will not admit, its withdrawal from superficial communication, its suicidal tendencies, mania, addictions, murderous rage and hypersensitivity. The shadow reminds us of the smoldering revolution we normally perceive only in the dark night or in the impinging quality of physical symptoms" (Mindell, 2008 p237).

As a child I felt only amazing pain when witnessing how those around me cared for strangers, be proudly involved in charities, whilst leaving me uncared for. Every time I heard a story of a "poor person" my parents had helped, it was like a knife in my heart. I felt unseen. For years I had no excuse for this behavior.

Now I realize we can leave our own children unattended the same way we neglect our selves and our bodies. I was not the only victim. My parents were the victims of their own selves first. Noticing my suffering and pain, would have meant they had to also feel their own, and look at the painful and unresolved facts and traumas of their own lives.

The urge for survival and getting out of pain, plus the shame and the lack of compassion and ease with our own vulnerability, deprives us from seeing our

difficulties and being able to love our own selves and those we are closest to. With the ones we are “family” we are entangled in multiple ways and seems we get desperate in the view of all the accumulated suffering and the mirroring of shared pain. It’s a difficult process to approach and unfold alone. The risk of getting in even deeper trouble is high.

Feeling disempowered to approach our intimate field, we turn both our love and help, as well as our criticisms and disappointments outside of our systems. We look for new ground and some freedom from our entanglements where our sensitivity will be just accepted and praised, where we can be the hero and have access to love and acceptance that might be marginalized in our environment, and also some contact with vulnerability that doesn’t provoke personal pains.

What is still missing though, is the facilitation of this entanglement in the “close” environment and the healing of the wounds we share and recycle. The “patient” is finally our wider traumatized system. We need to come together and provide help and care for the whole unit to heal. Only after we make the wounds apparent and care for them will the system and ourselves relax and be able to really come closer, love each other, and be able to stand for the things that are important for us without having to leave ourselves or our homes. Only in this way we will not project them on each other and create more city shadows.

The normalization of the traumatic experience

According to the American Psychological Association (APA) definition “Trauma is an emotional response to a terrible event like an accident, rape or natural disaster. Immediately after the event, shock and denial are typical. Longer-term reactions include unpredictable emotions, flashbacks, strained relationships and even physical

symptoms like headaches or nausea. While these feelings are normal, some people have difficulty moving on with their lives. Psychologists can help these individuals find constructive ways of managing their emotions.” My personal experience though, is that trauma can be provoked by one clear event as stated above, but can also be the outcome of a series of events going back in time. Personal traumatic experiences can often follow or be based on collective traumas, with the relationship between the feeling of distress and its cause(s) not always conscious or obvious. It can remain marginalized from the perception of the traumatized person or just partly realized.¹

I didn’t know I was suffering from trauma and was surprised to read that more people shared the same experience.² One of the causes of this is the interesting contradiction in our social behavior. The cultural normalization and acceptance of events that can be severely traumatizing on the one hand, with the symptoms and altered states that these events can provoke afterwards being perceived as individual pathology, on the other. Even in the above definition of trauma of the American Psychological Association, there is no reference to the social related factors that cause trauma. In other words there is a silent transmutation by the culture of what are innately cultural issues, to issues of personal failing.

In fact only a small proportion of the cases of trauma is related to natural disasters and accidents. The biggest percentage of traumatic experiences has to do with factors that are related to our social behavior and action. Instead of focusing our energy on healing our injuries and processing our history and conflicts to prevent future trauma,

¹ Being exposed to war or traumatic events in families can affect subsequent generations, the children and grandchildren of the trauma victims (Levine, 1997, p. 189).

²Ken Matsumura, *Body and Soul Retrieval*, 2013, Corina Buenger, *the Dark Side of the Moon*, 2011

we gradually tend to accept the traumatizing events as normal and disassociate the wound as a separate reality. We don't even notice the wound after a while and we forget the cause that created it.

We know that war, displacement, divorce, unemployment and a big list of human related factors³ cause trauma but at the same time they have become just natural parts of our everyday life. One of the reasons people don't notice their own suffering from trauma is because we have socially accepted the traumatizing event as ordinary.

The mind cannot make meaning of the suffering, thus it marginalizes it. "So many people have divorced parents, so what?" "There are thousands of refugees, so what?" and "war is happening everywhere". Things are "normal". So then we accept our symptoms as just our individual pathology. "It is just me who has a weird tendency to stay late in bed and feel no interest in anything..."

Mindy Thompson Fullilove has thoroughly researched the traumatic stress reaction to the loss of some or all of one's emotional ecosystem when displacement happens, naming this phenomenon "Root Shock". Root shock can follow natural disaster, development-induced displacement, war, and changes that play out slowly such as those that accompany gentrification. In her article "Psychiatric Implications of Displacement: Contributions from the Psychology of Place" (Fullilove, 1996), she writes about how the psychological processes of attachment, familiarity and place identity are threatened by displacement and the problems of nostalgia, disorientation and alienation may ensue.

³ ACE Study (Adverse Childhood Experience Study) has demonstrated an association of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) with health and social problems as an adult. Also a detailed list of factors that can cause trauma and statistical percentages can be found in the Trauma Informed, The Trauma Toolkit, 2013, http://trauma-informed.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Trauma-informed_Toolkit.pdf

When the conditions are normalized and trauma is handled and analyzed as a separate experience from the process that created it, the impact is abusive on the sufferers and deprives both the sufferers and the field from the potential to heal. Trauma is the basic evidence of a hurtful reality. When this message is manipulated by turning the suffering to individual pathology, the whole process is hijacked. This will only escalate things and add to more social tension, while no resolution has been reached. The issue is not the analysis of the wound but the elimination of the cause and the healing of what has already been affected.

Both individuals and whole groups of people end up not even knowing they suffer from trauma, like the populations with war, slavery or displacement background, which were mentioned before. They just slowly turn out having “weird social behavior” and living in the margins. They become the identified patient, the “city shadow” of the larger field, while both their trauma and its real cause remain hidden. Trauma literature talks about the denial of the traumatized person to face the distressing incident but the denial of society to own and care for its pathology is rarely addressed and insufficiently handled. One traumatic incident can be just one outburst of suffering in an already traumatized field that remains unrecognized and unhealed for years.

In my point of view, what has become pathological is our perception of reality. We have plenty of theories about the outcomes of painful events, however the predominant response is to merely inform the health care system about the new “patient” and ameliorate our resources of dealing with the symptoms. Instead of turning around to notice how we are the creators of all this pain and mess, we focus on the analysis of the wound. We spend millions in research dollars exploring the

ways nature's structures change when injured and what artificial supplies we can produce to hypnotize the pain. Hope is shrunk to helping the individual handle the symptoms and reduce the recycling. This is a lose-lose game.

Reading books on trauma made my panic come back. I entered painful loops of fear, despair, depression and pain. My life seemed like one more "case" with predetermined future, hypnotizing me in a no way out feeling. It is mind blowing to read all these things you suffer from gathered in some pages as a simple description of a thing that is called "trauma". This made me realize that the pathologizing effect basically derives from two things: a lack of meaning in the experience itself and a lack of modeling about how to transform it. We need help on dealing with trauma, lucidity around the way it is structured and guidance to navigate in this field and heal, not just a description of the state. When this is missing life becomes deprived of potential and people feel condemned.

Excluding trauma from the perception of health

My personal experience after all these years of dealing with difficult moods and symptoms is that these states are not often perceived as a natural part of life. My personal agony and discomfort has been intensified from the difficulty to find a relieving and accepting attitude towards my experiences and the reassurance that what I am experiencing is ok.

I had to grow to realize that trauma is not a static irreversible state, neither one alien to life. Part of the reason we fear it comes from the definition we give to "health" and our gradual cultural dissociation from consciously experiencing whatever is outside

this definition. We see the state of trauma as irreversible because we don't know enough about it, what to do and how can we "heal it". One thing is certain though, it is an incredibly common and natural experience.

If we notice our mood and feeling through time, we will see that nothing is stable. Our sensations vary all the time, and we actually move in a continuum of "I feel great" to "I feel sick". The one moment we laugh and another we cry. For certain periods of time we are close to one mood, which in another time might feel almost as an unknown reality. Life keeps changing.

The issue is though that we don't value all our experiences as "normal". We seem to favor some experiences over others, and usually the experiences that bring discomfort, we tend to exclude them of our perception of how life should be, with a tendency to forget their existence as long as they move to the past. In reality though, all experiences are natural and equally important, defining of the phenomenon of life. If we perceive the dominant or desirable experience as the only reality or as how reality should be, we marginalize a wide variety of human experiences.

We need to remember that "norm" means "rule", and refers to either "the most common" experience or to meeting specific criteria. Natural doesn't equal normal.

If we don't take into account the more marginal experiences is like misrepresenting life. What we call "health" in the mainstream Western culture is actually a fixed position. It is a state we perceive as without symptoms. But in fact, "health" and "disease" are states that alternate all the time, with their own frequency of presence (Morin, 2014).

Choosing our definition of "health" and promoting it as the right place to be, we tend to be against or afraid of many natural states of life, which will inevitably be

experienced through life. These states sometimes last longer and may be violated because of the lack of knowledge and disrespect for what they are.

We need more knowledge to understand nature and the meaning of “dis-easing” experiences, as well as to learn how to relate with these states. The result of our cultural fixation on their rejection is leading us to reduced knowledge, means and modeling for dealing with real life. Studying life closely as a whole and not as of separate measurements, following the experience and valuing the invisible as much as the tangible, might help us come closer to life’s mystery, wisdom and healing capacity.

Trauma is out of fashion

Another side effect of our cultural promotion and praise of the states of ease, comfort and strength is turning any “dis-easing” state not only to a fearful and undesirable one, but also to one that feels shaming to experience. According to the prevailing lifestyle, “dis-comfort” and “weakness” are better to be banned and if possible, erased from the map. There is an underlying rejection of vulnerability felt in almost all our interactions with the world. The promoted lifestyle is really against being “wounded” and our own self-evaluation unfortunately tends to follow the outside prescription. Shame, guilt and hiding from our human condition are related to our cultural and internalized personal criticism of the experiences that depart from our perception of what is “fashionable”. Only further suffering and loneliness is generated by this attitude. Living trauma means actually going against the tide.

If we think of trauma as a wound, there are some consequences we would naturally expect. Our system would need to slow down in order to heal. Plenty of sleep and

recuperation time would be indicated. The past, in the form of memories, feelings, dreams and talks, might often be an area of interest, as it holds answers and facts related to our present state. We might need time to reflect on what happened to gain a sense of order and make meaning of our experiences. Our senses may be intensified and our system still alert in defense. Our sense of our self might be vague and feel disoriented and lost after the shock and the interruption of flow. Sadness and weakness are likely to appear. We might get scared and look messy, weird and aloof. All the above elements are the “don't's” of fashion. What we are instructed as favorable is the exact opposite. We have to be fast, active and productive. Success is linked to being concentrated, in control and focused on a clear goal. Our attention should be turned to a better future. Technology is progressing rapidly every day, so we need to stay tuned in order to be on board. There is no time to lose. There are all the means to be perfect. There are super foods to make us strong and we just have to make smart and quick moves to be on top of the waves. It is super exciting and easy! Just don't loosen up. We can fix everything. There is no reason to be miserable and ugly.

Being someone who suffered from intense symptoms from a very young age, I found this prevailing attitude as giving no space to my real self to exist, nor the security and acceptance to let my experiences come forth. I hadn't shape yet a strong self-authority that could stand against this propaganda, so my self tended to shrink and feel like a loser. Especially while being young, felt almost humiliating to have feelings and experiences that others couldn't understand and my own self was scared of. Sadness, fear, panic, bad mood, no appetite were supposed to be for the old and those near death.

I guess that other people, experiencing trauma from an also young age, might have similar experiences to mine. For me, in order to get out of this loop of exclusion, I needed to find the means and support to consciously “lose”. I needed to “quit the game” of comparison and externally imposed importance and turn to myself with love and appreciation. Although it might feel very lonely in the beginning, I found that befriending personal experiences is the first move to relief, security and growing self-authority. It is a shift that can lead to a deep transformation and freedom of fear.

Having explored the nature of trauma, how it is defined and different ways in which it gets marginalized, we will now take a look at how trauma enters in the family field and how its dynamics may be related to personal encounters with trauma.

Chapter 2 - From the cultural marginalization of trauma, to the familial and personal

“Thus, to have heart, you need to have courage to detach from other’s opinions. With courage and discipline, you notice that you are a secondary process for the whole community. It is not you alone who wants to change, but a cultural path that wants to change. Your changes may therefore somehow be right for everyone else”

Arnold Mindell (1993 p142)

Our families as replicates of the world

From the wider social marginalization of trauma, I will now enter into the more personal field using my own story as a case study. I would like to show how the bigger social issues are played out on the personal level; how the marginalization of traumatic experiences is structured in our intimate environments and own selves; how fields get polarized in specific roles around traumatic experiences and keeps replaying them; and then finally, how all the accumulated trauma and the energies in the field get constellated in one’s own body, life and psychology.

The big traumatic events in human history like war, slavery, racism, discrimination of women, and all kinds of discrimination and abuse, are global. There is almost no chance for someone not to carry seeds of these wounds in the background or to not suffer from these issues directly in her life. This bigger “outer” trauma is actively present in our private lives, but often invisible, it clouds our perception. It doesn’t belong only to the past or to “others”, it is something that in smaller or bigger proportions is present in our relating, our family life and our personal struggles. We

are progressing together, processing the whole world history inch by inch through our own relating and living.

Although our life events seem “ordinary” to our everyday identity, making us accuse our feeling reactions as disproportional, reality might turn out to show that the opposite holds true. Sometimes we are unable to realize the extent to which our life is being hurtful and “unhealthy” to our nature, and preprogrammed by old unresolved pain and conflicts. Trauma can also be experiences we take for granted because of their repetitiveness, ongoing presence, and the lack of any reaction to their occurrence. Patterns of coping with trauma while marginalizing the impact of it can become cultural, blinding the whole field and making us wander around our sensational upset. Realizing, naming and consciously representing the voices and experiences we carry within can reveal the real ecology of our personal environment and make clear which roles are present and which conflicts remain unresolved. Facilitating these dialogues with more awareness can give an end to the recycling of the old wounds and help us come closer and relate.

The role of the disturber

When I decided to enroll myself to this program, I was feeling defeated by my symptoms, moods and relationship problems. I was feeling shame for “being constantly in trouble” without being able to explain either the size or the uncontrollable nature of my suffering to the people around me. Social encounters were becoming painful, and I couldn’t cope any more with the internal and external disappointment I was feeling about my condition. I preferred to stay on my own. This is how my intense marginalization started.

Different rational explanations were giving sense to my symptoms and I had a lot of insights after years of therapy, but still, things remained unresolved and uncontrollable. Something was threatening my whole system every now and then. I didn't feel anyone understood what was happening inside me, not even myself. I was getting marginalized even from my intimate environment and trapped in the identity of a victim that cannot find the strength to move on in life.

At that time I didn't know that one person can be representing a role in her field nor did I understand the multiple ways my personal experiences and actions were related to the whole. I was unconsciously becoming "the disturber". According to Processwork theory, when someone starts to suffer and slowly feels marginalized in a field, the cause of his suffering is most probably related to the marginalization of experiences from the whole field. There is a shared need for change that the system has difficulty to allow, and this way some kind of disturbance or impossible situation will usually appear to push and show the way to new needed balance.

In "Working with the dreaming body", Mindell writes about how this is the way cultural change happens. "Most changes come from some individual who is, at first, physically ill or who behaves insanely for short periods of time, but who is still basically strong enough to maintain the primary process of the group. If one member of a family chooses to bring his body experience or his fantasies into the group in such a way that the majority of the family does not feel threatened, then the whole family changes." (Mindell, 1985 p83)

Until though the field feels ready, and not severely threatened to open to new information and change, the person who is bringing in the "inexplicable" disturbance, will feel lonely. Expecting those who are close to understand and really make space

for our experience is partly impossible. The primary perception of how life should be in this field is against what our experiences are trying to bring forth, so we usually meet with reactions and attitudes that incriminate us for our feelings.

Especially in an environment where trauma and vulnerability have been strongly marginalized, the system will make any effort to either normalize and ignore the “suffering” or make it go away, denying any deeper reason for its existence. It will actually try to bypass it with almost the same intensity as the one felt by the previously experienced pain, finding relief in the simplistic justification of pathology.

And of course, our own primary self is also part of the field and against our parts that are in pain and reacting. It is remarkable, that even after suffering for a long time, I was the first one to betray myself with disbelief about the seriousness of my discomfort and need every time I was feeling a little better and life seemed to be getting in order. I was also the first one to hit back at myself for being a loser the moment I felt bad again. I felt extreme fear of any new issues, and shame at the same time.

Having access to hospitals, doctors and psychologists, I felt even worse for having so much support and still not getting better. I didn’t really believe that my suffering had such a serious cause to warrant such distress. I could easily side with the voice that was implying that I was exaggerating, that I am an imaginary patient and that deep down I could have done better. In the end I agreed with the part that said that I just needed a push. At least this side implied that I am finally ok! I so much wanted to erase any sense of “problem” from the map.

My experiences were marginal for the whole family field and I was just unconscious to the fact that I was the disturber.

My story as a case study

What I will present here is the background of my story, in historical facts, personal experiences and body symptoms in main interest to present how all these weave together and reveal the main Processwork field theory and the body's role in revealing the self. All my experiences that seemed irrelevant and were creating fear and shame of myself, turned out to be related parts of one bigger process, with my symptoms being my main access to the powers needed for relief and rebalancing.

I also want to show how the marginalization of trauma travels through generations, structuring life around old unprocessed wounds and creating new ones until things reach a climax. I want to speak about the roles in the field and the ones that are missing, and show how the feeling atmosphere that is not addressed and owned becomes internalized and turns to be one person's pathology.

The setting my childhood life

When I was born I was the only child and only grandchild in both families. I had the luck to meet four grandparents, two great grandparents and come in contact with the culture and the stories of three generations. My grandparents, from my mother's side, were almost sharing my upbringing with my mother since my birth and I was living between the two houses. During these first five years I was a happy and strong child, with lots of attention and love around me. Everything, apart from my turbulent sleep, seemed great.

The year I turned five was a very strange one. A mysterious bomb fell which reshaped my whole world. My parents divorced and I moved to live with my grandparents for good. My paternal grandmother died and after a while my father had a serious car accident. For almost a year I lost touch with him.

In the space of three years, the setting of my life was completely transformed. My parents were both in new relationships, my grandparents from my father's side were dead, and I lived with my grandmother, my grandfather and my uncle from my mother's side. I spent every second weekend with each of my parents. In the house I live in, among other challenges, my grandfather is slowly entering the world of Alzheimer's.

In the background

Turning our gaze to the background, there is root shock and great losses in both sides of my family. The ghost of a sudden split of the world between a lost and a new one is strongly present before my birth, as well as flips of rank and security. There has been a repetitive "world destruction", lack of stability and calling for adaptation to new conditions and starting anew. The agony of survival was not far away when I came into this life and the myth of the "orphan" seems to be ancestral.

My father's father lost his homeland when his village was turned into an artificial lake in order to supply Athens with water. He was orphaned at birth when his mother died during childbirth. He came to Athens at the age of eight and lived his life with hard work and tight finances.

My other grandfather was a refugee from Asia Minor. He lost both his parents and his older brothers during the exile. He came to Greece with his younger siblings at the age of nine and grew up in an orphanage. He was an artist. In later years he became a rich businessman, only to lose everything again and find himself at risk of imprisonment. The whole family is threatened again with poverty.

My grandmother came to Athens from her village, at the age of 16 as a bride for my

grandfather. She was only a child of an agricultural family when she suddenly moved to the big city. She thought that Athens meant beautiful dresses.

As far as the wider field is concerned, the experiences of loss, root shock, change and sudden merging of populations was a great challenge for the whole country at that time. Similar stories reside in the background of many other Greek families.

In 1923, 1,5 million Greeks came to Greece from Asia Minor as refugees like my grandfather. After 2000 years inhabiting the area, the whole Greek population of the East disappeared, losing every relationship with this land.

Also, like my grandmother, most of the wives of that time were given to marriage at a very young age and to men they didn't choose.

People from the countryside, like my other grandfather, migrated *en masse* to Athens for a better life, usually much younger than the age of 18.

Finally, during World War II, Greece suffered from great poverty, followed by an intense civil war with its dividing effects still echoing in the present.

This makes me believe that part of my own background trauma is also collective.

Shuttled between houses. Confusion, disorientation and lack of security

One big part of my life experience is being exposed to regularly changing scenery and culture. Since my birth I was changing houses and sleeping places with a maximum of five nights in a row in one place, the main house being the one of my grandparents.

Every weekend I was visiting one of my parents but my experience there was not one of equal rank. I was careful and reserved and my focus was on my effort to fit in.

Different houses meant different rules. I was in a constant alternation of hot and cold water and I couldn't rest from attending what was happening on the outside. It was of

utmost importance that I become aware of the customs and become part of the field.

My system was tuned to adaptation.

My own needs were overridden and I couldn't connect with what was present inside myself, be it feelings, strengths or needs. My sense of worth and acceptance alternated according to the changing scenery, and no matter how hard I tried, stability was fleeting. My sense of security and belonging was gradually becoming thin.

In order to relax and open up to my own self I needed a way out of any system of comparison and changing rules. I needed a connection with something stable, loving and accepting, but this was not happening and I remained unaware of my deep need⁴.

Living between two worlds. Threatened both by depression and progress.

Living in the same house with my grandparents and feeling their disconnection from the outside world made it hard for me to leave them behind and follow my life. The heaviness and sadness in the atmosphere was holding my heart a prisoner. I unconsciously felt I was the privileged one because of my age and my access to social activities and I tried to share my privilege and change the atmosphere in the house. I wanted them to be happy.

On the other side, when I was outside the house I mostly felt in a low rank position. Not living with my parents I missed their presence and support, as well as the more youthful activities other kids of my age enjoyed. While other children were undisturbed in their play, a vague sadness and worry became a close companion that

⁴ Long-term repeated traumatic exposure has the most serious consequences. Children and adolescents are by nature more vulnerable to traumatic experience because their sense of self is still in development. Trauma in adolescence compromises the three normal adaptive tasks: to form an identity, to gradually separate from their family of origin, and to explore the wider social world (Herman, 1997 p61)

made me look different and didn't let me fully take part in the games. I was feeling left behind.

On the surface I was feeling jealous comparing myself to other children, but on a deeper level it was hard for me to cope with my difficulty and my sadness. There was not enough space even to really feel it. Only my body was giving clear signals, making my "heaviness" apparent. I was gaining weight, I was speaking quietly and my mood was often low.

By returning home, I was flipping again to high rank position and trying to cheer up the atmosphere. There was no space for complaint. So I kept skipping my own feelings. My generalized sense of worry and a fear of death of my beloved ones was leading me towards keeping "balance" and depriving me from clearly feeling each feeling. Neither joy nor sadness could have its own space and deepen. I was living with a mixed feeling of incomprehensible dissatisfaction and uncontrollable flips of mood. At times sudden joy was taking over. Then sadness counter balanced. But these feelings were unsustainable, random, and with short duration, like exploding bombs. My mood always returned to the reserved worry of the atmosphere in the house. A depressive silence was marginalizing any stronger feelings from the scenery. The heaviness was never spoken and joy was extinguished.

Symptoms

My symptoms were plentiful and from a rational point of view didn't seem to relate the one with the other. When a new symptom appeared I experienced it as a new threat and it was agonizing. My life seemed to be constantly in danger. An unknown threat could come any moment and attack me. I couldn't relax and I felt shame for

always being in need. It is tough to be young, seemingly ok, and have constant irritations of different kinds. It is exhausting and leaves you with no energy.

My symptoms had become the main organizers of my actions. They had the power to control my life and my direction and define how far I could go and for how long. No one was able to tame them. I was trying to overcome them with determination to move forward but they kept changing forms according to the trigger. My “sick” side was strong, persistent, uncontrollable and ground shaking.

My first intense symptom was strong suffocation at the age of 11. I couldn't breathe and I had panic attacks. I felt fear and confusion together in the form of an altered state that made it difficult to be actively present. I was trying to keep touch with consensus reality order and not seem weird in my relating. Inside though I felt like I could die any moment. My main focus was to find anything that would make me forget my negative thoughts.

Then my heart started aching. It was tense and hurting while breathing and my stomach was swollen. Suffocation, panic attacks, fear and depression were still present together with tightness in my chest area, indigestion and constipation. All these symptoms lived in the background for many years, creating a kind of known mood.

Allergy in the form of strong allergic rhinitis was the new addition when I left my father's house to live on my own. I was under a lot of stress. It lasted for several years and made me try numerous therapies in order to manage the symptoms, with very slow progress. There were periods I was sleeping in a sitting position. I had difficulty in staying focused on tasks and I had a constantly foggy head and runny nose.

After this, the irritation moved further down, to my intestines, causing pain and a feeling like I had internal wounds. The pathological severity was increasing. My last symptoms before I collapsed were painful boils.

Revealing the overall process in action

- Present reality

For the last five years I have been dedicated to working with my symptoms, my moods and all the rising challenges in my environment through the various Processwork methods and theory. I was working in therapy on a regular basis, during my residencies, my supervisions and almost every day in different ways in innerwork. I had a vast repertoire of disturbances to study and the privilege of time to really concentrate on gaining awareness. Everything in and around me was in intense distress. Greece, in a remarkable synchronicity, was entering into the big financial crisis at the exact same time of my personal collapse, signaling the parallel collapse of the country.

Agony, fear and depression, which were the big hunting ghosts of my own psychology and the predominant powers in my family field, were now reflected in the national context. Wherever I turned my gaze I saw intense distress and fear, bordering on despair. This gave me a sense of amplification of the symptoms. The field's process and mine were somehow coming very close, like being one. The volume of the difficulty was increasing massively, but there was also an interesting controversy happening inside me.

In this field, in a surprising way, I started feeling a slight relief. I realized that my "hunting ghosts" were for the first time shared and visible. This mirroring of my despair on the one hand left me no space to look away, pushing me to come into

contact with its essence and usefulness, and on the other hand allowing an unconscious sense of ease and relaxation to arise because of its “community”.

I felt less marginalized for my feelings of “defeat”. Even if the situation was extremely tense, I was still relieved by the shared feeling that the situation brought. Somehow the amplification of despair was creating the needed change by itself, the “sharing” of our humane vulnerability in front of life’s challenges and an imposed “letting go” of the effort to escape.

My symptoms became my doorway to experiencing. Together with my dreams and my flirts⁵, they helped me navigate a threatening landscape. For most of the time I was working in the dreaming and essence level of reality. My moods and the external reality were so challenging and seemingly dead-end, that I had to turn inside and connect with the process from an experiential level. From there I could find meaning and sense in what was happening in the consensus reality world and connect it with a sensory tendency that was showing me the way out of the impasse. This was creating a sense of security and strength to move along with the turbulence.

I had to dive in and let the sensations guide me to awareness. Little by little, I was learning to tap into the energy of my symptoms and appreciate them as helpful allies. My ability to recognize their message was increasing, as well as my ability to change my usual ways of behaving, and to use their power in different forms in my everyday reality. Fear and agony was now coexisting with potential and hope. This was the beginning and the catalyst to my own healing, change and apocalypse of the whole inner and outer theater behind my bodily felt experiences.

⁵ see chapter 4

- The process through my symptoms

Along the way of unfolding and connecting with the energies of my symptoms, facilitating their relationship and dealing with the intensity and complexity of the field around me, I met dozens of allies who helped me become the different parts and play them out. My scenery has been full of animals, landscapes, cartoons, heroes, as well as senses, all showing me the way. What I will try to do here is to put in words and order a whole process that has been unraveled through sensations, images, dream figures, sounds; not through linear thinking.

The overall evolution of my symptoms is like unfolding one single process. They started by grabbing me from the communication chakra and blocking my heart. Then they went up blurring my perspective and clear thinking and then slowly went down blocking my vital energy until my heart finally stopped and I fell on the ground.

Behind all my symptoms are basically three main energies that change form and location. Both the alternation of energies within one symptom, as well as the overall path my symptoms followed, is the same process. The action in the micro and macro level is identical.

The first energy is tight and solid. It initially manifested as the tightness around my throat and chest area that was restricting my breathing. Later the tightness went to my stomach and intestines and then finally in the internal grabbing of my boils every time they started their formation. The second energy is a pulling downwards, taking alternatively the form of depression, confusion, sleepiness, weakness and finally fainting. The third is a shaking that leads to explosion and pushing everything away. It appears in the form of the panic attack, irritated swollen belly, sneezing nose, internal shiver and boils that finally erupt.

All my symptoms are actually doing the same thing. They are preventing me from moving ahead, following and fitting in and they turn me unconsciously internally. They were making me altered, messy and explosive, like a boiling immovable volcano. This was an image that appeared often while working with my symptoms. If I put the energies together they seem to create a hologram of one action that goes like this: grab, pull down, hold to surrender, gather power, shake and push out.

Looking back now at all the information I have about the field I was born and raised into and my personal experiences, I notice how the energies my body was bringing forth, were needed and missing powers for a long time. The need of a solid holding that can allow surrender and the disconnection from the outside threats in order to regain power, centeredness and connection with the self was vital. Myself was “grabbing” me internally in order to not abandon her, to stop running away, to stay and find some peace and rest in connecting with my own feelings, my own body, my history and heritage and who I am.

The sudden cutting from roots, and the alternating environments and rank has been in the field for two generations. The anxiety to survive, get back to life, and regain worth, social position and rank, were the main ingredients of the air I was breathing. The “disconnection” from the external world and security has been experienced in such a sudden and strongly abusive way and that it has been marginalized as a very scary experience. The main focus during all these years has been on “grasping” life again and reestablishing the connection with the outside world. The whole system was structured towards fighting for the outside acceptance. Life was mainly experienced as an excessive effort to succeed, with heartbreaking defeats and self-blame every time the system ignored its own limits and needs.

Although we could say that the divorce of my parents and my “abandonment” to my grandparents were the tangible aspects of my trauma, the forces I struggled with were much wider, older and stronger. The way my own home was “lost” and the way reality was structured afterwards was a repetition of a past I wasn’t aware of. My personal pain, fear, aloneness and agony for security were informed and amplified by the field atmosphere; they were present from long ago and nurtured by everyone around. The way and the attitude with which things were handled, was informed by previously lived experiences. The setting was different, but the roles and the process were not.

- Intergenerational influences

It is fascinating for me to find out that the traumatic experiences in my life have been unconsciously organized, maintained and nurtured by the older traumas. The two major traumatic experiences that remained unprocessed from the time of my grandparents stayed alive through time and created a specific psychological dynamic that kept replaying. Although the scenery was changing and life was moving on, the process was just recycling. The pain, the fear and the shock of the sudden loss and the agony to go against it and survive, were uncontrollably organizing life.

The system has been so hard hit by loss that “vulnerability” and “looseness” had become very threatening. The system should be “alert”. The only safe mode was the one of being in defense. And while the system was flipping between two states, the one of dealing with defeat and the one of pushing forward to reach life, there were also two types of defense cultivated. The one was the “strength to endure” any misfortune, pain, helplessness or strike of fate, and the other was the “blind action forward”, almost like a rebel, pushing at any cost, in order to reach out to life again.

It is like moving between a “freezing” of the emotions, so they will not be felt, and an effort to “flee” from threat to rejoin life. “Peace” and “relationship” are missing states, and very difficult ones to reach. The experience of pain, fear and agony have been so strong that they are provoked by minor triggers, setting forth at any moment either the “freeze” or “flight” mechanism. Any approach can be perceived as a threat. This ends in marginalizing other feelings, powers and instincts that are trying to appear and reestablish balance. Somehow the old lived threat of “war” never pauses, becoming a prolonged reality. The defense mechanism remains always on and the sensitivity high.

My grandfather was the first one to experience the shock of loss. He lost his whole world, all the adult members of his family and any sense of stability and security, because of the war. My grandmother joined the field with her own experiences of similar feelings. She was given to marriage and sent away from her village when she was just 16 years old, again under the threat of war. Their marriage happened during the 2nd World War, while my grandmother was threatened that it wasn't safe for her to be at the village. In a way they were both refugees from completely different backgrounds and with their own personal high dream of safety and prosperity.

For different reasons they were both missing an adult, nurturing, loving and protecting role in their lives, someone who could stand for them, as well as the safety of belonging to a wider community. None of them had a role model for intimacy either. The place they could meet was to stand against the difficulties and threats of life and the pain of loss. They could be a team, as long as there was an outside enemy or a cause to defend. However, when they were turning to each other, they were also each becoming the enemy of the other. No one had the inner security to open to the other and relate while honoring her/his diversity.

-The roles and the ghost roles

The ghost roles of “war” and “threat” were now playing unconsciously in the house. The unfriendly and unknown world projected onto each other, resulting in endless fights. They both felt threatened and rejected. The dream of “relationship” could not be reached for as long as the openness that could lead to meeting and merging of the parts was unknown and felt unsafe. The “looseness” and the “vulnerability”, for flirts to come in and for attraction to be allowed, were strongly marginalized, while neither felt strong enough to negotiate and make sure he/she will not be violated. Life in this setting is limited between two options: a restrictive, threatening and upsetting togetherness or a solo going out and living life. The system is stuck in the earlier polarity of endurance and flight.

In this field, the next generation comes and picks up these two roles more congruently. My uncle comes first and takes the enduring role of the one who tries to cope with the civil war happening in the house, plus the material poverty that followed the new losses. He gets stuck in a lifelong effort for safety and peace, but has no skills to facilitate the war, nor the inner security to face the threat of sorrow and death. My mother comes second and takes the rebel role, the one who finds the courage to leave the scene of misery and war, and is brave enough to flee from depression and restriction to reach freedom again.

The power of the ghost role of “threat”, as a disproportionately strong invader, is so big that it unconsciously splits the field in two and polarizes people between the roles of the defender and the rebel. The one side freezes and closes down in front of the face of fear, and the other runs away; the fearful conservatives and the daring progressives.

The one side accuses the other for its position and for having the wrong way of reacting, ignoring that they are both organized and threatened by the same ghost of fear. The intensity is so high, that people lose any access to anything is outside their role and also to the relationships and the community of effort between them. My mother's urge to stand against depression and move out to live life was so strong and so much internally justified that it disconnected her even from her maternal instincts.

When she married my father, she also had no skills for intimacy. All she could see in her marriage was the potential for freedom. When intimacy came as an issue, she could easily flee from this threat again and pursue her freedom. Her drive was so much fueled by her suffocation by the family model of togetherness that she easily took a divorce in times when this was rare, especially for a woman to initiate. Deep down she was never connected with the severity of what she was doing.

Apart from my father, who was devastated, the whole field of my mother's side was so hypnotized by their known roles, that there was almost no reaction. Life continued in the same depressive mode with just another loss to deal with and my grandmother crying at times, among other misfortunes, for me being an "orphan". My mother stayed tough in order to save herself from the heaviness of feelings and gain back her freedom from intimacy.

It is almost unbelievable that only my father tried to speak to me about their divorce, and he was also the only one I remember having strong feelings about what was happening. Apart from that, nothing else was said. My mother never spoke to me about anything, feeling I should be "protected" and stay outside of "their issue". I just stayed with my grandparents forever, and since I was anyway spending most of my time there, even that seemed natural.

My mother was able to think only in terms of safety, freedom and progress. As long as she knew I was safe with her parents, everything was ok. She had to move on towards freedom and a “happy life”, which would be also good for me in the future...

My whole world was lost in one night and in silence, just the same way my grandfather lost his land. Nothing was said, nothing to negotiate, back to the “endurance” role and coping with the new reality. Everything is normal.

Any role of “standing against the oppressor” was missing. The “threat” is never confronted. There is not enough sense of inner power to stand for oneself, neither a sense of inner holding to fight back or react. The game has only two choices for action, “endure” the loss or “flee” to another direction and keep running to not be caught. There is no way to negotiate or reverse the situation. We are lost by definition. The one side is closed and solid in its sadness and depression, defending its ground in stillness and the other is running away in any possible direction away from the scary “home”. The “threatening invader” has finally deprived the field from life. It is a devastated war zone, where half the population is living in the caves in grief and the other half has immigrated, running always ahead towards the new in order to be saved. Outside in the open, nothing lives.

- Bringing the story together

The marginalization of vulnerability, turned from a survival skill to the main force of self-destruction. There is no relationship with the “other” and no relationship with the self, no awareness of its own hurt, of its own needs and what is missing. The own sensing is restricted to specific sensations. The self becomes either numb to its wounding and lets any inner or outer oppressor free to shrink its vitality, or cuts off

her own parts and her own needs in order to remain free of negotiation and grabbing feelings. The freeze or flight mode is becoming so absolute and insensitive to the person's needs, that it becomes a cruelty against the self.

At the time my parents divorced, the environment around me was a representation of this dynamic. I was left with the part that was numb and in depression, while my mother was moving ahead in ignorance. My father, who held the role of "feeling" and the dream of "relationship", stayed alone with all the marginalized and unprocessed feelings, and not much in my life any more. Not surprisingly, from my current point of view, he ended having a severe car accident a little while after the divorce and was in hospital for six months. After that time, and when I saw him again, I was shocked and detached. My mother had "cut" any direct communication with my father, and I remember that this was just another strong war, splitting even my physical plane in two parts. In my mind there was a dividing line in the city, on one side my mother's world and on the other my father's. I got very confused and upset when one was crossing this line and entering to the side of the other.

In these terms, my symptoms were finally my saviors. In their "attacking" way and "uncontrollable" nature, they were imposing the missing "control" over the situation and were meeting the "urgency" of my needs. They were trying to break through the defensive patters and provide access to all the energies that were missing in my field. The initial "grabbing" energy, present in all my symptoms, was finally standing for the burning need for stability, holding and relationship. It came to "stop" me from going away from myself, imposing itself by force over the blind "flight" pattern. It was trying to hold me and turn me to my own center in order to reconnect me with my

feelings, senses and powers. It helped me to stop from “running” out of anxiety for acceptance and fear of myself, overriding my own nature and identity.

Then comes the pulling down part, compelling me to let go. This part breaks the pattern of endurance and brings forth my inability to hold any more. It forces me to surrender and follow my need for decompression, nurturing and care. It becomes the missing “cradle” for my infant abandoned self. It forcibly dissolves the agony of my “orphan” side that makes me restless and disoriented, and helps me calm down and settle. It supports my great need of “gathering” in my own world and relaxing in order to find home and safety in myself.

Finally comes the part that is pushing away. This comes to bring me in touch with the most marginalized and missing part of the story, which is the “fighter”. The one who can stand against the “threat” and stop the abuse. This part is about standing my ground and for my right to exist and is clearing the scene of inner and outer oppressors. This is the guardian of a whole and free self.

- From internalizing history back to cultural reformation

When I was born, I had no idea of all the stories and experiences of the past. For my conscious mind, there was no great visible disorder. Even the divorce of my parents was passed to me as something natural. Everything was silenced and disguised by a normalizing attitude all around me. From the plane of my senses though, there was upset, reaction and intense symptoms. It was like carrying the tensions of the world in my own gut. Everything I have just written, I discovered by working with my own disturbances, in my body, mood and relationships. All the roles in the field and their conflicts had become parts of my own psychology. I was like an alarm shouting for

help, unable to follow and complete on my own the processes my symptoms were initiating.

After all these years of trying to “see” and survive in this thick field, I strongly believe that the issues we face in our everyday reality are much broader than personal, and that support is needed on a community basis. Individual work needs to go hand-in-hand with field facilitation and education.

It is very hard for our families and our intimate relationships to battle alone with the pain, the fear, the rage and the guilt of a war in the background, or find the equanimity and see clearly when arguing about issues that touch upon race and sex. It’s a very difficult bet from the beginning, but people are unaware of this truth. Usually individuals end up searching for help when things climax in their own psychology, while their issue is not unique and is not quite their own. The same story is replayed in many homes and impacts everyone in the field. Our conflicts have been structured throughout history, and in an equal way we need the support and care of each other to wake up to our blind spots and to the hurt and pain we carry and we cause. It is difficult to handle history in a constructive way and not make it recycle.

In the beginning of my journey I was haunted by the suffocation of my own family’s suffering and my internal urge to reach out for community help. The more I work with people and get to know their stories and dreaming, the more I witness the common roots of our difficulties and confusion. The roots of any trauma seem to go far beyond the identified traumatic incident, and far beyond the personal level.

We need the openness of the community level to witness our shared human nature and our interconnectedness, and also experience some safety in order to realize the

link between our personal difficulties with the dynamics in the wider picture. We are missing help, consolation and acceptance around the things that have already happened to get out of the guilt and the blaming and more awareness and support of our power to grow. “Criticizing ourselves for what we have done to our world may be helpful, but cannot change irreversible processes and rarely inspires us to react creatively or to raise the overall quality of our lives” (Mindell 1989, p.1).

Part of our “community” is marginalized and not represented. We hide our suffering and our vulnerability out of guilt, shame and fear. We miss the relief and support we could gain by sharing it. We are like friends separated by a secret we each hold from the other, even though the secret is the same. Some of the threats are common and you can sense them in the atmosphere. They are just not represented or directly named although they impact the field greatly. When they stay secret for a long time, they can sometimes organize civil wars.

Chapter 3 – The healing of Trauma as a rank issue and the main oppressors standing in the way of flow

*“Don’t be afraid that you are afraid, be a friend with pain,
life has always something deeper to say, and the pain and the time are two sages”*

Manolis Rassoulis, Greek lyricist

Bringing an end to the recycling of trauma

Following the findings of the previous chapter, the traumatic experiences we face seem to be just peak moments of much bigger processes. It’s not easy to specify when the traumatizing process really begins, and it’s also interesting that around the same central processes, everyone connected is traumatized in different ways and to different extents.

This is what makes the whole field sensitive and prone to inner debates, and makes it more difficult for individuals to find a way out of the field dynamic to access other experiences and an overview of the whole process in action.

However, for each individual there is a unique point where the process gets stuck and recycles, creating a specific constellation of trauma and a wound that remains open because of the inability to facilitate the traumatizing dynamic such that the way to healing is opened. This is the vicious cycle we get trapped in and which we need to process in order to return back to flow.

In this chapter, I would like to talk about this recycling and show how its continuum is significantly based on rank issues between our mind and our sensations. Living in a culture where mind has become the predominant way of relating to and perceiving the world, our feeling experiences get marginalized in multiple ways, preventing us from

accessing healing. In my case this was the main factor that preserved my suffering and re-traumatization. Our everyday mind has its own limitations and can be threatened by the needs of our deeper self and thereby stand in the way to reestablishing flow and balance.

Recently a client of mine asked me “what can we do to get out of trauma, how can we deal with it? It has already happened and its presence cannot go away!” This experience of reality as a fixed, harsh and irreversible state is the exact feeling we have when trapped in the field of trauma.

From a more detached place though, this is not the whole reality. A connection with this wider perspective is needed to start moving away from this unpleasant and fixed position. Trauma has a mesmerizing power over its sufferers. It gets imposed as the only reality because of its intensity and also has a way of nurturing fear and the senses and perception that support the oppressor’s mindset. What we are actually missing is a loving advocate to take opposite action in these two areas: help the disconnection from the threat and bring in a wider perspective over reality; a two directional support for growth.

Our first needed support is towards dealing with the threat itself or also called the “oppressor”; that which is causing the trauma. This threat is usually something that has happened or is still present in our outer reality, being is too harsh for our nature, along with the parts of our inner world that have internalized the same attitudes. We need to find how we can change our relationship with this threat in order to prevent further trauma and to reestablish safety. Nature, through our body’s tendencies, will show the right way to deal with it, be it fight, asking for help, detachment, or

something else. After this is established, we can work on facilitating our relationship with it.

In Processwork language this means:

- Role-play with the help of objects the three roles: client – oppressor – helper, and check how the client put them interact. This will show the process and how to work with the threat.

- Support this process that is revealed as the one that leads to safety and strengthen the person's ability to maintain it: disengage from the threat - ability to reach a safe place.

- After this comfort zone has been reached and the person is back in his center and not in a place of defense, negotiate with the threatening voice/role/reality. It can be through role-play or through accessing a processmind place and looking back at the situation from that perspective.

- Role model a different relationship with the threatening energy

- Slowly support and strengthen behaviors of the person that carry the essence of the threatening energy, in order to help the connection with this marginalized side

- Facilitate the relationship between parts of the self by doing continuous edgework

- Finally help the person to fully own and live this energy dissociated from the context of threat and move along all his parts with ease and flow

This part of the work is mostly associated with stages II and III⁶

The other parallel direction is towards establishing a relationship with the self and connecting with all of one's parts. With the various feelings and experiences that live in the body, as well as with behaviors and patterns of relating to others and to life in

⁶ Mindell, personal communication 2/20/2015

general. Our deeper self is always connected with life and has its own ways to find access to light, even in the midst of the most difficult challenges.

By turning the attention to ourselves, we notice what is there: symptoms, tendencies, habits, ticks, things we usually don't identify with neither see any meaning in their existence. All these things thought might be the "weird" ways our self is already bypassing the threat. Following them brings us out of the trap that is the traumatized state, and reminds us that trauma is not our whole identity. Strengthening and amplifying our connection with these parts of ourselves that are already out of the wound helps us break the spell and unfold to our full size again; take care of our well being; and, create space for our traumatized parts to heal.

In Processwork language this means:

- Support the reconnection with the body and the senses, even in subtle ways in the beginning, like a general sensation or a mood forecast
- Notice symptoms, dreams, double signals in behavior, all the secondary things, and bring them into awareness with curiosity, respect and a friendly predisposition in order to search if there is something "nice" there
- Help the person connect with things that feel good; can be any little and uncanny thing or flirt, and strengthen the sense of self and wellbeing. We need to remember that the primary identity of trauma is fear and hurt, pleasure and safety are usually marginalized or unknown.
- Bring relief by helping the person connect with life in a satisfying way; support the present experiences that the person enjoys
- Support dreaming and experiencing as ways to uncover the personal ways of relating with life; just by following tendencies in the neutral essence world, outside of mind's interpretations

- Use the therapy setting and your relationship to train in how being oneself is

This part of the work is mostly associated with stages I and IV. Stage I work is extremely important in trauma, while the main thing that has been violated is the identity of a person. In the best scenario, the identity might have just been through a big shock, but in many cases the person might never had the chance to form one. Stage IV work is the best ally to this process.

In a quick summary the overall two-directional process is “getting out of the danger’s grab and renegotiating with the powers in the field” and “holding the self to relax, deepen, expand and reclaim its parts to wholeness”, or otherwise return to flow.

We do not have to erase history or look for powers we do not have in order to escape. We just need help on our way to find safety, set our perception free again, come in contact with the parts we marginalize and follow nature to unblock the way. Our bodies and sensations will give us almost all the information we need if we listen to them. As we saw in my story, *enduring suffering* and *running away* were the two known coping mechanisms to deal with the threat and were contributing to the recycling and deepening of the trauma. The threat of the conqueror was still governing; sending the self away from home, to either isolated inner suffering, or to exile.

At the same time though, there was a different experience happening; the one in my body. My symptoms were leading me to a letting go of effort, and to a nurturing inner state where home and connection existed, and transformation and healing could happen. All I had to do was to find the support to listen to and follow this parallel

reality, allowing the relief I experienced each time to grow, so I could feel stronger to respond and disengage from the threat.

When we are stuck in trauma one of the biggest issues is that our default response is often the exact opposite of what is needed for healing. We feel powerless to do anything about the situation and at the same time we are afraid of our “weakness”. The constant threatening presence has so much power and absorbs our energy and attention. All our power is projected there. It’s interesting to notice that although we are constantly “bleeding” and running out of energy, we cannot really turn to ourselves to connect with our wounds and their needs: our attention is hooked on the “enemy”. We are somehow stuck between the outer threat and the inner fear and criticism of our own selves and our newly emerging experiences. If we don’t have access to any “fairy” to reassure us that it is ok and we can relax, this experience whereby both the outer and inner worlds feel threatening, is a frightening one.

The prevention of healing as a rank issue

In my story this was the structure of my trauma. Something from the outside was aggressive towards me and was asking for explanations about my condition, while I was stuck trying to understand what was happening to me. The bullying about my suffering, my inability to name it, and its prolonged insufficient care came to be more damaging than the original traumatizing events. My repetitive traumatization was the marginalization of my feelings from my consciousness and my inability to access comfort.

One day, I was doing innerwork trying to unfold my feeling of not being able to speak; of something blocking me from expressing myself. I started from just getting in touch with the sensation while I was sitting on the floor. After some seconds

though the sensation of blockage and a kind of “holding down” expanded to my whole body. I stood up in order to explore this force that I felt against me and also check what was happening with my movement. I felt that it was immobilizing me in general.

As I stood up, I realized that this force was somehow imposing on me. It was bigger than me and was making me look up in order to face it. At that moment my experience became also visual. The image of a strong, male, big size bully appeared in my mind. He was like one of these people who control the entrance in clubs. As I tried to draw the visualization of my felt experience I came up with the following drawing. This image is an accurate representation of what I am describing here and a good mirroring of the state I felt trapped in for years. This “controller” was somehow immobilizing me and keeping me out of life. He is looking at me haughtily, sending the message “life is not for you”. I am stuck, alone, in fear, I have intense symptoms and I cannot speak.



As I dream further into its presence, this figure is pissed off and bullying me. It asks me all the time “why are you creating trouble?”, “what do you want?”. Its presence is blocking my perspective, as if I am confronted with a wall. His anger grows as I continue to fail to explain what I am saying and feeling. He silences and suffocates me with his aggression, intensifying my fear, confusion and shame. I think that the intensity of the experience is going to kill me, while inside me is panicking too. I cannot go out and I cannot go in. I am altered and trembling.

After a traumatic experience, the relationship with ourselves is often interrupted. Apart from the outer context, something in the inner world has also shifted and we are faced with parts of ourselves and with feeling experiences that are “unknown”. There is an “expansion” of the self with unknown internal experiences, which is upsetting to our usual identity and most likely suppressed in conscious or unconscious ways from our whole intimate environment. Our experiences are perceived as “disturbances”. We cannot make meaning of their presence, and our initial reaction is to want to send them away. In Processwork these exact disturbances is useful information we try to come in contact and unfold, while they bring us in touch with parts of our identity that have been marginalized.

The aspect of our trauma that will not find an outlet or care will stay internal. It will keep sending us messages and call for our attention, like the crying of the baby I used as a metaphor in my introduction. It states the presence of discomfort but using a different language to the one that the mind can understand. On the one hand this is what enables its rescue from the initial marginalization and censorship of the mind, but on the other it has difficulty to find allies in the consensus reality world. It can

upset the system and impose its presence, but cannot easily communicate its message.

That was a key revelation in my awareness.

The feeling experiences get easily disavowed from our intellect. They need to turn into symptoms, dreams, altered states, unexpected events, tension in our relationships, in order to state their presence. They need to amplify to the degree to really upset our everyday life in order to make us stop and relate with them. Their persistence and volume are their only ways to be heard.

The marginalization of trauma becomes finally the result of a rank difference between the intellect and the world of experiencing and feeling. Our mind-oriented perception of reality is standing as an obstacle in relating to our selves and our feelings. Trauma will remain in the margins of our consciousness until we feel safe to approach and permit sensation. In other words, we are trapped in the fear and the upset of the mind.

The three oppressors

On my way to experiencing and listening to myself, which finally enabled my healing, I met three oppressors that were related to the mind dominating the senses. These attitudes that I call oppressors are strongly rooted in the inner and outer world, creating disbelief and overriding the messages of the self. They are actually three betrayers of the self, making the effort of the self to express itself extremely difficult. “If your particular group attacks you first in your dreams, then you go to therapy and meet your own resistances. Yet this may not succeed, because self-doubt, that is, your attackers, can block you even from seeking help, dreaming or moving. Inner attacks are at their maximum when you attempt to change and be real. Sometimes only a shaman who looks for your lost soul can help” (Mindell, 1993 p201).

All the oppressors I met on my way relate to the way the mind operates and the limits created in perceiving reality based on memory and past knowledge. This makes it susceptible to biases created by previous experience and leads to perception of the immediate experience based on old interpretations. These three oppressors I managed to uncover, I named as following:

1. “Why?”: The mind’s need to understand
2. “Come on!”: Action as a way to stay in control
3. “Stay fit.”: Constriction to the known as a safety provider

What I will present here is the basic ideas that arose out of my own exploration of trauma and the patterns around it, as well as the reflections of my own heuristic research based on my personal experience. I will examine each oppressor separately, exploring its profile, how it is organized in polarity with feeling experiences and what are the basic edges we need to cross in order to connect with our true self.

- “Why?”

This is the main language and role of the mind! The way the mind operates is through understanding the need and the meaning of experiences, so it can determine which actions to take. The way to approach any situation seems to be a collection of data in order to process it, archive it, and then retrieve the relative useful knowledge from the database to make the moves needed to provide our system with safety, sense of control and order.

In the case of trauma though, like with any new and emerging experience, the mind is in deep water, with often the answer being “I don’t know why...” yet. While the mind

is looking for explanations and understanding, the sensing world is overwhelmed with new feeling experiences, in the form of symptoms, emotions and needs. In this situation, the demand of the mind for explanation becomes an oppressive force in the midst of crises. The situation is for the moment unknown and the only tangible thing is the feelings that are present and the need to accommodate them. The role needed to take charge in this instance is one that can hold and make space for the “disorder” of the experience, which the mind is trying to put away, so that the sensations can calm down, settle and open up to bring their message. The mind for the moment is actually knocked out and sabotages the new information that is trying to come in. It needs to pass its rank of being the authority role to another operating unit of the system.

In this condition of “birthing” of new experiences, where life is just arising, the push of the "why" question is too ignorant of its disconnection from the sensing world. It enters an unknown territory with a naive attitude and forcefulness because of its usual privilege of "order", “knowing” and “control”, making its presence felt as one of an invader. The reality is that in this setting the mind is the main function that is actually “out of order” but it does not know it. The lack of understanding makes the mind nervous, becoming prone to accusation, attack and creating more confusion and hurt in its effort to get out of this upsetting state.

This insensitive approach towards a traumatic experience, either coming as an inner voice or as a role in the outside world, is an oppressor that has to be recognized and either disengaged from or stopped. It's like coming from your cozy home in casual high tech outfit and arriving at a place just hit by a strong earthquake. There is curiosity about this extraordinary event, but if the focus is concentrated on the need for explanations and answers and ignores the sensations and needs present in the

moment like shock, pain, fear of the unknown, awe, lack of means, injuries, new shakings... it becomes a violator. The first need in this context is for help, safety, and a hug. By staying closed to our senses and focusing on the mind's commands and shortcomings we leave all the feeling reality uncared for and outside of our perception.

The question "why" would have been answered if the mind could relax and allow the self to feel and connect with experiencing. This is the way to learn. For as long as we ignore or pathologize life experiences in ourselves and others we can't create the safe spaces needed for life to be revealed and bring balance. This is the outcome of being unconsciously driven by the anxiety, insecurity and fear that the mind creates. It disconnects us from our feelings, awareness and relationship with our selves. This attitude finally interrupts our connection with life's wisdom.

If the mind does not find someone to help it calm down and facilitate its relationship with the unknown and with change, it will become a dictator and the new rising abuser. It will start abusing the feeling experience by marginalizing it or pushing for intellectual explanations. The mind is out of its known world in the feeling environment. It will repetitively turn our attention to the facts instead of the feelings, always looking for understanding before the experience is lived. It is hard for the mind to stay calm in the face of depression, panic, body symptoms, addictions; to follow them in order to let them fulfill their function and be understood. It will impose its own agony for order and control, hijacking the real need the symptoms are trying to express.

The system will experience more hurt and trauma by trying to please the mind-oriented directions and questions, ignoring the real calling of the feelings and wounds. As long as the feeling experiences are not addressed and unfolded, the long term inner

and outer fights around “who’s fault is it?”, “why did it happen?” and accusations and anger will recycle. If the whole situation is not facilitated to pick up the missing energies that the symptoms are calling for, the field will be split and enter into a phase of war, be it active or silent. The roles of the victim, perpetrator and witness will replay, deepen and solidify. The needed resolution will remain out of reach, and short-lived remedies found based only on the description and the anxieties of the mind.

So what we have to do first is:

- Help the mind feel safe, and
- Address the feeling experience

What is needed for healing is the exact thing the symptoms are trying to do:

- Detachment from the reality as perceived by the mind; symptoms usually make us altered in a way
- A new feeling experience, and
- Some kind of change in the status quo in order to incorporate this new experience.

These changes that are trying to come forth are usually very needed. Part of the nature of symptoms is to break a specific mindset and force a different action to restore balance.

If for example someone is alcoholic and is often drinking and becoming offensive with the members of his family, approaching this as a personal and field “symptom” we can see that alcohol is for instance imposing looseness to the drinker, and the offensiveness free self-expression and relationship entanglements in the field. By facilitating this environment in Processwork techniques, we would create some space and help the person explore what experiences are standing for him behind the “bad” habit of drinking and offending. We would check if these states are somehow

meaningful for the person and further on for the whole field, and if access to them needs to be supported.

Instead of just following the mind and trying to stop the disturbance, by following the disturbance we can go deeper and see what is trying to come forth. It is highly possible that a shift towards more intimacy, acceptance and freedom might be needed in this environment. “Healing” in this case is to support people to move towards a more “loose” and relative attitude that the “symptoms” are indicating, and have less of a strict and punishing disposition. Finding the deeper process in a field and following it brings relief and helps the polarization among the members resolve. They can move beyond the roles of victim, perpetrator and witness and access compassion in front of their common needs.

Symptoms and altered states behave like terrorists in a strict and inflexible regime that is marginalizing needed parts. In cases like this, the body takes the initiative to invite these parts in and stand against the dictatorship. In the symptoms themselves we will find both what is needed and the way to pursue it. For example, one need behind depression could be for someone to go internal, and if the body is also showing it by heaviness, the way might be by disconnecting even more and going “down” to any deeper place this leads.

We might notice for instance that while talking with a person who is trying to stay engaged in conversation, his head and shoulders are leaning forward and between his sentences he’s having some long pauses. The cognitive side of the person will keep trying to be present, but we can notice that another opposite action is taking place. In this case we can encourage these slight tendencies to take more space. This is a Processwork technique of amplifying sensory-grounded experience. By helping the

person feel good to pause even more and consciously follow her body movement forward, a new state will emerge. The person might feel relief from the absence of any effort, and the body might go all the way down to lay on the floor.

The trick here is to follow the experience exactly the way it evolves and support it grow in the channel it appears. For example the leaning of the body has to do with movement, so supporting the person kinesthetically is the way to go. After a while this leaning forth and then laying down, might evolve in a sense of expansion, which depending on the feedback of the person, might be a movement of just a proprioceptive sensation of energy flowing out of the body bringing a sense of relaxation and letting go. Supporting this relaxation to take its space, might be already very relieving and new experience for the person. From this new state images might appear, adding the visual channel in the experiencing, and sensation might move even further to joy or a sense of freedom.

The process can have many stages and the channels might change many times or not, but the main thing is to just follow the process as it evolves, outside of any intellectual interpretation. Our concern should be to help the sensations in their work to stand against the oppression of vital parts of the self, facilitating and strengthening the liberating actions they initiate.

Following what is present we can go all the way and complete processes that might be stuck under the fear and control of the mind. We can go further from the known, as well as bypass the content that is usually disorienting us from our immediate needs. This way what might initially seem a depressive and dissociative mood, can turn to be the way to accessing a desired state of freedom and joy, which is possibly out of reach in the everyday life of the person. This is healing.

- **“Come on!”**

This oppressor is coming to move the self away from its experience and turn its attention towards a general participation in life. It is related and activated by the fear of death and the limited perception of the mind that says progress is a linear process, going along with action and looking towards the future. The difficulty for the mind in this instance is not the lack of understanding, but the disengagement from the usual way of operating and the “stopping” consequence of the symptoms. The sense of slowing down, weakness, and decline, as well as the failing of the known patterns is upsetting for the part that perceives life as a continuity of “moving on”. The known way of being and acting that was providing safety is somehow collapsing and this brings fear.

The major part of healing though, should be based on recuperation. The system needs to release the blocked energy, be nurtured with what is missing, regain a sense of self, relate with any new parts that have appeared, and restore flow and vitality. In psychological trauma, as discussed in chapter one, this is usually bypassed. The way these needs appear on the surface is usually when symptoms with a pathological nature emerge. Even in these cases though, the usual outcome is that only the pathology will be addressed, while the psychological needs will continue to be marginalized.

If no one makes any connection between the symptoms and their deeper meaning, which is the main point that Processwork is making, they will remain just pathology. The psychological aspect will only benefit from the more relaxed time and the care earned by the treatment of the pathology. But the incomplete care means that the wound remains open, taking energy away from the person on a regular basis. In my

personal experience my long term fragility and fatigue was an unconscious effort of my system to pull me down and receive the care that was missing, as well as the space and peacefulness to decompress from accumulated anxiety of years. Processwork's teleological philosophy and belief in the meaning of the experiences was a very important ally in befriending my symptoms and becoming able to really follow them. Usually though the real need doesn't find response. In this way the system gets stuck between an effort to move forward and various disturbances that are opposing this action. There can be a general feeling of being left behind and in need to catch up, or trying to be present while struggling with symptoms and altered states. Moving on becomes harder, meaningless and some times impossible.

The oppressor will then appear, with disbelief toward the difficulty: "Come on, move, do something!" or "Come on, stand on your feet, grow up!" or as a constant "need to do something". This oppressor can take several forms, either as a "push" or "empowerment". The issue though is exactly the same. The mind in its fear of any part of the process that is going "down", prevents the self from connecting with its feelings and any marginalized disempowerment.

The need though is very real. The way the mind marginalizes the difficulty or underestimates it, leads to pathologizing of the self for its low performance, low self-esteem, feeling a loser, and a false identity as "needy", covering the real fact that the person is "in need".

A traumatic experience has in its nature an element of disrupting the flow, like a cut. It's usually a sudden and unexpected event, changing the direction of action and breaking the linearity. Part of the mythic side of trauma is that something needs to

change and probably “die” in order for the new to appear. The mind’s anxiety to get out of any “wounded” state, while this is not in accordance with the other senses within the system, violates the process. In other words, the anxiety to get healed prevents the healing. The symptoms are calling for the completion of the process, but it is hard for the mind to really allow it. Until the self connects with a sense of power and holding, the sense of letting go, emptying and allowing the void to exist is very challenging.

Some of the difficult states for this oppressor, just to name a few, can be depression, heaviness, weakness, sorrow, grief, sleepiness or even lack of concentration. In order to reestablish the relationship with the self we need to allow these experiences to exist and help them deepen until the self can connect with their essence. They most often try to complete a healing process of discharge and rebalancing while standing against the overriding of the self.

There is a missing “power” role in the field that is not scared to accept things as they are and can stop the pushing oppressor. A role that can hold and sustain experience as natural and can cast away the ghost of death.

Interestingly, these afore mentioned states, if unfolded, include in their essence this exact solidity that powerfully stands for the self and her experiences. Connecting with this essence, the process will naturally evolve. If the person finds access to the missing power within, a new, more centered perspective will appear that will move things effortlessly.

- **“Stay fit.”**

This last oppressor has a friendly outfit! He is not aggressive. On the contrary he is ameliorating and normalizing things. He tries to keep everything in good shape, and if something is not, he either perceives it as fine, or he believes there is no real problem because he is going to fix it. Here the self faces the difficulty of bringing in the problem and being able to state: "I am not ok". In this situation the self is not silenced and attacked as with the first oppressor, nor is it pushed to move on like in the second, it is just invisible!

This oppressor is disavowing whatever is unpleasant as something that is out of the picture. It is marginalizing complaints and needs as "unimportant". It forces the self to adjust in a particular way of being, which is perceived by the mind as good, in order to fit in and stay in the norm. The rules for being are set by an outside authority but following them brings the safety and comfort of belonging to a stable and secure system where things are under control. The need for everything to be fine and hopeful marginalizes any need or feeling that is standing outside the fixed way of action and being.

Despair, hopelessness or any declaration of suffocation and need for deep change is simply out of the question. Hope and goodwill are covering any problem or discomfort, without ever really listening. The threat of uncertainty and the risk that a change could bring are so overwhelming that all the effort and focus is put on holding, looking after and fixing the known, the option that is already available. What we miss is not important and can remain out of our awareness. The specific needs of the self are overridden for the sake of a generalized wellness.

The easiness the mind feels in the known and predictable world becomes an oppressor, viewing all the unknown or uncontrollable experiences as useless. This mind is in a very high rank position, while following the general lifestyle has many allies in its defense. It is very difficult for the self to penetrate this system and stand for its needs without being perceived as crazy, silly, childish or immature. The self is trying to stand outside the dictatorship of an artificial paradise. In this case life has been deprived of its natural unpredictability, mystery and variety of manifestations, in order for the mind to have control. Comfort has excluded all other states, making life unreal, and the real self extinguished.

The reality is that nothing can remain alive in this sterile environment. As a natural consequence hopelessness will appear and grow strong. It is an interesting controversy that the rising hopelessness is the only hope to reverse the status. The self in this closed system of selective awareness is dying from cutting off parts of its own nature. As long as the “cutting” intensifies, despair will also increase as a symptom, making the secondary suffocation apparent. This part of mind has internalized the “cutting” energy of the trauma and uses it on itself. By “cutting” itself in advance, it escapes the agony of threat.

The sense of weakness and inability to defend oneself in the face of danger, and the perception of the battle as one of disproportional power, has made the cognitive side of the person sacrifice the self and shrink its potential and vitality. The feelings of despair and hopelessness are the reaction of the self to a reality that has given up on her. Self-authority, power, potential, life myth and dream, are all excluded from the map, being killed by the previously experienced defeat that is hovering around as a ghost. What the self is trying to bring forth in this case is a breakthrough. Experiences

might be so strong, as strong as the force needed to break free from a deceiving replicate of freedom to reach a real one. Only by going really extreme, can someone break this “fixation”. What the self is standing for is the breaking of the model and the creation an entire new world. world

The main point I want to make in this chapter is that any experience that is coming to restore balance, will find the resistance of the mind, almost by default. The experience will be:

- unknown
- incomprehensible
- disorienting
- upsetting and most possibly
- scary

The main reason we prolong our suffering is because we do not usually find the ways to bypass the perception of the mind and follow the body’s messages and attempt to heal.

Chapter 4 - The way back home

Be the last. Move in the world as if you are not. Remain unknown. Don't try to be the first, don't be competitive, don't try to prove your worth. There is no need. Remain useless and enjoy,

Lao Tzu

After speaking about the various ways that trauma gets marginalized, and presenting some of the forces that stand against approaching the wound, in this chapter I would like to focus on the way someone can move out of this place, and start walking the path towards healing. I will present here some of the attitudes and tools that signaled the beginning of my personal change, helped me deepen my relationship with myself, and brought me back to the way home. They are nothing more than hints that might help someone follow her inner process, bypassing the disorienting forces.

Notice your trauma and accept your wounds, let go of the fear you are in the wrong place.

Approach your wounds, the further away you go, the wound and the decay deepen.

All you have to do is love all your parts deeply. What else is better on a Saturday night than to love your depression? Who would be a better date? Stop pushing yourself to get away from the scenery, stop telling her to conform. Love her dearly.

Welcome pain, welcome sorrow, and welcome depression.

All our symptoms and “bad” moods seem scary in the beginning, but the more we push them away the scarier they tend to become. Deep down, the reason for their appearance is that they have something to say. By letting go of the fear that we are in

the wrong place, we start to get to know ourselves, relax into who we are and discover our innate wisdom that will guide us right where we are longing to go. The only wrong place to be is the one of ignorance towards our sensations.

Like I have shown in chapter two in the analysis of my symptoms, only after I followed the “pulling down” tendency of my experiences, did I finally manage to start my healing process and my relationship with myself. My anxiety was leading me to stay alert, while my system was longing for a deep let go and nurturing.

Following oneself doesn't have to start with something big. It can begin with just noticing a tendency of the body or a feeling that is present and is in opposition to the action followed in the moment. Noticing and giving it some space to exist without overriding it is the first step. You don't have to be happy with your sensations. You just need to stop resisting them. You need to first experience what is there in order to find out what is needed for its relief.

Use your alienation to your benefit, the need for retreat.

One of the difficult aspects of trauma is that it creates a sudden change to the usual identity of a person because of the injury and the shock. The person might not be able to function as in previous times or in the same way she witnesses others. Something is different and the progress and participation in life seems to become more difficult. As mentioned in the previous chapters, a kind of alienation and marginalization can appear, even in unconscious ways. The more conscious aspect of this outcome can be felt as tiredness and a feeling of doing extra effort for what seems as a simple task. While this accumulates, it can turn to a generalized feeling of always being a step behind.

If we follow now what was mentioned in the previous hint and welcome this feeling of exclusion and exhaustion, things might turn to our benefit. Relating to our alienation as an internal need to heal and rebalance, turns this negative experience to one that is wisely appearing in order to offer us some time for recuperation. Until we find a way to remove ourselves from the hot spot and retreat in a safe, detached and loving place, we cannot gain awareness and tools to facilitate our inner process and listen to our needs. Repetitive cycles of re-traumatization happen, when we are off center and unable to stand for ourselves in the various interactions. It is like going back into the ring before taking care of our wounds and regaining our senses.

I find this step crucial for the beginning of a new direction, and want to put some more emphasis here. Our body might strongly sabotage our efforts to push forward using various forms of “disability” because of the need to consciously side with our need for retreat and letting go of the agonizing time. As long as the mind brings in the anxiety that “we are late” we cannot really relax. The usual first reaction of the mind is “ok, I can let go of trying to control things, but for how long? How long will it take?”

This innocent question is another bully against our need. The answer to this question from the side of the self is “I will take as long as I need” and “the more you interrupt me with your questions and pressure me the longer it will take!” And to deepen a little more what I am standing for here, “there is nowhere else to go, why are we in a hurry?” By opening up to our experiences we actually return back on our way, so it is the ending of “losing time”. In this case “staying back”, meaning giving up pushing and looking inside, in a weird and agonizing way for the primary identity, equals to “going forward”!

Believe in your symptoms and befriend them, they are voices from home.

The most amazing ally in finding the way home is our own body. When all the causes of our suffering have been disguised and all the witnesses silenced, there is one voice that always remains alive and is not willing to surrender or betray us, the voice of our own body.

What we call our “illness” and pathology can sometimes be our only ally, signaling our needs and the way out of a reality that is upsetting for our being. Especially concerning long established trauma, the superficial reality is so familiar and justified by the mind and the wider culture, that we are actually trapped in a place with no defense. Our physical and psychological symptoms can be the thread that if followed can get us out of the invisible oppression of our fields and save our deepest nature from extinction.

Even if our symptoms are disproportional reactions to the current situation, or just feelings from old wounds that recycle and seem “crazy” to the present moment, like all the PTSD related symptoms, their appearance still signals that the old wound is still open and it rings a bell to its noticing. From my experience, although the reaction seems disproportional according to the momentary threat, it is not yet disproportional to the overall need that has been suppressed and marginalized.

The fact that the original threat might have been removed doesn't mean that the strengths of a person or a whole field have also been restored. This means that there is a constant state of sensitivity. If we are deprived of our roof, stopping the rain is not enough to bring safety. Real safety and relaxation comes only after we put another stronger roof back in order not to feel threatened by every drop of water. The grief, the pain, the fear and sometimes the lack of skills and survival strategies, cannot be

bypassed. The need to share our difficulty with someone and seek safety and help to catch up with the developmental phases that have been lost is very real.

To give an example, going back to my story, one of my symptoms was panic-attacks. I was feeling intense fear and I couldn't concentrate my focus on anything. All my effort was to control myself and stop the fear, which I hardly managed. When I consciously stood though from the side of my fear without trying to control it, my experience took a completely different way. I started to feel the intensity expanding in my whole body, adding a component of trembling. Following this trembling it intensified more and more and spread to my whole body.

Suddenly all my body is shaking in strong movements, my head, my arms, I feel almost like an earthquake. My movement starts having a relieving effect. I feel that I shake everything off me, and nothing can catch me. I feel strong and reacting. My fear has disappeared and I am closer to feeling like a wild animal. I am not interested in any cognitive interaction. I am just rebelling and pushing away everything around me.

Bringing this perspective and experience back in my life, this energy was exactly what I was missing in order to push away an extremely depressive atmosphere that was shrinking my vitality. My usual behavior was one of being caring, quiet and careful. With this side of my nature, which has the power to react and stand for itself, I was totally disconnected. Following my sensations and unfolding the primarily very scary state of panic, I ended up with a power that was behind the panic, which once released transformed to a liberating wild energy.

Come to terms with being different and stand for your uniqueness

Our initial drive for community and belonging makes us marginalize, even unconsciously, the parts of ourselves that don't fit the norm. Starting to learn our special traits, our special qualities, is a delicate work of self-love and appreciation, which is going against the rule to "behave ourselves".

It is natural when people gather in groups that they create a specific culture based on the common elements that bring them together. This is the meaning of the word "community". In this special place of contact we find joy and comfort, and the sweet experience of sharing that tends to win our attention and energy. While we are proud and focused on our "community" though, we usually miss a side effect.

Our parts that remain in the margins of each culture have difficulty to show up. The experiences that stand out of this common space or just find no mirroring to identify themselves, remain lonely and in difficulty to exist. Unless we consciously start to witness their presence, their suffocation and low rank position, they will sooner or later start to create trouble. Sometimes they are bored, sometimes they are scared, but they definitely need our attention and support to exist.

Although the outside prevailing culture plays a determinant role in the marginalization of aspects of one self, the first ground of defeat is our own perception⁷. Our own internalized criticism, shame, fear, ignorance and dissociation of what we are experiencing cuts off parts of ourselves. Change begins by gaining

⁷ "Most chronic self-criticism stems from the internalization of mainstream views. People put themselves down if they don't meet the standards of the local government, their religion, their school, or their social class. When self-critical people do inner work, they are apt to meet a figure who puts them down because they are not valuable in some culturally defined way: they have the wrong physical appearance, skin color, hair, health, race, religion, age, gender, occupation, training or economic status. The world and its value system dominate them internally." (Mindell, 1995 p38, as cited in Corina Buenger, 2011).

trust for our experiences internally. It doesn't mean we already know which parts of our personality we are ignoring, but it is important to stop negating our discomfort or disagreement when it presents itself. It is more about becoming curious and paying attention to the little details that makes us different and special, instead of judging them or feeling we need to change.

Since we are children we grow up with rules about right and wrong, and with age, society keeps building on this construction. Either we follow them or not, we are still living in relevance to them. The point that I want to make here is that there is something beyond any polarity that is important, the wonder of who we are beyond any comparison, the mere observance of what is.

We often grow without ever having the time to really know our selves beyond any culture and community. We keep skipping these specific tones of our character that make us unique. Noticing and relating with them though is the beginning of our true relationship with our selves and of our real presence in the world. Our true nature needs attention and care in order to be revealed and a customized environment for her to flourish. Otherwise we are just trying to survive with our identity compressed in order to fit in different sub-cultures. Being able to love and stand for one's self is the beginning of autonomy and real freedom.

Follow your flirts and your altered states, they link you right to your deepest self and your connection with the world

With the term "flirts" I came in contact through Processwork (Mindell, 2010). Although I was always a daydreamer and I loved gazing around, I was never before aware of the usefulness and the importance of my relationship with the elements that

were attracting my attention, nor the vitality of this connection between the world and myself.

In Proceswork the term flirts refers to anything that is flirting with our senses. It may be an object, a person, an atmosphere, a small detail of something or the whole idea of another. It is anything that stands out to our attention, this unpredictable and subtle attraction that happens instantly.

As Amy Mindell well describes it, “Flirts are the way in which the essence⁸ world arises. The essence world appears as quick, flickering, nonverbal sensations, visual flirts, moods and hunches. Such experiences occur very rapidly such as our attention being caught for a split second by the brilliant color of a flower. These flirt-like experiences are of such a brief duration, that we normally do not hold on to them long enough to help them unfold and come into consciousness. They are fleeting and non-consensual.

Flirts lie between the dual and non-dual worlds. They are dualistic because we see them. However, when we get closer to them and reflect upon them, we have the experience of becoming one with them (non-dualistic)” (Mindell, 2002).

My relationship with this realm became clearly conscious after my near death experience. When I regained my senses from fainting, I found myself in a slight long-term altered state. I felt surrendered at the bottom of the sea, observing reality from a detached place, where noise and intensity were somehow muted. I could make no more effort to keep in touch with my humane environment and to my surprise... it didn't feel that bad at all! My sense of time, place and order were defused.

⁸ The essence level is the realm of subtle tendencies that occur before they can be verbalized such as a tendency to move before moving. Experiences here are the seed, or core, of an experience from which the other realms of Consensus Reality and Dreamland arise. This is a non-consensual area and experiences here are subtle, fleeting, and cannot be verbalized. (Mindell, A. 2002).

This sensation of being at the bottom of the sea felt like being in eternity. There was no time, no rush, no sound and no purpose. Like a big letting go. The atmosphere was holding and insulating me. I felt like being in the womb again, but much freer. This time there was no cord and no relationship to another human being. It was far more spacious and I could also look around. It was like being in the womb of the universe.

This was a key moment to opening back to the world again.

Having nothing to worry about any more I started giving time and staying with the things that flirted with me. I could sense the influence of the things around and also be open to their magical power. With this looseness and surrender, my initial flirts where transforming to sensations, sounds and feelings. One image of a flamenco dancer could wake up my passion and my strong feeling nature; the rays of sun could connect me with the warmth I needed and the warmth inside me; and the smell of suntan lotion with the deep sensation of relaxation and pleasure. These flirts were guiding me and connecting me with deeper parts of my own self I had lost touch with and others I had never before met.

This experience made me realize that I have a connection with a life that goes beyond human relating. Suddenly I was in close relationship with the world. I could feel my relationship to the water itself, to the place on earth I was born, to the air, to the earth and its smells. Memories of things I have loved were coming back. And this time I had the pure memory of my own sensations, disregarding the people I had shared them with in the past. The “other” was not important any more. It was about my own experiencing and feeling. I was reclaiming the memory of myself, my feelings and my own capacity to love that has been mesmerized under the spell of pain and the threat of loss.

I was actually in a process of separating myself from others and relating for the first time directly with myself. It wasn't finally the loss of the relationships themselves that was the most threatening thing to my existence, but the freezing of my own feelings and sensations. Love had become so entangled with pain that had become unsafe for my heart to open up.

During this process of following my flirts and having time to witness my own self, I became aware of my deep and very personal way of being and relating to the world. Nature is an amazingly generous and safe partner to reestablish the loving flow and reconnect with one's own life force. Witnessing and experiencing the beauty around me was very powerful. I connected with what the orthodox tradition names «κοινωνία», which means communing. According to Orthodox Christianity, love is reached through participation. Love is participation in life.

This widening of the term “relationship” was a big revelation and the first contact with security in myself. I realized that by changing lenses to my “witnessing camera”, what I call my immediate environment changes drastically. I can adjust my view according to my need. The spectrum from micro to macro is really wide. I can close my perspective, zoom in, and focus just on myself and on what flirts with me. Alternatively I can open my perception wide and have an overview of the whole field, fit the whole world in and experience myself as a child of the universe. My family is much bigger than I think and my existence spreads in a time span much longer than the present moment. This holding and love of the wider field helped me rearrange my perception of myself and life so that I could face the tensions of the present moment, knowing they are just snapshots of a continuum.

This change of perspective also helped me experience detachment and a sense of connection with all my relationships, even those who seem broken on the surface. It

helped me see how all turbulence is superficial. At the bottom of the sea there is always peace and quietness. Life is not threatened nor split. I could sense my connection with my roots and family going long back in time, plus my own belonging to this world and the wisdom I carry within. It's a place beyond conflict and beyond consensus reality alternations.

The bond between the flirt and our self is a link with life. A primarily unknown power organizes our noticing of each other and establishes a connection with this realm through a sense of "mine" and "familiar". It makes us aware of our belonging and our needs by the mirroring of a part of our inner world to the outer one. It is an intangible relationship and a holding. Home is "my world" and "my world" is my relationship with the world that surrounds me. It is very unique, very private and always present. This is the real home that cannot be taken away. It is everywhere. It is the special experience of existence.

Use detachment to regain balance and perspective and access love

All this suffering we get into, deep down is no one's fault. It is our limited awareness of the dynamics that are in action in our field and our human vulnerability that gets triggered. We are all roles of a bigger field and through our lives and feelings we are trying to process our own history and diversity. The more aware we are of the limits of our role in a momentary interaction, and how the other is also standing for another aspect of reality and of ourselves, the less we are going to hurt each other. Deep down our conflicts aim to wake us up to the awareness of the whole and transform the state of polarization to the one of flow.

When we are not attached to our feelings we can witness the comedy of our wars and

their transitory nature, but when we approach we get easily polarized. We lose our overview and our conflicts feel serious, painful and never ending. We need to train ourselves in ways to return to inner wisdom in order to be able to see and navigate more smoothly. Only this way can our hearts and love remain safe while surfing life's currents.

When anger, fear and pain become torturing, it is a sign that we should withdraw and turn our gaze inside. Our perception narrows when we are hooked by something that touches us personally, triggers deep feelings and makes us lose our perspective. In this moment, working with our selves and regaining centeredness can save us from recycling suffering. By working on the dynamics internally, reflecting and allowing nature's wisdom to show how things can evolve, enables us to prevent further hurting and support the process to unfold. "We all too often try to solve problems without believing in the wisdom of natural flow. We wear ourselves out using our own energies rather than using only interventions that are recommended by the interactions between the time-spirits themselves! Nature makes choices; we only need to follow" (Mindell, 1992 p64).

Dynamics need their own time for processing, and we cannot always see what is trying to happen. Forcing an outcome is not wise. Strengthening our ways of detachment on the other hand, creates a sense of being simultaneously in and out of the field. This protects our heart from excessive weight, helps us have more awareness and thus able to even facilitate the process in action. Peace is a process in itself. What we are looking for is the fluidity to follow the ups and downs with less resistance and hurt.

Awareness

While we move along this path of getting to know ourselves, the agony, the challenge and the triggers do not go away. The same issues that used to bother us, come up again and again, but what is also growing in ourselves is our awareness. The more we open to parts of ourselves and welcome them, the more the picture comes slowly together. We start to know our inner conflicts, our strengths and vulnerability, and every time we are able to facilitate their dialogue a little further. We can surf more freely between different aspects of our nature, strengthen our ground against inner and outer criticism and feel secure in our turbulence. We get more experienced in making space for the unknown and feel at home in it.

Awareness comes in the form of openings, like a magic picture. One moment we see clearly and the other we don't. As I write, I have the awareness that the "trapped" one I describe, the one in agony looking for home is not only an old me, but is also myself when I am not in a lucidity of mind. It's weird and upsetting, as I want to grasp my insights and make them solid, but they are always illusive! There is though one thing I know for sure. With each opening, the passage widens. With repetitions of witnessing, material moves from the unconscious to the conscious for good.

Having named some of the steps that lead back to the connection with the self, we will now move on to see what makes Processwork a really valuable ally to this path.

Chapter 5 - Processwork's contribution in working with Trauma

It is when we are most unbalanced and least secure, when our identities are under threat, that we must reflect and push our edges to develop. At these times we search for meaning in the incomprehensible. We grow beyond parts of ourselves that only suffer, and are forced to expand beyond our identity that the mainstream has laid out for us.

Dawn Menken (1995 p30)

My thinking and analysis throughout this essay is basically informed and influenced by Processwork theory. In this chapter I will try to outline the basic aspects and attitudes that I value as fundamental and transformative in the work with trauma, and which have already been implicitly named.

There are two kinds of gifts that Processwork is bringing to the field. The one has to do with the overall approach and its non-pathological perspective of the phenomenon. The main philosophy of Processwork that trauma is a meaningful experience related to the personal myth of a person is already a healing view over trauma. It doesn't see a person just as a sufferer or a victim of an unfortunate event, but mainly as a time spirit carrying and processing the material and dynamics of the time. Our life myth and our gifts seem to be the exact needed agents in our fields for the evolution of life, and at the same time our field and our experiences create the perfect playground for our nature and gifts to flourish. It is as if we are born by the mutual momentary attraction and meeting of our spirit with life.

The second gift has to do with the specific tools and ways of approaching and unfolding experience. Processwork by studying and following nature's way brings safety and organic change in an area sensitive to exposure and intervention.

Challenges often arise as the outcome of marginalizing parts of our selves and our needs from our everyday identity. Facilitating our relationship with them is a way of restoring our access with what we unconsciously disavow and supporting the self in its effort to follow her path of heart. The main direction is towards unfolding whatever appears in the present time and making its message and usefulness more apparent and conscious to the individual. Instead of calming down, trying to change or overcome the symptoms, Processwork is trying to reveal their inherent wisdom and the way they are carriers of useful energies. The access to meaning is immediate and it comes through one's own experience. It helps people get in touch with life's dynamics and truth without following specific beliefs.

Processwork is a paradigm that focuses on awareness and on the revelation of reality and not on a goal-oriented outcome. It approaches experience with a beginner's mind, meaning with pure curiosity and an each time a fresh look at what is trying to happen. It aims at following nature's wisdom and way in dealing with the "unknown". "The body wants to dream. It needs to reduce stress and also become the creator of trouble in order to bring new awareness. It wants to live at the edge of the unknown and gets weak if it is only protected or "healthy". The dreambody requires more than wellness; it wants challenge, risk, personal power, and freedom. Even more than this, the body must seek danger in order to become itself. The dreambody will never be healed through healthy living alone, because it seeks the uncanny, at the edge, through dreaming" (Mindell, 1993 p153).

In this sense Processwork creates a sanctuary for our unknown parts to rest and survive from guilt, shame and punishment. It's a compassionate approach towards human nature and one that sees everything as a process and not as a static reality with

good and bad interpretations. In processwork the field is one and we are all different roles in it, with the field itself being also one. The roles we each time represent are the manifestations of the different voices and qualities present, while we simultaneously carry them all within. The role is beyond the person, it is part of the field and we all move in and out of the different roles. We change position and role according to the moment and the context. From time to time, we occupy all of them and by gaining awareness over this, we get in touch with what we consider “other”. This helps us both to break the polarities we get stuck in as well as increase our compassion. This way we can facilitate our relationships, both with ourselves and with others, with more ease and slowly learn to embrace our conflicts and unfold them to find something meaningful behind them. .

Especially in the case of trauma, field theory maintains that we are all roles in a field and that we actually rotate around them until we manage to deal with our issues. This is a very helpful component in allowing all the good and bad feelings that coexist. We need to both pay attention to each voice and feeling present, but also facilitate their relationship. No one is just the perpetrator and no one only the victim. We are living the paradox of being friends and enemies at the same time. Processwork theory has a way to work beyond accusation and this is deeply healing. Although we meet and we separate, we agree and we disagree, we hurt each other and then we help, these are finally moments of a wider process and conflicts through which the field gains awareness around itself and grows.

Another cornerstone in working with trauma is the three levels of reality that Processworks addresses (Mindell, 2000). Apart from the consensus reality level, which is the plane of reality we all agree upon and is the usual level on which we act

and are aware during our interactions and everyday living, in Processwork we name and focus on two more levels of reality: the dreamland and the essence or Process Mind level.

Our body symptoms and our dreams belong to the dreamland level, while our flirts reside between essence level and dreamland. While we usually start by describing things on a consensus reality level, where content seems important, while unfolding things we usually go beyond this content and move through these deeper levels, where life is mainly manifested in the forms of dream figures, energies, sounds, movements, images and going even deeper to subtle tendencies. On this level we can get in touch with our own senses bypassing our criticisms and get in touch with the oneness of things. We can find both the deeper meaning that was mentioned before, and the resolution or way of dealing with what bothers us on the consensus reality level.

For trauma, where content can be extremely sensitive and emotionally loaded, working in these deep levels beyond much content is very helpful, awakening, healing and transformative. What is harsh or feels impossible and stuck on the consensus reality level, takes a completely different perspective when working with it in the form of movement and pure energy.

We need some detachment from the mind's limited perception. We need to get out of the usual behavior, judgments and way of contact and to "play" out an unknown part, to really become it. If we leave for a while our known perception of things and go deeper and let the senses and unintentional movements guide us, we will connect with our deeper self and with the process in the field. From this more sentient place a different perspective over reality becomes apparent, and a sense of the organic way in

which things move. Like Albert Einstein had said, “we cannot solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them”.

The understanding that is lived through the senses creates also a change that is more sustainable. Reaching the level of experience, not only the mind has a memory of the insight reached, but also the senses. By accessing energies and roles with the whole body participating and really becoming them is healing to the trauma, while it brings the body in touch with frozen parts, wounded parts or energies that are associated with abuse and had been marginalized from access. These experiences can create new positive links in place of what might have previously felt threatening or just unknown. Processwork doesn't aim just in cognitively understanding the other side, or finding ways to move beyond one's limitations. This is just the beginning of the opening. The most important aspect of the healing is the unfolding of the experience and the deepening of it until we come in touch with the real needs or voices present and the volume and quality in which they need to be lived. The experience described needs to move from being just a description to becoming a vivid and felt experience. The more we access states that have been marginalized from our usual identity and we facilitate the back and forth between the different parts, the more the self sets itself free to move and exist in full size.

Chapter 6 - Literature review and the place of Processwork in the trauma field

Descartes states in French, “Je pense, donc je suis” - “I think, therefore I am”... However, if Descartes used the reflexive form of the verb “to feel” he would have been emphasizing how the body is feeling, the visceral feelings that parallel and contribute to our emotions and not how it feels to touch an object. Unfortunately the personal experience of feelings within the body was not part of the equation for Descartes.

Stephen Porges (2011 p2)

Throughout this essay, using my personal experience as a reference, I have explored the challenges that traumatic experiences can lead to, as well as possible ways to deal with them and find healing. It is obvious that trauma is an issue with many facets, affecting the personal psychology, biology, developmental stages, social life and spiritual balance of a person all at once. As a result, there are various theories and approaches to trauma, each one addressing one or more of its aspects.

In the terms of this essay, I would like to address both directions relating to trauma that I find important: trauma awareness and the healing of trauma.

I will present some of the latest research, approaches and opinions, so that the reader can find more information about trauma, be able to reach out for help if need be, and examine the place of Processwork in this field.

Trauma awareness

Trauma is like a field on top of which various symptoms, addictions, behaviors and even diseases can grow. To realize and address this very basic background behind many human experiences is a huge shift, which of itself is the beginning of treatment.

When this basic level is not addressed, treatments will be insufficient, as the real cause remains undiagnosed (Brown, 2005). The good news is that this need has reached the awareness of the health care system, giving rise to the whole movement of Trauma Informed Approaches.

In the opening of 2015 National Conference on Addiction Disorders (NCAD) in St. Louis, Stephanie S. Covington, who specializes in the development and implementation of gender-responsive and trauma-informed services in both the public and private sectors (Brown, 2005), said that it doesn't even make sense to provide treatment without understanding an individual's trauma history; "The biggest impediment [in treatment] is unresolved trauma because it impacts people's capacity to truly recover".

Covington supports that addressing trauma must become a standard operating procedure. For example, the same way all patients are universally treated like they are HIV positive, it should be the same way with regard to trauma. "The basics are what need to be addressed; we're not even talking about service here," (Brown, 2005 p1) Covington said, adding that in order to implement successful shifts in culture everyone from administrators to food service staff need to be on board.

According to Covington there are five core values of being trauma informed: safety, trust, choice, collaboration and empowerment. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) names the exact same values but refers to them as key points in a trauma informed environment, adding peer support, transparency next to trust, and cultural, historical, and gender issues. Covington also includes these points in her further analysis.

According to SAMHSA's concept of a trauma-informed approach, a program, organization, or system that is trauma-informed is able to:

- Realize the widespread impact of trauma and understands potential paths for recovery;
- Recognize the signs and symptoms of trauma in clients, families, staff, and others involved with the system;
- Respond by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices; and seeks to actively resist re-traumatization.

Also the trauma-specific intervention programs generally recognize:

- The survivor's need to be respected, informed, connected, and hopeful regarding their own recovery;
- The interrelation between trauma and symptoms of trauma such as substance abuse, eating disorders, depression, and anxiety;
- The need to work in a collaborative way with survivors, family and friends of the survivor, and other human services agencies in a manner that will empower survivors and consumers.

This is a fundamental and long needed step to make the world conscious of trauma. Having a world that is trauma informed means the opening to recognition, help, focused treatment, and the creation of an environment where trauma sufferers will no longer have to be in the low rank position of trying to stand for severely upsetting experiences in front of mistrust and unawareness. It is a significant field intervention. Educating people about trauma is a social shift that not only responds to the trauma sufferers' need for help, but also brings awareness to the whole system. It is a way to make the ghost of trauma apparent and have the "care" back in town. This is very relevant to my own research as discussed in my paper. Please see Appendix for list of resources in this area.

The trauma informed approach could be valuable for everyone. It provides

information that helps recognize trauma and begin the healing process from an advanced stage of understanding. It also creates an anchor and reference for practitioners in moments they become entangled in the process, reminding them of the generic dynamics of trauma.

Using Processwork in this field, with its signal based awareness, rank and field theory would be a great asset to be included in trauma informed training. Processwork's approach puts a lot of emphasis on how we also become experientially trauma informed. By being attentive and sensitive to signals, atmospheres and rank dynamics, the best way to relate to trauma is shown in the person's presence and behavior. Being a paradigm that focuses on all the channels of expression enables someone trained to be able to notice, respect and help trauma stand for its significance and also support the healing process.

Trauma Healing

Now we will turn our scope towards healing. There are many methods, approaches, practices and philosophies regarding trauma. Every psychological school of thought has its own way of approaching trauma, and there are various techniques, like the Emotional Freedom Techniques (EFT) and the Traumatic Releasing Exercises (TRE), which are quite famous for having significantly good results in working with trauma related symptoms.

While though the topic of this essay is not to compare the different schools of thought and practices, nor to present them all, I consciously chose to speak about one theory and two approaches that I consider to be at the cutting edge of trauma research and which also address the role of the body in healing, which is in accordance to my personal experience.

The persistence of my body symptoms irrespective of my cognitive understanding of my suffering was what originally brought me to Processwork. The important process between the mind and the body is what I have tried to illustrate throughout this essay. The outcome of my heuristic research into what has been blocking my healing process turned out to be what I have named “the three oppressors”, which as I have explained are three different mind related operations. The outcomes of my personal research through working on my symptoms tend to align with what research has found regarding body mechanisms and the nature of trauma.

In this part I will briefly present:

1. The Polyvagal theory of Dr. Stephen Porges (Porges, 1995)
2. The approach of Dr. Bessel van der Kolk and the Trauma Center
3. The somatic approach of Dr. Peter Levine (Levine, 1976)
4. Linking the previous theories to my research and Processwork

The Polyvagal Theory

Polyvagal theory was proposed and developed in 1994 by Dr. Stephen Porges (Porges, 1995), a university scientist and psychiatrist, and previous Director of the Brain-Body Center at the University of Illinois at Chicago. His research has focused on how neural regulation of physiological states influences behavior and more specifically the link between the evolution of the vertebrate autonomic nervous system to the emergence of social behavior.

Prior to Porges’ proposed polyvagal theory, it was believed the autonomic nervous system had only two components, a sympathetic nervous system associated with fight-flight behavior, and a parasympathetic nervous system primarily associated with

a cranial nerve known as the vagus, associated with growth, health and restoration (Porges, 2011).

According to the old theory of the autonomic nervous system, the sympathetic and parasympathetic components are antagonistic and the autonomic nervous system seems to function as a balance system. Porges though, according to his polyvagal theory, supports that the autonomic nervous system seldom functions as a balance system and is more likely to react to challenges in the environment in a hierarchical manner.

Polyvagal theory suggests that the vagus actually has two functionally distinct branches. Instead of just regulating growth, health and restoration, each branch serves different evolutionary stress responses in mammals. The more primitive branch elicits immobilization behaviors, whereas the more evolved branch is linked to social communication and self-soothing behaviors.

This new revelation transforms our perception of our defence mechanisms and operation. It adds the components of a double vagal defense system, which changes completely the previously simple model of autonomic balance. Our system is mainly responding in relation to our environment. Our physical context interacts with our physiological state to determine the options we have to deal with stressors and challenges. This forces us to reconceptualize the adaptive reactions of the autonomic nervous system according to the three hierarchical components, which seem to operate phylogenetically.

Our oldest defence mechanism, and the last one that gets activated in our evolved status, is the one that is associated with the unmyelinated vagal system, controlling the immobilizing mechanism. This reaction gets activated in the cases of extreme danger and feelings of a *no way out* situation. Our next defence mechanism, the second one

in the hierarchy, is related to our sympathetic nervous system which brings forth the fight or flight defence and gets activated when the situation starts to feel unsafe. Finally, on top of all, is our most recent autonomic system, unique to mammals, which is the basic controller of our behaviour as it can turn the defence system on or off. This component represents the myelinated vagus, which originates in a brainstem structure and is linked to the muscles of the face and head, giving signal to the defence layers below, according to the sensing of safety.

This myelinated vagus is calming us, efficiently processing our cardiovascular and metabolic needs, and actively inhibiting the heightened states of arousal associated with the sympathetic nervous system, in order to help us fulfill our social interaction needs. When safety is not detected though, this mechanism backs off, withdrawing its soothing activity and giving control to the sympathetic nervous system, which is the defence system we most often use in our evolved mammalian state. Only in extreme cases the defence passes to the more archaic defence system of immobilization, as this state is not safe for mammals, having a high need of oxygen for survival.

According to polyvagal theory, these neural pathways regulate the autonomic state and the expression of emotional and social behavior. In other words, our physiological state dictates the range of behavior and psychological experience. This last correlation has many implications for the study of stress, emotion, and social behavior and sits in opposition to the cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) model, where cognition is a key point to regulate our feelings and behaviours. Porges believes in the antagonistic role of the body and is critical towards the way our culture imposes an interpretation of behavior as being either good or bad, instead of seeing its adaptive function as regulating physiological and behavioral states.

He states that we respond to features in our environment with physiological shifts that are outside the realm of cognition and awareness, calling this process “neuroception” to emphasize that the process happens on a neural level. Our body functions very much like a polygraph, continuously responding to people and places. We need to learn more about how to read our body’s responses. We have to know that when we feel uncomfortable, there’s a reason our body is feeling uncomfortable and we need to adapt and adjust to that.

Porges believes that there is a bidirectional communication between the brain and the body. For example, sensory information travels from the body to the brain and influences how we respond to the world. And brain processes can influence our viscera via the cognitive and affective processes related to our perspective of the world and our reactions to various features of the environment. However, this bidirectional and interactive notion of how our nervous system regulates our viscera in a complex social environment, although intuitive, is neglected or minimized by much of clinical medicine including psychiatry.

According to Porges, the strategy of subjugating feelings and the preeminence of cognitive processes follow a long tradition in Western culture of emphasizing thought at the expense of feelings, going back to Descartes and his mind-body dualism. Not respecting though the body’s own responses and filtering visceral feelings over time may contribute to illness by dampening the bidirectional neural feedback between brain and body.

Porges puts great importance on the physiological state of a person. If events and contexts compromise her ability to recruit the neural circuit that supports safety and social interactions, the interaction is going to be very challenging. The ability to be

engaging, expressive and understanding is going to be limited. We can generalize to our entire culture and identify features that would interfere with access to the neural circuit supporting social engagement. Porges remarks: “Our culture is not structured to promote personal safety. It is a culture that unambiguously states that we can’t work hard enough, be successful enough, accumulate enough, and everything is vulnerable. So the culture is really telling us that we live in a dangerous place and during dangerous times. I always wonder what would humanity be like if we were more respectful of humanity’s need for safety.” (Porges, 2011 p10)

He also states that our culture takes a paradoxical perspective in defining safety. It focus on words and cognitive representations and minimizes bodily responses and feelings to define safety: “As professionals and academics we think that we can use our cognitive skills to define safety. Yet being “safe” is really the body’s response to the environment. Basically, educational and socialization processes are working very hard to dismiss the body’s responses to environmental features.” (Porges, 2011 p1-2). Despite our enhanced level of smartness, we have become literally ignorant about what our bodies really need to feel good.

According to Porges, if we are smart, and this is where science can be helpful, we can start learning what are the features in the environment that functionally trigger our nervous system into fight-flight or allow us to move into a state of safety and recruit the social engagement system, and what features in the environment trigger a behavioral shutdown, immobilization with fear, and states of dissociation. If we are not safe we are chronically in a state of evaluation and defensiveness. However, if we can engage the circuits that support social engagement, we can regulate the neural platform that enables social engagement behaviors to spontaneously emerge. From a polyvagal perspective, this is the objective of therapy.

In the world of trauma, people's bodies respond. In some cases, the behavioral pattern and neural regulation changes dramatically following trauma. These changes can be so great that the behavioral features may appear to represent a totally different person, who can no longer relate to others or interact in the same world. Since the behaviors of the traumatized individual do not conform to the expectations of typical social interactions, the traumatized individual often feels that they are inadequate or can't do things correctly. These feelings of inadequacy may be driven by societal expectations and even through the evaluative feedback during clinical sessions. For example, therapeutic strategies may provide a continuous dialog of evaluation, often emphasizing deficiencies in a hope of triggering voluntary control of more prosocial behaviors. However, the continuous evaluation of their behavior may push the client further and further into defensive strategies.

We don't respect the fact that perhaps the skill set of learning how to regulate your visceral state is not part of the curriculum. Thus, opportunities to exercise neural systems to improve neural regulation of physiological states, which in turn would support a more efficient expression of social behaviors, are not available or are minimized in the prevalent educational models.

Bessel van der Kolk and the Trauma Center

Bessel van der Kolk, has been an active clinician, researcher and teacher in the area of post-traumatic stress and related phenomena since the 1970s. He is one of the world's leading experts on trauma and the founder and Medical Director of the Trauma Center. In his work he attempts to integrate mind, brain, body, and social connections to understand and treat trauma. His research ranges from the impact of trauma on

development and brain imaging, to the use of yoga, neurofeedback, eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR), and theater for the treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder.

Van der Kolk believes that trauma is a survival disorder and he places a lot of emphasis on affect regulation or self-regulating techniques which research shows that can be very successful in treating trauma. He believes that the most common therapeutic approach, which is focused on talking sense into people, is not working in the case of trauma, as research shows unambiguously that trauma is not an issue of cognition, but an issue of disordered biological systems. “It has to do with your body being reset to interpret the world as a dangerous place”, and this reset begins in the deep recesses of the brain with its most primitive structures, regions that, according to van der Kolk, no cognitive therapy can access. “It’s not something you can talk yourself out of.” (van der Kolk, 2014 n.p.). That view places him on the fringes of the psychiatric mainstream.

He supports that trauma creates a disconnection between the person and his sensations, making an important part of therapy the reestablishment of this relationship. He stresses the need for a safe environment where self focus and examination can happen. People need to reconnect with their feelings and bodies and become aware of what is happening inside them by being attentive to the internal experience. The starting point has to be the body; a “bottom up” approach as he calls it.

Van der Kolk (2016) embraces polyvagal theory and believes that through regulation of our bodies we help regulate also the very basics of our brain. According to his point of view, the way we move, breath and interact with others changes our brain and that this is our best hope to heal people from traumatic stress and associated conditions. In working with trauma he finds it important to help people play out their

emotions in the theater of the body and complete them, getting out of the immobilization of trauma. In this context, he supports yoga, theater and movement as helpful components of treatment that bring back the relationship with one's own body. Van der Kolk supports that as human beings we are deeply interconnected creatures, programmed to engage and help each other. When social engagement breaks down we go to extremes. Especially in the case of developmental trauma, where the capacity of the caregiver to comfort the child is insufficient, the mother's in particular, there is an effect on the lifelong capacity of the individual to moderate itself. In the face of insecurity and danger, depending on the part of the nervous system that gets activated, we find ourselves experiencing either hyperarousal, making us blind to others and just carrying on, or freezing which closes us down and we lose contact with the world. We need a solution to help people go back and work things out with others.

According to a research by Dr. Enrico Mezzaccapa (van der Kolk, 2015 n.p.), a colleague of van der Kolk, who headed a team at Boston Children's Hospital, involving 42 traumatized children and "normal" children in Boston Public Schools, the capacity to gain control over one's actions, to look before you leap, the capacity to think about how your actions will affect others and inhibit yourself from doing something, was highly correlated with good heart rate variability (HRV). HRV is a measure of the relative stability between the sympathetic and parasympathetic system. Children who were aggressive and anti-social had little executive control and had very poor HRV. They also found that these children had lower sympathetic modulation, which means it's hard for them to engage in a task, as they were more preoccupied with avoiding unpleasant things than engaging enthusiastically in new things (van der Kolk, 2015).

These findings, and his long-term experience, has made van der Kolk focus his work and research around training people to ameliorate their heart rate variability (HRV). He has found that good HRV is important in the regulation of thinking and emotions, helping people achieve better performance. Traumatized children usually don't take pleasure in doing things, because they are frightened and uptight, leading them also to low performance. Good HRV means being optimistic, taking initiative and having stress resistance. Low HRV on the other side is related to feeling depressed, anxious, having trouble in learning, and even related to early mortality.

While many times people, and very often children, arrive at his office without being able to take even one breath, work may start by just facilitating them to take one breath. A big part of healing is making the body and mind feel safe again, in order for the person to be able to pay attention to themselves and create self-efficacy, which is nothing else than balance and intimacy. There is a need to give the heart and brain time to recover, with sometimes the only intervention needed to throw a ball to a child, or go behind him in order to help him breathe and then focus on what is happening in his body. The face and the voice of the therapist are very important. When the basics in one's system are flattened, cognition just gets off line and we also need to return to the basics, to sensations and contact in order to become centered again.

Learning how to regulate the brainstem is possibly, according to van der Kolk, one of the most effective ways to dealing with trauma and abuse and the long term legacy of trauma that is imprinted on the mind and brain: hyperarousal, impulsivity, aggressivity and loss of concentration and attention. In this direction the increase of HRV, neurofeedback, sensory awareness and yoga are all in the same boat.

The somatic approach - Peter Levine

Peter Levine received his Ph.D. in medical biophysics from the University of California in Berkeley and also holds a doctorate in psychology from International University. After years of multidisciplinary study of stress physiology, psychology, ethology, biology, neuroscience, indigenous healing practices, and medical biophysics, together with clinical applications, he formulated the Somatic Experience approach, which is a body-oriented approach to the healing of trauma and other stress disorders. According to Levine, the root cause of trauma symptoms, and the key to transforming PTSD and the wounds of emotional and early developmental attachment trauma, is the release of thwarted survival energy bound in the body. The main philosophy of his approach is to facilitate the completion of self-protective motor responses, by gently guiding clients to develop increasing tolerance for difficult bodily sensations and suppressed emotions.

Levine states that “Trauma is the most avoided, ignored, denied, misunderstood, and untreated cause of human suffering” (Levine, 2008 p7). He believes though, that when trauma is addressed it can be transformed and healed. According to his point of view, human beings are born with an innate capacity to triumph over trauma. He opposes mainstream psychiatric medicine’s view that many of the long-term effects of trauma are incurable diseases, and actually believes that not only is trauma curable, but the healing process can be a catalyst for profound awakening - a portal opening to emotional and genuine spiritual transformation (Levine, 2008).

In his own definition of trauma, “we become traumatized when our ability to respond to a *perceived* threat is in some way overwhelmed. This inability to adequately respond can impact us in obvious ways, as well as ways that are subtle”. And he continues “In short, trauma is about loss of connection – to ourselves, to our bodies, to our families, to others, and to the world around us. This loss of connection is often

hard to recognize, because it doesn't happen all at once. It can happen slowly, over time, and we adapt to these subtle changes sometimes without even noticing them... We may simply sense that we do not feel quite right, without ever becoming fully aware of what is taking place; that is the gradual undermining of our self-esteem, self-confidence, feeling of well being, and connection to life" (Levine, 2008 p9).

Early in his study of trauma, Levine was involved in brain research and already knew that the instinctive parts of both human and animal brains are virtually identical. This led him to the study of the coping mechanisms of wild animals when faced with extreme danger, and the noticing of their innate physiological process for returning to normal after escaping death. He realized that animals have a way to shake off the accumulated energy, which is necessary for action, after the escape is complete. Although life-threatening incidences are part of the wild animal reality, animals return to normal without suffering from any symptoms later on. He also noticed that in case the animal was interrupted in his effort to escape, when it came out of shock, his body was instinctively completing the escaping motions by what seemed like a shaking motion and then a "blowing off the stress" by taking organic breaths.

Levine came up with the realization that trauma is primarily physiological. "It is something that happens initially to our bodies and our instincts. Only then do its effects spread to our minds, emotions, and spirits" (Levine, 2008 p30). Accordingly, the healing of trauma "is primarily a biological process or bodily process often accompanied by physiological effects. This is especially true when the trauma involved betrayal by those who were supposed to protect us" (Levine, 2008 p26). This way he came to the belief that healing should inevitably involve establishing a connection to the body and that methods that do not enable this connection will have limited success.

When we feel threatened, our bodies instinctively generate a lot of energy to help us defend ourselves against the threat. In the cases of trauma, this initial energy related to the original overwhelming event hasn't been released, and thus it gets often triggered and activated creating our symptoms. This exact energy though, although feeling unpleasant, is what we need to notice and not avoid, in order to move along the process of healing trauma.

Our symptoms are messengers trying to inform us that something inside doesn't feel right and needs our attention. By learning how to listen to these messages, increasing awareness of our body and finally using these messages, we can begin to heal our trauma. According to Levine the first symptoms that are likely to develop immediately after an overwhelming event include hyperarousal, constriction, dissociation and denial, as well as feelings of helplessness, immobility, or freezing. Hyperarousal is like the nervous system's accelerator, while the sense of overwhelming helplessness is its brake (Levine, 2008).

Finally, one more unusual, less straightforward but problem-creating symptom is the compulsion to repeat the actions that caused the problem in the first place. "We are inextricably drawn to situations that replicate the original trauma in both obvious and less obvious ways... We may find ourselves re-experiencing the effects of trauma either through physical symptoms or through a full-blown interaction with the external environment. Re-enactments may be played out in intimate relationships, work situations, repetitive accidents or mishaps, and in other random events. They may also appear in the form of bodily symptoms or psychosomatic diseases. Children who have had a traumatic experience will often repeatedly recreate it in their play. As adults, we are often compelled to re-enact our early traumas in our daily lives. The mechanism is similar regardless of the individual's age" (Levine, 2008 p19-20).

According to Levine this re-enactment is an attempt towards resolution and self-healing. We create situations that will force us to confront and deal with our unresolved trauma. “The drive to complete and heal trauma is as powerful and tenacious as the symptoms it creates” (Levine, 1997 p173). However, as Baumgartner (2011, p9) states in her paper, when “re-enactment is not conscious and not deliberate, we are not aware of what we are actually trying to do. Hence there’s always the danger of re-traumatization. Instead of empowering, the new situation can be as hurtful as the original and the circle of pain, victimhood, and helplessness reinforced.”

At the same time, from a biological perspective, it is also a “survival strategy” we share with other animals. We need to develop behaviors that increase our likelihood of escape in the future. In replaying parts of the situation we are trained. An important difference between human beings and animals though is that animals seem to “review” each close encounter and practice possible escape options after the aroused survival energy is discharged. In comparison, human beings have difficulty with the discharging process, and usually act from hyper-aroused states. This mostly leads to violence and cannot lead to renegotiation of trauma and healing.

The human brain has three integral systems: reptilian (instincts), mammalian (emotions) and neo-cortex (rational). When the gathered energy is trying to get out of our system it activates emotional and physical reactions that are similar to the ones in the initial trauma. Our emotional and rational parts then become overwhelmed by the sensations, activating new stress reactions that block the instinctive biological discharge. Without this discharge though there is no completion. We get stuck in the activated negative feelings of anger and revenge, while our superior intelligence has interrupted the healing process that the body was trying to complete.

For Levine, arousal can become chronic as a result of overwhelming sensations and emotions that have an internal source. For this reason, trauma can and must be transformed by working with it internally.

“Once we understand how trauma begins and develops, we must learn ourselves through the felt sense. All the information we need to begin renegotiating trauma is available to us. Our bodies (instincts) will tell us where the blockages are and when we are moving too fast. Our intellects can tell us how to regulate the experience so that we are not overwhelmed. When these brain functions work as one, we can establish a special relationship between the mainstream for our internal experience and the turmoil of trauma” (Levine, 1997 p188).

To conclude with, since trauma is happening primarily on the instinctive level, the memories we have of overwhelming events are stored as fragmentary experiences in our bodies and not in the rational parts of our brains (Levine, 1997, 2008). This means that we don't have to consciously remember an event to heal from it. All symptoms of trauma can be seen as examples of constricted energy and forgotten lessons of life. It is enough to heal the actual symptoms after which we can be open to engage with the present, and to what life brings us.

Linking the previous theories to my research and Processwork

Now it is time to bring things together and see the picture that these theories formulate around trauma, as well as how they relate with my ideas discussed in this thesis and with Processwork. To begin with, I would like to notice that all the theories discussed seem to be complementary to each other, as well as to Processwork theory.

Their main common points are:

- the physiological aspect of trauma

- trauma symptoms as a defense mechanism
- the need to address the body, listen to its feedback and support its mechanisms to regulate
- the innate capacity of the body to heal and reregulate under the right treatment and conditions
- the marginalization of trauma experience and its natural aspect
- the relation of trauma experience to our culture's orientation

All of these points reflect on my own ideas and the outcome of my heuristic research.

Each theory though, seems to add to this puzzle one key element on which it emphasizes, using it as the main "door" to treatment:

- Polyvagal Theory emphasizes in the physiological state of a person and the importance of understanding the mechanisms that get activated in one's body. In the terms of treatment it states the need to help people realize the impact their environment has on their sensations, be able to reach safe conditions for their nature and get trained in their ability to recruit the neural circuit that supports safety and social interactions.

The revelation of the exact mechanism that the body uses as defence, and the relation of its more evolved part with our social relating is an amazing insight around human behavior and the process of facilitating trauma. Polyvagal theory made me aware of the physiological platform of the process I uncovered through my personal sensations.

- Van der Kolk puts more emphasis on the training of a person around his ability to regulate the physiological functions. Through regulating HRV, neurofeedback, yoga,

and theater he is trying to support the building of a relationship with the self. We could say that he is focused on rebalancing the operational system.

This approach's special gift is on finding more concrete ways of regulation of our system, intervening right to the "muscle" that needs training. It is an very hopeful component of therapy, while we don't have enough interventions that can go straight to the body's learned operations and move them to a better balance.

- Levine's main focus is on helping the body release the accumulated energy from the body and complete the healing process that has been initially interrupted. Important part of this process is to help people tolerate the fiercely energetic experience that comes along with moving from the frozen state and complete discharge.

The special gift of this approach is this exact knowledge of unblocking a natural recovery mechanism and the specific tools of working with experience and leading the body to this deep stage of release.

Looking back now to Processwork, we can notice that each one of the components mentioned is related to Processwork's approach:

- the environment and facilitating the client's awareness and relation to it,
- the importance of safety and the noticing of any signals that point the opposite
- the facilitation of the person's relationship with the "other"
- the protagonistic role of the body
- the relationship of the client to his body and its experiences
- the pacing of the process according to the feedback and sometimes just helping the person feel himself

- working with inner states and facilitating centeredness and the ability to relate with the deeper self
- the unfolding of the experiences and the facilitation of the body to deepen the experience bypassing the edges of fear and past memory and reach marginalized parts of the identity
- the amplification of one experience to all the channels of experiencing – movement, proprioception, auditory, visual, in order to really embody the new state with all the senses

To conclude, I would just like to add that no matter what methods, approach, techniques, spiritual practice or combination of all the above we choose, we need to remember that this path is a process. Everything that helps is welcomed, and at the same time nature has the leading role around the pace. It is not a linear journey, and each helping hand is precious along the way. The more aspects of trauma supported, the easier the transition.

Conclusion

“In the West, you may feel successful if you are famous, rich, or good-looking. But aboriginal people do not feel completely successful until their relationships are in order, until their community is well.”

Arnold Mindell (1993, p217)

Working with trauma is a political and revolutionary act. It leads to cultural reformation and change of generational patterns. Our personal traumas are manifestations of collective social trauma.

Trauma is a wound, and this wound is calling for attention so as to wake up the system to its survival. It's the agony of the self to exist. The more we postpone the listening, the calling intensifies and becomes an attack. Symptoms, dreams, moods, accidents, violence, all appear like stubborn terrorists interrupting our everyday reality. Deep down they represent our healthy selfishness that is standing for self-importance, love, respect and recognition.

Putting down these disturbances is like extinguishing the self and blocking life force. Nature is trying to show the way to life and evolution. If we follow the signals of the disturbances they will show us the way to a more whole and fulfilling life. Anger and disorientation are generated through resistance to the disturbances and the constant muting of need.

In the prevailing Western culture, life is organized around indulgences and the promotion of a lifestyle that focuses on the external image, success, productivity, pleasure and ease. This culture does not promote our connection with our body and feelings, and labels significant parts of our experience as pathologies. This leads to a narcosis of the spirit, instead of an awakening. There is a need for equivalent practices

of detachment from everyday reality in order to keep in touch with inner wisdom, sense of meaning and a centeredness that brings balance.

Trauma can be a calling to go internal, find personal truth, relate with oneself and regain personal authority. Traditionally, knowledge is projected on authorities. The focus is outside of the self and individuals are followers instead of creators. The new vector can be towards experiencing and knowing. Relating to life in a personal way and finding security in this sense of equally belonging to this universe. Depression can be just the beginning of a revolution towards freedom and spiritual awakening.

An externally prescribed lifestyle is overriding and violating nature. We need to follow a different organizer of life in order to find peace and happiness. A fixed lifestyle can only be narrow because of its static nature. Its own fixation excludes new experiences and promotes the feeling of “loser” when life doesn’t follow its standards. In real terms, life can never be a preconception. The mind can plan a way and set a goal, but finally life has always its own way to walk the vector, almost always differentiating from the initial plan. Following life instead of trying to control life leads to moving with ease, having feeling relationships, and satisfaction.

The symptoms related to trauma are just the evidence of a suffering self. Processing trauma individually is a peacemaking action in an inner field of civil war. There is a pressing need to flip the status quo in order for the system to regain balance. The marginalized feeling world is trying to gain authority and stand against its oppressors. Feelings need to speak their truth, take space, talk about the suffering and use their meta-skill of compassion to ask the oppressors to collaborate and stand for the benefit of the whole system. Creating inner war and having sides fight each other is only fighting our own self. The freedom of feelings and the ability to live and express them

can end the trauma cycles.

Pain is the way the feeling world is using its power to stand for itself against the energies of the oppressors. It's time for feelings to take the authority to ask questions, and take action towards healing and stability of care. The dialogue could be: "Why should I do all these things you tell me to do, who said so? What is wrong with who I am, who is afraid of my feelings? Come closer and give me a hand instead of shutting me up all the time! And stay here. Don't go away. Stop betraying me".

Taking care of my trauma is making space for myself to exist. Cleaning the field of attack, fear, guilt, blame, undervaluation, invisibility and bringing the wound out to the open to heal. I am standing my ground. I remove myself from a system of sly accusations and put-down comments.

All the unprocessed horror and garbage of our human history stays heavy upon our hearts. If we don't process our traumas, and open up to our own vulnerability, we can get tough against ourselves and against each other, under the illusion of "correcting mistakes" and "fighting for justice". Our hearts harden more in order to survive.

Life though is the exact opposite; it is potential by definition. There is no such thing as punishment in life. There is only return to flow. Mistakes are to show the right way. If we don't notice and process our human despair in our collective unconscious we risk replaying history and multiplying suffering. We are banging our heads against a wall.

Working with trauma is processing history and healing our wounds in order for guilt, shame, and accusation to step aside and make space again for humanity. Accusation, blame and threat feeds war and intensifies the alienation of our compassionate nature.

They lead to the recycling of trauma, with each new cycle more vicious than the last. It is like revenge.

The more trauma we witness around is a sign of ostracized vulnerability. We are creating a monstrous world. The feeling world is like ET, left alone and unattended on another planet trying to phone home.

We need support to go in and heal our wounds. The direction is not out in front. The direction is here and now with what is already present. We create a dark world because we need a projection screen for all the scary unprocessed parts we have gathered within. We are afraid to go in and experience our own darkness. With guidance, respect and care though, darkness can reveal magic.

The night is the time healing happens and dreams get born. During daytime we create and materialize the energy we gathered during nighttime. When this is over, we need to go down again and be reborn. If we prolong our daily world, we become like restless children that resist bed, nervous, unsatisfied and causing trouble.

We just need help to rest.

I hope this paper has elucidated the various ways trauma gets marginalized, and hopefully help people wonder around their suffering and whether this is pathological.

I also wish some of the ways I mentioned as the way back home, to open a window to exploration and possibly a desire to relate with oneself. We have seen through out this paper that dismissing our suffering just makes it grow, passing from generation to generation, while just turning out attention towards it, it starts to transform. Most of the barriers to approach our healing are just barriers of the mind.

Paraklisi

Perpatisa para poli
ke ta ftera mu ta 'ho hasi.
Ma esi pu den patas sti gi
kan' tin psihi mu na petaksi...
M' ena aerostato na pame sto fegkari,
ena aeraki na mas pari...
Fotia ki aeras na kanume diki mas
ti mikri zoi mas...

Ine i kardia mu mia avli
s' ena keli pu olo mikreni.
Ma esi pu ehis to klidi
ela ke pes mu to "giati"...
Se kapia thalasa pu o ilios ti zesteni,
to oniro mu ksaposteni...
Nero ki armira na kanume diki mas
ti mikri zoi mas...

Eho ena kompo sto lemo
ke mia thilia pu olo stenevi.
Ela ke kane musiki
tin trela pu me diafentevi...
Ki an ine i notes ke i leksis afelis,
tragudise tes na haris...
M' ena tragudi na kanume diki mas
ti mikri zoi mas...

Request

I walked so much
that I've lost my wings
but you, that you don't step on earth,
make my soul fly..
For us to go to the moon with an air balloon
a breeze will take us
fire and air, to make our small life
ours

my heart is a yard
in a cell that keeps getting smaller and smaller
But you that you have the key
come and tell me "why"
In a sea which the sun warms
my dream's laying off...
Water and saltness to make our small life
ours

I've got a knot in my neck
and a noose that keeps getting smaller and smaller.
Come and turn into music
the madness that protects me...
And if the notes and the words are naïve,
sing them for your pleasure
With a song to make our small life
ours

Alkinoos Ioannidis (1999), Greek composer and lyricist

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Appendix

I list here some resources for immediate access to become trauma informed and also gain more information about the approach and available services:

- Trauma Informed Approach and Trauma-Specific Interventions, SAMHSA National Center for Trauma-Informed Care (NCTIC)
(<http://www.samhsa.gov/nctic/trauma-interventions>)
- Trauma Informed: The Trauma Toolkit, second edition 2013 (http://trauma-informed.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Trauma-informed_Toolkit.pdf)
- What does “Trauma Informed Care” really mean, The Up Center, Vice President of Residential Services May 1, 2013
(<http://www.cpe.vt.edu/ocs/sessions/csa-trauma.pdf>)