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# *The Journal of Psychohistory*

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## **Peace Counseling: A New Profession**

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*Healing a Collective*

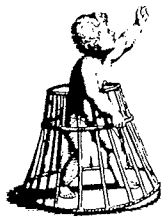
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*Mediating Conflicts*

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*Parenting and Peace*

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## *Mediation from a Group Dynamics Point of View*

This contribution briefly presents two aspects. The first part reports on the history and work of the Austrian School of Group Dynamics, assuming that readers are not acquainted with it. The second part offers five fields of problems which show up regularly in a conflict mediation setting.

When Kurt Lewin, a German social scientist, emigrated to the U.S., started his first experiments with groups and out of this developed Group Dynamics as an applicable social science, European scientists visited him, bringing the initial insights back to Europe in the early 1960s. They tried to introduce GD to Europe and founded Group Dynamic Societies (with the EIT as a subsidiary of the National Training Laboratory). One of them was Traugott Lindner, who searched for partners in Vienna to put on group dynamic seminars and develop a theory within the scientific community. Among others he found partners at the Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Vienna, where Peter Heintel was working at that time. Shortly afterwards Mr. Heintel was asked to be founding rector of the Klagenfurt University, where he installed the Institute of Philosophy and Group Dynamics. With the constitution as an academic discipline, GD was to guarantee the development of practical applications as well as an evolving theoretical basis to support all activities. The Klagenfurt School of Group Dynamics has always been in close connection with the Austrian Society for Group Dynamics and Organisational Consultancy (founded 1972), which appeared as a critical-philosophical scion of the EIT (with intellectual concept modeled out of Lewin's works and the *Frankfurter Schule*, aiming to prevent European society from further fascistic readiness) and was supposed (1) to ensure high quality trainings for its members and (2) to assure the development of concepts and staying in touch with closely

related sciences. The social and political reference has always been evident; primarily drafted out America for the purpose of learning how to deal with racial differences, the focus later on (mainly in France and Austria) turning to a critical discourse on authority. Today, dealing with changes in societies, politics and economy is the centre of efforts. Other associations, as in Germany, thereby chose a rather therapeutically orientation and concentrated on the therapy of individuals in groups. The Austrian Society today is considered a think-tank in developing social competence in groups and organisations, based on an interdisciplinary mix of philosophical, political, psychoanalytic, historical and organisational contents. Numerous instruments of intervention and opportunities for qualification have been produced since then. For instance: with a computer-aided Sociogramme, developed by Uwe Arnold and Ewald Krainz<sup>1</sup> (carrying on the first thoughts of Moreno, it is now based on the higher improbability of the creation of trustful relations) we can picture the emotional structure of groups up to 350 people and, when applied regularly, the process of the emotional development within these groups can be seen. Giving this as a feedback to a group, a more conscious moving forward can be achieved.

The challenge for applying this instrument to peace counseling is that emotional structures appear so clearly that many groups refuse to join the exercise. Which nations would allow their emotional structures to become transparent? Another example: the Faculty of Interdisciplinary Research and Education offers an academic course to become an "European General Mediator,"<sup>2</sup> where students are given the theoretical and practical competence to mediate in any kind of conflict, be it in the private sector, in the economy, in administrative fields or in politics. Until today, this is the only academic training course to become a mediator in Europe. Meanwhile, psychohistory is not only part of the theoretical concept of this course but also part of the curriculum at Klagenfurt University and the trainings of the Group Dynamic Association.

In the late 1980s I came across the works of Lloyd deMause during a philosophical seminar with Mr. Peter Heintel. Papers were handed out and *Reagan's America*, translated by Klaus Theweleit,<sup>3</sup> was among them. We could find amazing parallels between the concept of Lloyd deMause and Peter Heintel's thoughts regarding the collective unconsciousness. Since then psychohistory is often discussed in all societies, mentioned above, sometimes controversially (some just cannot believe it), sometimes it seems a matter of course.

In practical work, of consultancy or in situations of conflict interventions within groups of any size, the theoretical framework is permanently pre-

sent in the background and in reflecting discussions with colleagues, tailored interventions are created. While building hypotheses during practical projects, certain problem-diagnoses have appeared to be prominent in conflict mediation. These will be, as announced before, briefly discussed now:

1. The problem of *neutrality*: The idea to declare oneself as “neutral” has also been a strategy of nations (including Austria) to stay out of being involved in international conflicts. In the case of national neutrality, which might have been driven by the delusion of independence, we can see the dilemma neutral states are in nowadays, because you cannot be outside of what you are a part of. Regarding the neutrality of a mediator, mediation theory tries to define minimum standards that should allow to provide space (elbowroom) between the parties. These standards are: (1) Absence of decision-power and (2) An attitude of being all-partial.<sup>4</sup> To lock up any of your own interests and to withstand your own feelings being triggered through situations that are highly emotionally charged represents a major hurdle within negotiations. Emotional distance has to be maintained (that is why politicians develop a behavior of being untouchable, mistrusting everybody and everything and living in permanent fear that everything around them will escalate) and at the same time one must not lose emotional contact with the parties. The systemic answer for such challenges is to create the counselling system, because systems are emotionally less vulnerable, if (and this is the second, psychological precondition) they are able to analyze and work on phenomenon of projections and if there is enough time for the preparation of interventions (otherwise emotions will flood them and they are engulfed by the process). Regarding international conflicts it becomes obvious that we are missing this neutral “third” party. The UN itself seems to be torn up in internal conflicts (of who’s interest is represented) and small neutral countries like Austria have either a problem regarding their historical burden or are simply ignored as possible mediators. In addition to trying to find neutrality in mediation it might also be appropriate to help parties to evolve, as envisioned by psychohistory, their child rearing.
2. The *psychological* problem: some mediation concepts that are called in by many diplomats mainly look at (rational) interests of the conflicting parties<sup>5</sup>, and try to balance them until some sort of agreement is achieved. Clearly demonstrated in his interview<sup>6</sup>, Mr. Wolfgang Petritsch describes how Serbs and Kosovo-Albanians in the peace talks before the second Balkan war were totally resistant against all threats and promises. The EU would have pumped billions of Euro into Serbia, if Milosevic would have give permission for un-

armed troops in Kosovo, and he rigorously rejected all offers and mumbled “there is only one way to deal with them . . . and we know how . . .”<sup>7</sup> To gain information about the real conflict one has to dig deeper and find the motives that drive interests and behavior. To put pressure on groups (and this happens when you work with threats and promises) creates certain behaviors of the group that we can witness in international conflicts as well as in smaller conflicts between groups or in experimental settings. Especially groups under pressure and being in a splitting phase—rising inner conflicts that can be seen in the economical and political systems—will produce and enforce picturing inner and outer enemies (scapegoating), having a delusional perception of reality (Lloyd deMause speaks of “entraining a trance state,”<sup>8</sup> alternate between action-oriented phases of and the feeling of being paralyzed and have fantasies of “the ideal solution”). Working as a mediator in such environments makes you feel like doing what is appropriate with people who are caught in a hysterical scene, slapping their faces to “wake them up”. There are two ways that this can be achieved: first, to ensure location and time where the patterns of interaction can be made visible through shared reflection. The other (more common) is to have the parties sign prefixed contracts, as happened in Rambouillet during the above mentioned negotiations. When the representative of the Albanian UCK realized he had to sign a contract that forces him to disarm his army, he fell into a whole day literally paralyzed state, demanding therapeutic skills from the mediators.<sup>9</sup> Once groups have reached a certain “trance-state,” they are very resistant against any sort of reflection and can only see a resolution following the path of sacrifice. It seems as if not the source of violence—this needs generations<sup>10</sup>—can be lessened in the short term, but finding less destructive ways of living with the need for sacrifice.

3. The problem of *representatives*: Representatives lose flexibility if and when they are in danger of becoming scapegoats (or outsiders) of the group. They permanently have to “betray” their group when achieving compromises with other groups and they also have to “betray” the table of negotiations when sticking to the mission given by the group. In both cases they run danger of risking their lives—either being killed by their own people (murder of the king or in democracies not being re-elected) or becoming a non-cooperative member in the view of the others. This dynamic can escalate, as the example of peace negotiations between Serbia and Kosovo shows, so that even glancing at the other party was considered a betrayal. On the other hand: Direct communication and the sharing of feelings (more than just demanding) creates trust, which is essential for fruitful negoti-

ations but bears the risk of having to find acceptance in the own group. Another dilemma aggravates the improbability of achieving peace between groups: the more a representative becomes a symbolic figure for the feelings of a group feelings (poison container), the less he has space (elbow room) for negotiations with others. Presidents normally do not negotiate, this takes place in so-called second or third track diplomacy. Groups of less important representatives can therefore more easily achieve mutual agreements, but mostly they are considered dissidents in their own country. "The Israeli Opposition is the best friend of the moderate Palestinians" said a member of the Viennese Jewish community and suggested the strengthening of dissidents on both side—a way that automatically risks a civil war among the own ranks. Representatives are either heroes or traitors (a recent example was the Russian President Gorbachev) or both. One way out (I myself suggest this procedure sometimes in delicate negotiations between representatives) might be to organize secret, informal meetings without the media being informed about it. Once direct communication can be achieved where also feelings can be addressed to, the chances for mutual understanding rise enormously.

4. The *time dilemma*: Leaders permanently struggle to convey that they are strong (psychohistorically they must prove they are able to merge with the Killer-Mommy of their childhood) and, at the same time, are put under time pressure by their groups. When they seem to become weak, action is asked for, even when the circumstances rationally ask for more time. On the other hand, acting out gives the impression to groups (and individuals) of being in control of reality, especially when a new psychoclass gains influence and changes are suggested.. To stop such strong psychological impulses is almost impossible, because, as mentioned before, groups and organisations are by nature resistant to reflection. This is considered to be stagnation in a situation, when one must face feelings of guilt and anger. A third aspect of the time dilemma is different speeds of group development, as can be seen between Western societies and other nations like Muslim states that have not yet performed the leap into modernity that in Europe took place during the Renaissance. And fourthly, the race between technological developments and the evolving of the psyche gives the impression as if we were primates playing with an atomic bomb or other dangerous means of self-destruction.
5. The *historical burden* nations and international conflicts carry around. Especially in times of change we observe a deep need of identity, mostly recurring to former inner pictures of ourselves. Insults and humiliations, even when they happened generations before, serve to



stabilize identity by scapegoating. And when no historical fact can be grasped, one will just be created. There are many examples of this in daily life. Bringing somebody to reason nearly seems impossible in emotionalized situations, because beliefs are always stronger than rational thinking.

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## ENDNOTES

1. Arnold, Kardunz, Krainz, *Das Gruppen-Organisations-Soziogramm (GOS)*, Manuskript, Klagenfurt 2005
2. Several conventions preceded the programme, published in: Falk, Heintel, Pelikan (editors), *Die Welt der Mediation*, Alekto, Klagenfurt, 1998
3. Lloyd deMause, *Reagan's Amerika*, Sternfeld/Roter Stern, 1987
4. Peter Heintel, Mediation: Veränderung in der Konfliktkultur, in: *Die Welt der Mediation*, Alekto, Klagenfurt 1998, p. 17 ff.
5. Fisher, Ury, Patton; *Das Harvard-Konzept. Sachgerecht verhandeln—erfolgreich verhandeln*. Campus, Frankfurt/New York, 2000
6. Interview with Wolfgang Petritsch, July 6th 2004
7. Ibid
8. Lloyd deMause, *The Emotional Life of Nations*, p.119-120
9. Interview with Wolfgang Petritsch, July 6th 2004
10. Lloyd deMause sees a problem between the current rapid increase in development of violent technology and the slowness of the evolution of child rearing (*The Emotional Life of Nations*, p. 430); Erhard Busek, Special Coordinator of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe said in his speech at the Klagenfurt University on January 28th 2005, that profound changes on the Balkan can be achieved in a period of 50 to 60 years from now due to measures being taken now.