

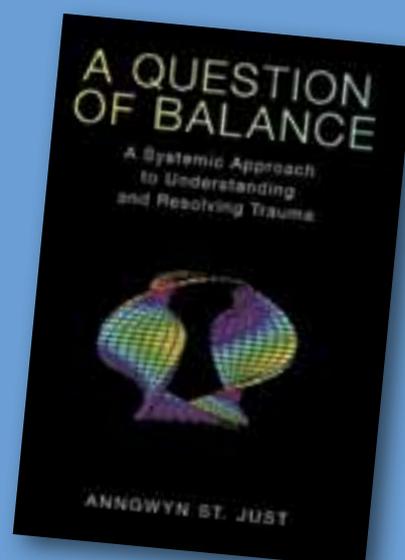
Book Review

Francesca Mason Boring

A Question of Balance: A Systemic Approach to Understanding and Resolving Trauma

Anngwyn St. Just

Published by Carl-Auer-Systeme Verlag, Heidelberg. (2006)



***A Question of Balance: A Systemic Approach to Understanding and Resolving Trauma*, by Anngwyn St. Just is essential reading for those working with systems constellation and perfect for sharing with colleagues who are looking for clear understanding of the dynamic-expanding systemic paradigm and its relationship to trauma and interventions addressing trauma.**

Anngwyn St. Just PhD, is currently the director of The Arizona Center for Social Trauma (ACST) International. For more than 25 years Anngwyn maintained a co-creative relationship with Peter Levine, founder of *Somatic Experiencing* methods for working with trauma. Travelling widely in North and South America, Europe and Russia teaching innovative ways of dealing with trauma, this social traumatologist and cultural historian with a systemic perspective provides clarity and connection in this groundbreaking overview of what ‘systemic’ actually means. From beginning to end this is food for thought regarding systemic factors influencing trauma, and the possible danger of treating only individuals and single symptoms (medical, somatic, or psychological).

Weaving history, community, culture, place, and anniversary dates seamlessly together in her review of trans-generational trauma, this author provides concrete cases and examples which bring the conversation to life. Sharing her own research findings regarding the presence of serial accidents in some families (both automobile and plane accidents) as well as some of her personal experiences in communities which have been

heavily impacted by trauma, this book is a conversation which easily engages both the analytical mind and the ancient consciousness which responds to ‘story’.

As Family, Human, Nature, and Systems Constellation move forward it becomes essential that facilitators are able to concisely language theories and principles which support understanding and credible discussion. Clear, brief presentation of the work of Rupert Sheldrake, Bert Hellinger, Anne Ancelin Schützenberger, and Peter Levine,

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provide insights which will be easily digested by those who are unfamiliar with Systems Constellation work, and serve to support the facilitator in having a specific reference in the form of an essential primer which covers many fundamentals regarding systems, trauma, history, and healing.

A Question of Balance provides a provocative systemic review of the traumatic tragedy of the Columbine High School Massacre in Littleton, Colorado, USA in which 12 students and a teacher were killed, and dozens were injured when two young men executed a ‘military operation’, after which the two young men committed suicide.

Quoting Professor Ian Bogst, Georgia Institute of Technology:

“Most of all I am worried about this culture of ineffability that would rather not talk about anything for fear that it may make someone uncomfortable,”

(St. Just, p.64) Anngwyn does not sacrifice truth for comfort.

The reader is challenged to consider that the Sand Creek Massacre (an 1864 US military atrocity) in which an encampment of Cheyenne & Arapaho were killed and mutilated may have

several connections to Littleton, including the parallel of ‘innocents’ being murdered and the description of the Sand Creek Massacre as ‘a military operation’. Historical reports concur that the Sand Creek encampment consisted of predominantly women and children. In addition, the Arapaho territory included Littleton, which is currently in ‘Arapaho Country’. The element of racism was present both in the historical Sand Creek Massacre and the detailed written planning of the boys who committed the mass murder at Columbine.

The perpetrators of the Columbine High School Massacre had a strong fascination with Nazi philosophy and Adolph Hitler.

“From a wider perspective, these boys’ obsessive fascinations may have had something to do with our country’s need to have Germany carry the shadow, and to minimize our own nation’s issues with fascism, racism, genocide, particularly involving Native Americans and people of color.” (St. Just, p.43)

Anngwyn investigates the possible influence of history and place in the Columbine tragedy which include the military presence in the family system of one of the young men, and most strikingly the local presence of a major manufacturer of weapons of war:

“...Lockeed, the world’s largest manufacturer of weapons for war games and mass murder. The fact that Lockheed employs over 10,000 local residents suggests a community acceptance of institutional violence as a solution to conflict and that this mindset could have had something to do with Eric and Dylan’s military operation.” (St. Just pp.37-38)

The possibility of residual resonance of trauma being held in the land invites us to proceed with caution and inclusion. Referencing ancient Roman understanding of ‘spirit of place’, the discussions of Rupert Sheldrake and perspectives of Australian Aboriginal people, Anngwyn encourages us to expand our minds as well as our approach in working with trauma and human beings; we may need to more

seriously consider what our impact is on the resonance of the land, as well as on those who will walk in the future, where we live today.

Coming from a western academic paradigm, Anngwyn St. Just steps just as easily into the discussion of the non-linear traditions of the shaman as she does into deep systemic trauma theory.

Dr. St. Just creates an environment in her writing, in which the communal impact of victims and perpetrators are viewed through a clear lens. The Palo Alto experiment, in which students were separated into two groups: prisoners and guards, forever changed our understanding of who is ‘evil’. As well-bred students became abusive of the ‘prisoners’ within days of the beginning of the experiment, those who could bear to look had to re-think their judgements and comfortable separation of victims and perpetrators. Anngwyn brings us inside the walls of that experiment and for those who have a clean distinction between the ‘good’ one and the ‘bad one’, we are reminded that:

“Most of us live in denial because we are never fully tested.” (St. Just, p.167)

This substantial text is punctuated with clear summaries of the non-linear models which are increasingly present in psychotherapy, medicine, biology, and other fields: chaos theory, morphogenetic fields, traumatic re-enactment, and metaphysical

truce become catalysts to a new, substantially expanded perspective.

Anngwyn St Just has a longstanding extensive commitment to the development of the emerging field of trauma therapy. Coming from a western academic paradigm, Anngwyn steps just as easily into the discussion of the non-linear traditions of the shaman as she does into deep systemic trauma theory. Taking the time to sit with this significant work is worthwhile, humbling, and informative.



Francesca Mason Boring, writer, facilitator, trainer, is from the Shoshone Tribe in the United States. Working with Universal indigenous fields she has supported development of constellation as ceremony, community constellations, and nature constellations. In Botschaften aus dem indigenen Feld: Rituelle Elemente und Zeremonien in Systemaufstellungen (Carl-Auer), she introduces respect and incorporation of ancient healing wisdom traditions and ritual in life and constellation.

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