

SYSTEMIC CONSTELLATIONS



Ursula Franke

In My Mind's Eye

Family Constellations
in Individual Therapy
and Counselling



CARL-AUER

Carl-Auer



Dedicated to my mother

In My Mind's Eye

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Ursula Franke

Family Constellations in Individual Therapy and Counselling

Translated by Colleen Beaumont

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Letter from Bert Hellinger

Dear Ursula,

As I read this book, I often closed my eyes and allowed myself to be guided by you, letting forgotten images arise in my mind's eye and finally truly looking at them. This is a book that held my attention from beginning to end. You guide your readers gently along in small steps, until suddenly they find themselves on a journey of adventure and discovery through their own souls, families, personal histories, and, above all, into a future less burdened by tensions. As they feel themselves carried along, they are also painlessly learning how to bring order into confusion, in themselves and in others. It is easy to forget that this is primarily a book meant for those who wish to use family constellations, particularly in the protected setting of an individual session, in order to help people in difficult, sometimes hopeless, situations come to new insights and recognize new possibilities.

The repertoire that you offer here is astounding, but always clear and easy to understand in the richness of examples. It is a beautiful and useful book that has been long awaited. Congratulations!

Bert Hellinger

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My thanks go to Bert Hellinger, who has opened my eyes and my heart to new, broader perspectives that bring a sense of calm and certainty into my work and my personal life. I thank Gunthard Weber, who has given me support and encouragement, and who invited me to write this book for publication. Thanks also go to Muck Bermuda, who never had doubts about me or my work, and who stood by me through every crisis. I thank Hunter Beaumont, from whom I have learned so much about myself and about therapy. He taught me to remain calm and composed as I question and look.

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Above all, I thank all those who have come to me as clients and students, and who have shared the adventure of therapy with me. Through their questions, their life stories, and ideas, they stimulated a continuing interest in developing co-operative interventions and adapting these to their needs and inner movements until we were able to find a peaceful place to stand.

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Foreword

My work as a therapist began after my course of study, quite naturally, with individual therapy. I had begun a training programme in George Downing's body-oriented psychotherapy, and was learning to examine and analyse the inner process in bioenergetic work on the physical, cognitive, and emotional levels, and in internal images as well. We were asked to make precise observations and to approach the total therapeutic process slowly and carefully. We saw how easy it was to provoke dramatic outbursts, and we concentrated on observing the effects of interventions, and understanding and interpreting these in all aspects of the client's personality structure. During my training in behaviour therapy, I discovered other aspects of psychotherapeutic reality. I realized the importance of a clear and systematic structure for looking at learning process and context, and in identifying repeating patterns.

In my first encounter with family constellations, almost ten years ago, my experience as a representative made a deep impression on me. I suddenly experienced myself differently, had thoughts I had never had before, and felt a strong, affectionate connection to a complete stranger. The moment I moved back out of the role, these all disappeared again. I knew immediately that I would have to explore this marvel in my own work. I was lucky enough to find a group of colleagues who were also infected with enthusiasm for constellation work, and we began to experiment. At that time, Bert Hellinger had not yet published any material, so we could only explore the rules and dynamics of family systems through our own experience and observations. As I was doing individual therapy in a psychiatric clinic at that time, I could see, within the contained framework of an individual therapy session, how family systems, traumas, and experiences affect people's symptoms and how they cope with them.

Shortly thereafter, I chose the topic of systemic family constellations for my doctoral thesis, which provided a good opportunity for

me to address these issues in detail. As I was not in a position to lead constellation groups, I set about examining family systems and their effects in individual sessions with my clients. I had learned imaging techniques in my studies and training as well as in my own therapy, and was familiar with inner images, fantasies, associative development of pictures, scripts, and dreams. I experimented with various techniques, and found that I could most easily identify the images of systemic connections and life experiences by using observations and interventions taken from body work therapy.

One day, I decided to set up a small constellation with a client using floor markers, as I had observed and experienced in the work of Eva Madelung. This experience was pivotal in my work. I suggested that my client imagine her father standing in the room. She moved immediately into her inner images, and feelings and emotions burst forth out of her. I chose not to interrupt this imaging process, and followed her through her inner space and the dynamics that were appearing before our very eyes. With astounding ease, we arrived at insights, explanations, and an understanding of her situation and her connections within her family system. A few weeks later she came to a seminar with her husband, and these first images were confirmed in her constellation at that time.

I was quickly relieved of any doubts whether other clients had this capacity for inner visualization and my own doubts whether I was capable of following these images and helping them to develop. Most importantly, it became apparent to me that difficulty in finding images is already an indication of the dynamics in the family system. At this point, in individual therapy, I work almost exclusively with constellations in the mind's eye. The space is ample, and all the people we need for the process and for resolution are there at hand.

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Introduction

Constellation work in individual therapy provides an opportunity for both client and therapist to become familiar with a way of thinking systemically and the resultant effects. It is well suited for developing competence in leading constellations later in group settings. Constellations in individual sessions provide a contained framework for gathering experience in small steps with dynamics, possible interventions, and helpful procedures. In this way, one develops the capacity for coping with increasing complexity. In personal contact with the client, the therapist can experiment with the structure of the process, various sentences, and their effects on feelings and bodily sensations in the search for a good resolution and good images for the client.

In order to do constellations in individual therapy and counseling, it is strongly recommended that the therapist have observed and experienced constellations and read the background literature on the subject. The therapist needs the basis of the systemic orders, bonding, and balance before working with actual clients. The dynamics have been detailed in many books. Personal experience doing one's own constellation – also in individual sessions, depending on the opportunities available – and particularly, experience as a representative in others' constellations lay a foundation for guiding a client through this process in individual therapy. The optimal preparation is, of course, a training programme in this work and professional supervision. Various institutes and colleagues offer such training world-wide. Information about training programmes is available through the International Arbeitsgemeinschaft Systemische Lösungen nach Bert Hellinger e.V., [The International Working Group for Bert Hellinger's Systemic Resolutions] c/o Germaniastr. 12,

D-80802 Munich, Germany, Tel. +49+89+381 027 10, Fax +49+89+381 027 12, e-mail: network@hellinger.com or on Bert Hellinger's website at www.hellinger.com.

This book is divided into two sections. In the first part, I describe the foundations of my therapeutic work. The second part addresses the inner processes, questions, and decisions leading to interventions, that guide me through the process of a constellation. The main focus is on the techniques of constellations in the imagination, which I have developed over years of experience and observation. The procedures presented in this book rest on a broad range of therapeutic knowledge and experience from various psychological methods and approaches.

I have changed names and personal details in all examples so that clients will not be identifiable.

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I. On Theory