

Ursula Franke

The River Never Looks Back

Historical and Practical Foundations
of Bert Hellinger's Family Constellations



Carl-Auer

Carl-Auer



For my Father

It's never too late to have a happy childhood.

Milton H. Erickson

The River Never Looks Back

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Ursula Franke

Historical and Practical Foundations of Bert Hellinger's
Family Constellations

Translated from the German by Karen Leube

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Foreword to the English edition

It is a great pleasure for me to see the publication of this book in English. Since the first edition of the German text was published in 1996, Bert Hellinger's method of using family constellation has spread to places all over the world. Numerous publications on the application of this method have appeared in all leading languages, as have training videos of workshops that Bert Hellinger has held throughout the world.¹ Detailed information is available at www.hellinger.com.

For their support and assistance in the production of the English edition, I would like to thank the following people: First and foremost, Dirk Koschel, who guided me safely and easily through the maze of any technical problems I encountered along the way; my friends Susan Compton, of Ithaca, NY, for her copy-editing, and Petra Kirchmann for her bibliographical assistance; Isabella Hell, for her hours of searching for needles in the haystack of literature; and my translator, Karen Leube, who put my thoughts into words in a way that was precise and at the same time, creative.

I am looking forward to the publication of my second book in English, due to appear in spring of 2003, and which will also be produced by Carl-Auer-Systeme Verlag. This book will focus specifically on the use of the family constellation in individual therapy. It will draw on my many years of experience with clients in individual

1 On stories and insights (Hellinger 2002a), discussion (Hellinger, Schützenberger, a. Sheldrake 2000), showing Hellinger's work (Hellinger 1998; Hellinger 2001; Hellinger 2002b; Hellinger 2002c; Hellinger a. ten Hövel 1999; Hellinger, Weber, a. Beaumont 1998a; Hellinger, Weber, a. Beaumont 1998b), esp. with couples (Neuhauser 2001), on family constellation and shamanism (van Kampenhout 2001), on teaching family constellations (i. e. Beaumont a. Hellinger 1999; Franke to be publ. in 2003; Ulsamer 2002; Ulsamer in prep.).

therapy and will describe the procedure step by step, from taking the family history and conducting the constellation to reaching a resolution constellation. See www.ursula-franke.de for further information.

Ursula Franke
April 2002

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Foreword

Anxiety is an internal state that motivates living beings to cope with stressful situations defensively. Anxiety disorders develop when this defensive style of dealing with problems is applied on a chronic and overgeneralized basis, meaning that it is used even when the type and extent of the threat does not call for it. In the context of psychotherapy, anxiety disorders tend to be perceived as the consequence of intensive and/or frequent painful experiences in the client's individual developmental history. However, recent investigations have provided indications that anxiety disorders cannot be explained by classic neurotic illnesses alone. These disorders can also reveal characteristics that can be considered to belong to the area of personality disorders.

Hellinger (1995) put forward the hypothesis that severe emotional disorders can occur as the result of (unconscious) transgenerational systemic takeovers which are based on unconscious identification. The question thus arises as to whether indications of such processes can be found in anxiety disorders, which are generally viewed as being less severe emotional disorders whose causes are rooted in the client's biography.

Ursula Franke's study is now the first attempt to provide a systemic and empirical answer to the question of whether anxiety disorders can be attributed to aversive experiences in the client's biography, and if so, to what extent. A further point of her investigation is whether evidence can be gathered that can be attributed to so-called systemic takeovers, which would support the transgenerational causal theory. In addition, she has modified the method of family constellations in a new and different way. This was done not only to reveal the existing relationship structures but also to allow the clients to see what it is like to slip into the role of individual

family members. In this way, Dr. Franke has undertaken the empirical testing of hypotheses gathered on the basis of hermeneutics to determine the cause of various emotional disorders and the extent to which they can be influenced.

This is significant because there is a need to systematically investigate the therapeutic methods that are used in psychotherapy practices, no matter how plausible they may appear to be when they are considered on an anecdotal, case-by-case basis. Only then can they be treated and used as methods that have general validity.

The argument often raised that research that attempts to seek this validity is frequently unable to take into account the many facets that case studies look at, and appears to sacrifice a great deal of information in the process, does not discredit it. On the contrary, it must be kept in mind that all too often the observations that arise in communicating about therapy and therapeutic decisions on a case-by-case basis are implicitly accorded the same general validity as information gathered in quantitative research. The unprecision in the manner of dealing with hermeneutic observations is one of the primary reasons for the sectarian-like establishment of "schools" in the field of psychotherapy. For the public, generalization must be made more transparent and scientific research more accessible. Dr. Franke's study is a first step in this direction.

*Prof. Willi Butollo
Munich, May 1996*

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Foreword

Dear Ursula,

The method of using family constellations is gaining in popularity in many countries. There is a demand for a scientifically founded description of both the procedures and the insights that the method provides. I am particularly pleased that your book is now available in English.

Relationships tend to be oriented toward hidden orders. They can be revealed by careful examination and by gently placing the participants in these orders into positions in space. Using this method gives rise to new possibilities for understanding the backgrounds of conflicts and for solutions that provide relief for everyone involved in them. And this is not only restricted to the family system. Understanding how orders work can be used effectively for conflict resolution in other systems as well, such as organizations.

What we know about the efficacy of the method tends to have been gleaned from careful observation of the larger contexts of systems rather than from research, and therefore, it is difficult to find an obvious scientific basis for it. After all, essential knowledge has its foundations in philosophy, the love of wisdom, which looks at more than just what is obvious. Philosophy wants to know what it is that serves life in a deeper sense. While science looks for evidence that can be repeated, wisdom knows about what is unlimited, that which transforms itself within that which is permanent. This is what makes wisdom open to what is imponderable and constantly new. Working hand in hand, science can keep philosophy from pure speculation, while philosophy keeps science from restricting its questions. I think you have done justice to both disciplines.

I wish you and the book continued success and especially, that you continue to have such a positive and helpful impact on your readers.

*All the best,
Bert Hellinger*

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Preface

(...) concerning things unseen, (as) concerning things mortal, the gods have certainty, whereas to us as men conjecture (only is possible).

Alcmaeon

In recent years, Bert Hellinger's method of using family constellations has aroused a great deal of interest in therapeutic circles. His use of family constellations to restore or create order in the system has caused vehement reactions, both positive and negative, from therapists and clients, and these reactions are loaded with emotions and convictions. From my very first encounter with Hellinger's method of working with family constellations, I have been struck by the clarity of the dynamics, the effect that it has had on my personal life, as well as the effects that I have been able to observe in clients in my practice.

Professor Willi Butollo, my doctoral advisor, allowed me to participate in his project entitled "Gestalt Therapy with Anxiety Patients", and gave me free rein in designing my study. Although this testified to his trust in me, at the same time it posed an enormous challenge. There is no real basic theoretical model for Hellinger's method of working with family constellations. For this reason, I consider it important to identify the beginnings of therapeutic work with family constellations and links to other methods. In the practical section of the study, the process of surrogate family constellations in individual therapy is examined. In my own therapy practice I work primarily with individual clients. Since Hellinger's method of working with constellations was originally conceived for use in group therapy, I needed to modify the process accordingly.

Over the course of time and through a lively exchange with colleagues (especially Eve Kroschel and Eva Madelung), a type of indi-

vidual therapy emerged and I used this for the study at hand. Based on Bert Hellinger's work, it employs a simple procedure to allow the client an insight into the system of relationships. Employing the research results and theses of Ivan Boszormenyi-Nagy also proved to be extremely helpful.

I would like to thank everyone who contributed to my work in one way or another, from the initial idea to the final stages. In particular I thank the following people: Dr. Eve Kroschel, who stood by my side in my process of research and writing and was always there to help me overcome my doubts and regain my vision in long discussions; Dorothea Stelzer, whose sense of calm gave me the courage to continue when I hesitated; Prof. Matthias Varga von Kibéd, who was enthusiastic about me and my work from the start, and was always there when another step was required; Dr. Eva Madelung, who introduced me to systems therapy and the method of individual constellations; Marianne Franke-Gricksch, whose fountain of knowledge about family constellations and systems therapy is inexhaustible; Peter Nemetschek for his personal introduction to the work of Virginia Satir; my clients and colleagues, who gave me their trust and allowed me to have a look inside their lives and their work; the Ludwig Maximilian University in Munich for its research grant; and Mr. Fuchs for his helpful and reliable technical support.

I am especially grateful to my doctoral advisor, Prof. Willi Butollo, who supported me in all of my ideas with enormous patience and warmth. In addition, he never ceased to confront me with his suggestions and requests and in so doing, gave me the opportunity to develop my own work. During every phase of the project, his guidance and discussions gave me the feeling that I was welcome and on the right track.

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Theoretical Section