

Juliane Grodhues/Dorothea Stockmar

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Like a Wave From Another Shore

After-Death Communication between Art and Psychotherapy



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Translated from German
by Fee Heitland



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Juliane Grodhues/Dorothea Stockmar
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It is not an inherent quality of man to discern the whole truth. Our goal in life is to aim for truth where we do recognize it. ... Truth cannot be found in books. Truth lives in human hearts, and we must look for it there and be guided by the truth as we see it.

Mahatma Gandhi

Celle (Dorothea Stockmar)

A search within grief

Anyone who has suffered a loss is searching and more or less consciously becomes a seeker for the lost. Bidden or unbidden, anything a bereaved person sees, feels, hears, tastes, or smells can recall a memory of the beloved dead: a person's appearance, a gesture, a facial expression, laughter, a specific manner of walking, a song that sticks in the mind, a distinctive scent, a certain speech style, a movie watched together, a phrase, a remark, a thought, a train leaving the station.

Perceptions, feelings, anything coming into a bereaved person's mind can be felt as a loss. Yet things that no longer occur, are no longer expressed, can recall the loss of a beloved person: nobody's trimming the hedges, taking care of the cat, letting milk burn on the stove, no-one keeps cracking the same old jokes, leaving their shoes lying about, banging on the table.

Yet a bereaved person's yearning for the lost is in perpetual danger of turning into a craving when the seeker becomes entangled in their memories, when the search radius keeps shrinking until there is no escape.

My yearning for my dead child led me to the farthest reaches of the house of grief I had constructed for myself. Everything was still so unfathomably close, after all. At first it was everyday things that caught my attention. His shoes behind the door, his keys, an open book next to his bed, his number still in my phone directory, a song he used to play on the piano, hairs I found in his hairbrush weeks later. I positively gathered up these things, followed them, seeking for clues.

In this most unbearable time of my life I sought the bearable. Opening my wardrobe, I rediscovered it: an attire of grief which I had assembled years before as a way of dealing with grief. There were garments expressing hopelessness, despair, disruption, but also ones that propped me up, gave me courage by inviting me to carry my message of grief into the world.

I tried all sorts of fabrics and was deeply touched by many of them. I put them all on – one after the other, some even on top of others. I was attempting to sense what it was like to be grieving. Yet no garment could have provided the support I needed to carry me through the time of grief. This support came solely from undergoing and experiencing my grief. “The pain is leading my way”, I heard myself say time and time again.

Do not swerve, do not flinch, share the speechlessness, accept a bereaved person’s frame of mind, give them the time that they need – these had originally been my thoughts on handling grief. Now I was forced to apply these to my own personal situation. Continually, I had to be careful not to let my work as a grief counselor get in the way of my own healing, not to lose sight of myself in the process.

My feeling of disruption led me to a need to rediscover and reinvent myself. There was nothing whatsoever that could not be reinterpreted under the guise of my grief: old bedsheets became mummified objects; light wood was driftwood in water flowing calmly. Sounds that echoed certain recordings; a coat of my son’s that made me feel so covered that I didn’t want to take it off ever again. In short, I absorbed anything that could provide support in my desperate quest for the lost. This included a certain dress that I eventually turned into a garment of mourning. For mourning is, as I had experienced, a search for lost time at the end of a life which does not end, which wants to be felt, to be articulated here and now, in gesture, thought, and word.

In my search within grief new spaces opened up and I was guided deeper and deeper into a world that still seemed enigmatic to me. Thoughts and feelings condensed into haikus while gazing at the stars, behind a veil of tears in my search for something lasting:

at rest like a stone
caught in a web of my love
a deep grief for you

a river of tears
the sun behind the mountains
I hear your laughter

my tentative steps
bridge towards another world
stars twinkling gently

From Saarbrücken to Chicago (Juliane Grodhues)

IADC – a new way of healing grief and trauma

It was 2006 when I first heard about American psychotherapist Dr Allan Botkin from a colleague in Saarbrücken. Botkin was said to have developed a therapeutic method allowing people in mourning to experience a mental reconnection with a deceased person that eases their grief. That afternoon, we had a long and intense conversation about experiences and phenomena concerning death and existential matters related to it, and I was deeply moved to learn of a therapeutic method that readily incorporates these aspects.

In my professional work as a psychotherapist I had begun to focus on working with traumatized patients; I had worked on projects dealing with refugees from war and had just started my own psychotherapeutic practice in 2006. Personally I had been concerned with the subjects of death, grief, and visionary experiences in the face of death for a while then, triggered by experiencing spontaneous and unexpected after-death contacts with a family member who had died in World War II and who I had never met. These contacts were unlike anything I had experienced before and radically challenged my previous worldview.

Back then I had no language, no terms for what I felt, saw and heard – yet I sensed with a growing conviction that something very important had happened to me. Neither my psychology degree nor my years of additional psychotherapeutic training had prepared me for seeking answers to these new questions.

Colleagues and friends assisted me for a while during my search for interpretations, but they understood no better than I did. I began to sense the scale of the taboo which these visionary experiences represented.

During that time, the mid-80s, I found clues in the as yet meager literature on near-death experiences and with people who dealt with the question of whether consciousness could exist past physical death. Looking back on those years the questions that remain are how I myself as well as other people deal with unusual visionary experiences and how much time and stamina it takes to integrate into your worldview an experience that might have lasted mere seconds or minutes and to intensify that newly begun process of change.

I came full circle when I heard of Dr Allan Botkin and his grief therapy IADC – Induced After-Death Communication:

Here I had found an interface between my psychotherapeutic work and my personal experiences.

My decision to travel to Chicago to meet Dr Allan Botkin and learn about IADC grief therapy firsthand was a quick one. By coincidence – or not – I had just booked a flight to the US, and since as a trauma therapist I was fully equipped professionally, all options were open to me. At Dr Botkin's Center for Grief and Traumatic Loss in Libertyville near Chicago I learned to apply the IADC method and experienced the healing effect in a personal session.

Since that time, IADC has become an important part of my range of therapeutic methods for the support of people in mourning in my grief and trauma practice. The IADC method can be applied in a small number of consecutive sessions as well as in continuous psychotherapeutic treatment.

There is a routine structure to an IADC session: After a few introductory questions about the deceased, the patient's relation to them and the circumstances of death, the grieving patient is directed to focus solely on the pain of loss during the therapeutic process. The emphasis is on the deep sense of sorrow and the traumatic aspects of loss, most especially burdensome images and other memories which are perceived as uncontrollable, persistent, and particularly painful, which block the natural process of grief and in the long term can lead to chronic mental and physical strain.

These blockages can be cleared and integrated into a new sense of perception of the loss. Once a patient has come to a point of feeling calmer, more accepting and more peaceful towards the loss, the process continues and a receptive, open mind is reinforced. When this state is achieved, the patient is asked to close his eyes. He is directed to be open to whatever happens. Oftentimes, suddenly and surprisingly, something happens that lastingly eases sorrow and other emotions: sen-

sing, seeing, hearing or feeling something that assures the patient of not having completely lost the person he grieves for, of knowing them to be in a good place, of still being connected to them in a loving way.

Some grieving patients then remember that they had always felt this way, but were unable to sense the feeling or had covered it up with their own grief.

IADC connects what was previously experienced as unrelated and creates a space for experiencing an inner connection with all living things and for perceiving their unity.

The IADC method is not meant to replace more extensive grief counseling and certainly cannot replace the grieving process. It can however be used by a grieving person at any time after the first shock has subsided – even decades later. IADC can be integrated into any grief model and offers support in establishing a more fruitful grieving process, particularly in cases of traumatic experiences or strong feelings of guilt, anger, hurt, rage or disconnection in relation with the loss. IADC can uncover these burdensome aspects and empower the patient to meet the healing process of grief more freely.

During the past years, several new methods of grief counseling have been established which incorporate the natural impulse of a grieving person to seek and develop an inner connection with the deceased. The IADC method allows for a very direct and natural approach to easing the deep pain of loss through the clearing of burdensome emotions and thoughts, to finding a new inner relation through contact with the deceased and thus to finding consolation, courage and strength for one's own life.

My journey to Chicago allowed me to discover this new method of healing trauma and grief and to invite others to follow.

Appendix

After-Death Communication dramatized (Dorothea Stockmar)

During many nights when I was unable to sleep, I painted and wrote through my grief. Letters to my dead son which I turned into a dialog between mother and son mediated by the *Weltenseele* (world-soul) later developed into scenes of after-death communication comprehensible to an audience.

Encouraged and supported by Sabine Mehne, Karin Grabenhorst and Erika Schröder, they were first presented under the title "Noch immer such ich dich" (*Still looking for you*). Thanks to the empathetic creative input of all involved, the cooperative effort felt to me like an intensive therapeutic process. A process which I reopened in in-depth conversations with Katharina Marwede and developed into the following after-death communication.



Dorothea Stockmar, „In the Light of a Different World“, 90x 90 cm, oil on canvas, 2011.

An After-Death Communication in Four Acts

I will find YOU

Dramatis Personae: Mother
 Son
 Weltenseele (*world-soul*)

Set:

On the left: a stand with a curtain for the Weltenseele
On the right: an easel with the painting "In sternenklarer
 Nacht" (*In a clear, starry night*)
In the middle: a table, 2 chairs

ACT ONE

Music

Brightly lit. Mother sitting in a chair, deep in thought, under her chair lies a heavy 10-meter iron chain. Son standing behind the easel.

WELTENSEELE (*behind the curtain*):

It was a long, dry summer. Raindrops began to moisten the dry earth. One drop fell on a leaf. A leaf like life itself that had been part of the cherry tree a moment ago. Yesterday it had still been alive, yet in the blink of an eye it had become part of the earth. Even though we had all been parts of a wholesome existence the whole time, be it in a mother's womb or as a leaf on a many-branched tree.

Distinctive shape, a shape within a leaf,
in a blossom, in an embryo,
seed of evolution and passing,
break-through, transformation, doorway,
at the end of that lit tunnel.

MOTHER (*rising slowly, turning to the easel, looking for Son in the painting*):

How strange these words sound to my ears! What tunnel, what doorway? Is there a way to get to my dead child after all?

SON (*stepping out from behind the easel*):

I greet you. I surge in like a wave from a unknown shore. I will show myself to you from time to time so you will not forget me (*walks towards audience*), as you must not forget us. We, the dead, have our place among the living.

MOTHER (*beside herself with joy*):

Is it you, my son? You are alive?

SON (*walking towards Mother*):

Yes, you heard all right. It is me, your son. When I left this world, I was born into another, into a new life. Now I can be what I have always been: free. (*Spreads his arms wide.*)

MOTHER (*still not understanding*):

Born into another life, you can be what you always were? FREE? How can I comprehend what I hear, feel, see? (*Reaches for Son.*)

SON (*sitting down facing Mother*):

Mom, something I really need to tell you. (*Thinks.*) How do I put it so you will understand? (*Dismissive wave.*) Oh, but what are words? NOTHING! Here, what counts are moments, feelings, thoughts that, unspoken, penetrate your heart without anyone having to speak.

MOTHER:

Unspoken thoughts that penetrate my heart? What is that supposed to mean?

SON:

Well, it doesn't exist here, time and your oodles of thoughts and feelings. All is contained in an all-embracing *Now* with no beginning or end.

MOTHER:

That's beyond me. But you always were a nose ahead of me. So quick with everything that I had trouble keeping up.

SON:

Mom (*almost reproachful*), from my point of view, your division into year, days, hours is completely pointless. You wouldn't divide a painting into timelines (points at painting on the easel), you wouldn't say: That line there was drawn at (*hesitates*) 6.30, that one at (*hesitates*) 6.41 and that dot in the middle at 7.00. None of that matters for the finished painting.

What does matter is the whole thing in its entirety. (*Stands behind the easel, looking at the painting from above while Mother dabs at it with a paintbrush.*) In your actions I am close to you again, when you are painting, digging over the garden, picking cherries or doing anything else. Don't be surprised if you end up with something you do not understand. It doesn't matter, keep going, I like it! (*Mother sits at the table, Son walks towards her while she writes in a diary.*) Let your thoughts and feelings flow onto the canvas, onto a page in your diary. Do whatever it takes to get the grief out of your mind! Trust your gut feeling! You'll see, it will help you. I just want you to be okay!

MOTHER (*gazing after Son*):

How can I be sure that it really is you? It is not your features that I recognize. You look so much different! Rather, it is the essence of your being: your youthful curiosity, your way of seeing the world, so easy-going, yet so full of depth. Yes, I recognize you in that ... All those times you asked for the meaning, asked questions like: "What is death? Is there a life after death?" Now it is you who is pointing me towards that, showing me a life beyond. But tell me, how can I reach you? What is the frequency of your transmission?

(*Son disappears behind easel, his chair remains empty.*)

WELTENSEELE:

If only you were willing to consider different frequencies, you would be able to receive a very different kind of message. You have been abandoned in a world of stark facts, scales, norms, and the necessity to choose. (*Beat.*) Speaking of choice – did your son have one? If he did, what made him choose like he did, from the vast pool of options? How surprised you were back then, 18 years ago, when he announced his imminent arrival. Why are you this distressed by his departure? (*Beat.*) What do you mean, it was too sudden? To you, the living, death always seems too sudden. You close

your eyes to the fact of your own transience, like a child covering his eyes, assuming he cannot be seen either. But I must warn you: if you cannot accept death as a friend, you will always lead a life of anxiety. You cannot evade it! Death is part of life.

MOTHER (*upset*):

But why did my son have to leave me at such a young age? He was only 17 years old!

WELTENSEELE:

Do not ask *why*. Ask *what for!* Ask for a new kind of significance. (*Beat.*) Your son never left. He was a latent possibility in your heart even before he was born, and in the same way he is still with you. Even though you cannot see him, he is there. Yes, there are many things you cannot recognize yet. But it is not a matter of seeing or focusing. It is a matter of the heart. With your heart you will feel and comprehend.

MOTHER (*to herself, gazing at the painting*):

In my heart I could feel you early on, before you began to take shape inside me. Your earliest gentle movements beneath my heart which became stronger with growing certainty of your existence apart from my own self. (*Speaking more softly.*) A miracle, conceived, surely, but recognized already in a pre-conscious world, a world which we all originate from. My son, ever since your death, I am more than ever tortured by those questions I keep asking myself: Who are we? Where do we come from? Where do we go?

WELTENSEELE:

This is the moment of realization, as if you could peel off layer after layer until the core of a true, YOUR true self appears.

Afterword

A glimpse behind the looking glass

When one reads Juliane Grodhues' and Dorothea Stockmar's book "Like a wave from another shore – After-Death Communication between art and psychotherapy", one does not merely read but feel, touch, explore, inhale. It grabs the reader, takes him in, whips him around and leaves him a different person than the one who started reading it. One is left – what? Touched, impressed, moved – out of sorts!

This book leaves one speechless in the face of the blow fate dealt and in the face of the irrepressible affirmation of life shining through the bottomless grief. Yet it is not a despairing speechlessness, but a hush of language, as Peter Handke calls it, behind which I explore and, like Alice does behind the looking glass, find a "wonderland" of the Weltenseele, a profound potential for finding one another in love's entirety. IADC is a method the full potential of which has not yet been explored. Not only does it provide consolation to those left behind, it also offers them an opportunity to become Alice, to take a glimpse behind the looking glass and find wonderland.

The parallel views of Dorothea Stockmar's poignant depiction of her ordeal, Juliane Grodhues' very personal introduction of IADC and the rather clinical interview in which she describes the inner workings of the therapy intentionally leave blank spaces for the reader to fill. They are filled by contemplation of after-death communication and its as yet unfulfilled potential.

In Juliane Grodhues' interview with Dorothea Stockmar and in the dramatized communication situation as well, the feeling of being out of order shakes one to the point of a distur-

tion of time and space. These sensations of being out of order concerns the displacement of the body as well as Dorothea's perception of being, in her grief, in a permanent state of mirroring in which the mirror can be concave or convex, reflecting a distorted reality or an idea of it. That is why it is so important to look behind the mirror, where the distortion of space and time at the moment when the three men appeared at her front door seems to turn into a sensation of being ousted from time and space. This feeling of being ousted which is felt in the first phase of grief seems to wrap her in cotton wool, making any experience of reality seem unreal. Often it is a "search of lost time" as seen by Proust. Attempts are made to remember an event the essence of which is anchored in a past which can no longer be remembered. The memory exists and at the same time does not, time exists and at the same time does not: lost time. The present, which in this case is a time of grief, expands and becomes excessively present. The definitive break in time is the event of death which crashes into time in an irrevocable and unpredictable way. Yet an event in the process of continuant evolution means "life" in the form of a series of successive events. This may be the mystery shining through the book: of course there is a question of "WHY", but most of all it is about transforming the dreadful event of death into an affirmation of a life which includes death. According to the Irish painter Francis Bacon, death is an inherent part of life and therefore coexistent and immanent of it:

„But then, perhaps, I have a feeling of mortality all the time. Because, if life excites you, its opposite, like a shadow, death, must excite you. Perhaps not excite you, but you are aware of it in the same way as you are aware of life, you're aware of it like the turn of a coin between life and death. And I'm very aware of that about people, and about myself too, after all. I'm always surprised when I wake in the morning.“
(David Sylvester, Interviews with Francis Bacon, p. 78)

This inherence allows death to be a constant influence in life. That is the message of the book.

Poignantly, IADC patients describe a similar experience of space and time which includes being ousted, existing and not existing at the same time. How comforting and positive that experience is! Working with them, IADC patients may experience the event of death as a catastrophe accosting them from the outside, but this experience is what raises perception up towards transcendence. Why from the outside? Is that not much too abstract? The outside is what can only be imagined but at the same time remains unimaginable. The outside is a paradox, yet it holds the kind of creative potential that can make after-death communication – something that rises above our sensory perceptions and effects us on a transcendental level – possible.

The book touched on essential aspects of existence. Inevitably, one starts wondering. What is it that exists between heaven and earth? The Weltenseele which grows like a rhizome and encloses, grabs, puts in motion – yet roots one in the earth like the roots of a tree? Experiencing a connection between someone who stayed alive and someone who died, both of whom are part of life, means feeling, touching, a careful, delicate search, tenderly and gently, challenge and event in one.

Dr Susanne Schieble, June 6th, 2011

JULIANE GRODHUES



Born in 1953, degreed psychologist with her own psychotherapeutic practice focused on healing trauma and grief, based in Saarbrücken. Many years of experience working at different institutes and personal spontaneous after-death communication followed by training in Induced After-Death Communication with Allan Botkin in 2006 in the US. Ever since then she has been working as an IADC therapist, since 2009 also training other therapists in IADC. By founding the Allan Botkin Institute Germany in 2011 she assists the spread of this new therapy method.

DOROTHEA STOCKMAR



Born in 1953, artist based in Celle, focuses on symbolic-creative impulses for healing grief by way of audiovisual installations based on themes like picture of language – language of pictures, Healing and the Art of Healing, in a different Light. Trained death and grief counselor with many years of experience as a volunteer in the hospice movement. Internship at a Buddhist hospice in Japan in 2005. Processed her grief after her youngest child's sudden death by writing a book: *“Ein Netz, das trägt!” (A Net That Holds)*, published by Santiago-Verlag in 2010.