

Classical Family Constellations, Movements of the Soul, Movements of the “Spirit-Mind”: Where is Constellation Work Heading to?

By Wilfried Nelles

Constellation Work became more differentiated. A larger public got in touch with constellation work in the last 15 years. During that time, at least four different schools emerged, beyond any differences in personal style, namely:

- 1) The „Classical“ Family Constellation, the way Bert Hellinger practiced and demonstrated it until the end of the Nineties
- 2) Several approaches based in constructivism. Among them, the “Systemic Structural Constellation” by Matthias Varga von Kibed and Insa Sparrer is methodically the most distinct one.
- 3) The method Hellinger calls “Movement of the Soul”, which was his main modus operandi between 2000 and 2006.
- 4) And finally the „Spiritual Family Constellation“ or “Going with the Spirit-Mind” or “Movements of the Spirit-Mind”, which Bert Hellinger practices since early 2006 and which he calls “The New Family Constellations”

These approaches differ concerning their methodical characteristics and their basic philosophical and theoretical assumptions, and they reached a certain degree of independence. However, there has only been a limited degree of theoretical reflexion on them and only rather vague description, except for the “Systemic Structural Constellation”. Some promote one of them as the „right“, or at least as a proceeding superior to the other ones. However, practitioners in general pragmatically use whatever fits a case best and the proceedings are sometimes even mixed up. Mostly, there is a main focus on one modus operandi, which is sometimes complemented by other things.

As far as I can see, the Classical Family Constellation is still the main method; in my work I mainly use Constellations in Motion (Movements of the Soul and / or Spirit). I can’t see much reason why not to mix up different methods pragmatically. However, when doing so the facilitator needs to know why he does what he does, because the different approaches do have peculiarities one has to pay attention to. In addition to that, for training purposes it is important to know about the their implicit assumptions and the necessities resulting from them. Practitioners must be aware of the consequences they have for the practical work. In this article, I will focus on „Movements of the Soul“, and “Spiritual Family Constellation” respectively the questions:

- What is the meaning of the Spiritual in Constellation Work?
- What are the methodical consequences?
- What role does the „Spirit-Mind“ play for Bert Hellinger?
- And the significance of Hellinger’s proclamation of a „new“, and “spiritual” Family Constellation for Constellation Work in general.

I assume the Classical Family Constellation to be known. Still, I will talk about some of its aspects when I discuss “Movements of the Soul”. I don’t have much to say about the constructivist approaches, they are not my cup of tea, as the English put it. However, for the record I’d like to affirm that I do respect the approach of Varga von Kibed / Sparrer and the work of the colleagues in Graz/Austria around Guni Baxa, Christine and Siegfried Essen¹.

¹ My critique of Matthias Varga von Kibed in „Die Hellinger-Kontroverse“ (Freiburg 2005) only relates to his mediocre argument against Hellinger in the „Potsdam Declaration“ of a group of systemic-constructivist therapists.

In this book’s chapter “Hellinger and systemic therapy” I discussed the constructivist critique of Hellinger and the backdoor beliefs of constructivists in detail.

„Movements of the Soul“

Bert Hellinger more or less officially introduced „Movements of the Soul“ during a course in Berlin during the summer of 2000. Previously, he had found this new method in several seminars in other countries, more or less by chance. The first time was in Switzerland, where he placed representatives of victims from a Jewish family in front of the perpetrators. He then waited, and a strong and surprising movement between victims and perpetrators happened, which was far beyond Bert's former work. Before, he had always sent the perpetrators out of the room, saying they have lost their right to belong to the system. Now suddenly he saw the victims opening their hearts for the perpetrators, without any intervention by himself. This was the birth of the work he later called movements of the soul. The workshop in Berlin and a seminar in Linz/Austria half a year later, which also was the first one to be announced as a training seminar and to which all the facilitators listed by IAG (Internationale Arbeitsgemeinschaft Systemische Lösungen nach Bert Hellinger, now called DGfS: Deutsche Gesellschaft für Systemaufstellungen) were invited, evoked ambivalent reactions among the participating colleagues, and the course did not contribute to divulging constellations in motion as Hellinger obviously intended. From my perspective, this is related to three things:

First of all, propagating something is not really compatible with being without intention, one of the basic rules of phenomenology according to Hellinger. This is why some constellations, especially in Berlin, were tense and intentionally forced to follow the new proceeding.

Secondly it would have been helpful to give some space for questions and answers, also for critical ones, from the invited facilitators in order to communicate background and implications of the new method. But this is not Hellinger's style – although opening up for a dialogue might have been helpful for his own understanding as well.

Thirdly, Hellinger never elaborated clearly where the new method was different from the old one, where precisely it was superior to the old one or maybe less appropriate, whether it is complementary to the old one or if it is replacing the old style completely, and many other questions more. I remember the International Congress in Würzburg in 2001, when I held a lecture about this topic. There was some perplexity, especially among young constellators, whether they were still allowed to work in the old way or if everybody was supposed to work with nothing but “movements of the soul” from now on. I was invited to many training courses to teach constellations in motion. While teaching I understood that there is only little sound knowledge about constellations in motion. Given the potential of this proceeding, I think that's regrettable.

The „Movements of the Soul“ has been unclear right from the start. The mistake lies in putting the method (the representatives are allowed to move) on a level with the inner movement (the soul is moved), so it lies in equating external, physical movement in the constellations and inner movement on the soul level. The identification of movements of the soul with a certain proceeding when doing constellations suggests that in the older, static way of setting up constellations there were no movements of the soul. There is the widespread idea that „Movements of the Soul“ take place when representatives in a constellation move by themselves and / or when the facilitator does not intervene and cedes the constellation to the representatives.

But this falls short of the true “Movements of the Soul”. To be able to use their potential, it seems necessary to elaborate beyond any specific method what movements of the soul really are. And then we can see what method suits these movements best. Movements of the soul are something we can perceive as a subtle inner movement in the first place. While we are next to a human being, our soul can open up and expand or withdraw and close off. This happens all the time, and generally we are not aware of it. But we can feel it, when we direct the attention towards it. Just like we notice immediately when another person's soul opens up for us, or closes down. Not only with humans we experience this, but also with animals, plants and the whole nature, even just in relation only to ourselves we can have this experience.

This movement seems to be a natural process to me, some kind of rhythm like tides. But with many people this movement is restricted; with some it is almost completely frozen. We experience this torpor as a feeling of being cut off, as isolation and loneliness. The reason of this contraction and torpor of the soul is always some traumatic event, be it systemic or personal. In therapy we try to ease this numbness, in order to allow the soul to expand, because the natural movement of the soul is to open into ever wider

spaces.

This opening of the soul is also a precondition of phenomenological perception and insight. Adopting the phenomenological stance I see what I'm looking at not only as an object, but as a soulful subject (even if it is just a piece of stone). I open up my soul wide enough to be touched by the soul of the contemplated one. Then a message reaches me from there. Instead of speaking of an opening of „my“ soul it might be more appropriate to call it an opening towards the soul level. So there can be no doubt that this space is not about setting limits and belonging, it is not about something that's mine, but about growth and being connected to all there is.

Bert Hellinger described this by stating that we don't *have* a soul, but we *are within* a soul. The soul is not *within* us, but *around* us. This point is crucial. It's a decisive extension of the current understanding of the soul. When one tunes in into this image, one notices immediately something inside opens up and widens. Then the soul does not belong to me, but I belong to the soul, and I am more or less a part of it. I would add that the soul is to be considered rather as a quality or dimension than as an entity that is to be found in some place (inside or outside). I think both is true: The soul is both within us and around us. I think we should not imagine the soul as a thing, as something located at some place inside or outside. To me, the soul is just what links up and connects. What connects me to other people and to everything there is around me. The wider my soul is, the more opened I am towards this space, this dimension of the soul, the more I am connected. In this sense spiritual growth is nothing but an extension of my sense of being, my identity, into the wider and constantly moving space of the soul.

This is not about elaborating a precise definition, but rather about just figuring what we talk about when we talk about the soul or movements of the soul². I think it's important to understand that the soul is not a mental construction, but something real we can perceive and feel exactly at that moment when the soul is opening or closing, when it is in motion. And secondly, that this is something natural that happens all the time – so it not a constellation method.

When we look at constellation's work, it seems quite clear that Family Constellations were oriented towards this widening of our soul's space right from the beginning. Or should I say: oriented towards the widening of ourselves into that space of the soul, towards the connection with this dimension? This widening was supported by the facilitator not looking at the client only, but taking in the whole family or clan into his soul.

So this opening starts with the therapist, who gives space to everybody in his soul's movement, without making any difference, but especially to those who were excluded, forgotten, devaluated and disowned. So Family Constellations demands a movement of the soul beyond all questions of method from the therapist, a movement towards greater openness and comprehensiveness.

From this point of view the changes inspired by Bert Hellinger over the years are no more and no less than an ever wider and deeper movement of the soul which is integrating more and more without making a difference. In a first time there was the step from looking only at the client towards seeing the whole family soon, then – beyond the family – to those he is not related to by blood, and then even to enemies, tyrants and mass murderers, with the same openness towards good and evil, to finally reach what Hellinger calls “the Spirit-Mind”.

This is a sound and logical evolution that finds its roots in the very beginning of Family Constellations. So I was never surprised by it. However, this development is not identical with one particular method. A facilitator works with Movements of the Soul when he is capable to feel the movement in his own soul, and to keep his soul opened even when seeing people and events that seem terrible to him and that do not correspond to his system of values or preferences or ideals. By doing so, he opens up the soul space for the client and the group. And if in addition to that he can sense the subtle movement of the soul with the other or follow their movement intuitively, then he uses Movements of the

² Hunter Beaumont (in: W. Nelles, H. Breuer, Der Baum trägt reiche Frucht, Heidelberg 2006) tries to describe something similar. He is using different metaphors but we might both be making the same point.

Soul. But if one does not have a clear awareness of these subtle processes and simply allows representatives to move around without intervening, or even yielding them the leadership, then this facilitator simply does bad constellation work. He will probably soon be well and truly deluded by some drama. This has nothing to do with movements of the soul.

So I am pleading: Instead of speaking about „classical constellations“ and “constellations with Movements of the Soul” we should speak about static constellations and constellations in motion. So it can be clear that *both* proceedings embrace the soul and its movements. Both can open up the needed space, and both can fail to do so, because each and every solution within a static constellation implies an opening (and thus a movement) of the soul, too. This opening is perfectly independent of the method applied to create it.³ So this is not about just another way of using language to describe the same thing, but a quite fundamental distinction. To me this distinction seems to be a necessary precondition to be able to teach and train people to use Movements of the Soul. It is not about allowing people to move freely in the first place, but to sense the inner movement of the soul and to become entirely aware of it. Only if one is competent in this, he can distinguish a movement of the soul from another movement meant to avoid the movement of the soul when doing constellations in motion.

So there two distinguishable processes that do not necessarily go together are meant by what Bert Hellinger called the “Movements of the Soul”: On the one side it is an extension of one’s own soul movement beyond the family and clan, a movement that includes perpetrators and victims, good and evil. Secondly, a technical change from static constellations to constellations in motion. Only when we’ve drawn this distinction we can ask which of both proceedings expresses and visualizes the (inner) movement of the soul best. Then we might conclude that one constellator does a better job about one particular soul movement when using static constellations and another attains better results when practicing constellations in motion. Some might rather work using sentences, and others better work without words, and so on.

Constellations in motion and static constellations

I think the biggest misunderstanding about constellations in motion is the notion of the facilitator withdrawing from guiding the constellation and leaving the representatives to their movement. I don’t know how many share this opinion. I heard it from some colleagues who criticize constellations in motion or adopt a critical stance towards it, and a few times I have witnessed constellations facilitated in this way. This seems to be the most reliable way to me to make constellations fail. Indeed constellations in motion have to be more intensely guided by the facilitator than static ones and they are much more demanding for him. But it is a different kind of guidance. The facilitator has to take care of the whole process to be oriented towards the movements of the soul. That means, he does not hand over the leadership to the representatives, but to the soul working in a constellation.

In his article about „Die Zukunft des Familien-Stellens“ (The Future of Family Constellations), published on his website, Bert Hellinger writes: “The bottom line is that almost no guidance from outside was needed anymore.” Apparently some draw the conclusion from this quote that they can hand things over to the representatives. But Hellinger continues: „The soul searched for and found the solution all by itself. (...). But only if the facilitator of the constellation was in tune with this dimension of the soul and had himself guided by the soul“. So this is the bottom line: The facilitator tunes in to the movement of the soul and is guided by the soul. In doing so, he is also guiding the representatives, by differentiating who is following a movement of the soul and who is not.

Besides the fact that there is always a certain risk a representative might rather be acting out of an idea than following an inner movement, many movements are evasive: for instance the representative looks away, in order not to see something bad, turns around, moves backwards and so on. These movements (generally) illustrate something that happens in the system and so it might show something

³ Of course this movement can also be created by other therapies or by ordinary human interaction

important to the client. Sometimes this ends after a while, and a healing movement of the soul follows, but sometimes this evasive movement gets stuck, leads to a circle or even to something crazy that's not related to the system if the facilitator does not intervene and / or if he is not in touch with the soul of the whole system. If we take a closer look there are almost always two movements to discover in such cases: the ostensible, evasive movement and a profound movement of the soul towards something. The latter one is mostly very subtle, but visible indication of the body. When representatives are asked about it, they confirm most of the time that there was this movement, although another movement was stronger. One can test this easily by suggesting the representative to follow the profound movement for a change and then one can check what this brings up. This way the facilitator can check and render visible to himself as well as for all the others whether he is in touch with the soul, or whether this is just his personal imagination.

This is similar to the proceeding with static constellations. The facilitator also has to tell the difference if someone is collected or not, whether the answers given to his questions come from inner collectedness or from personal imaginations and fantasies. Just like the sentences he makes people say: Do they enhance the process or not? And when we change the positioning: Do things become clearer, denser, or not? However, static constellations offer more space to try things. We can reposition the representatives, try another sentence, and if that does not help, we just try something different. Actually in this mode the representatives and their utterances are more significant than with constellations in motion. Based on what they express the facilitator searches for a solution. We recognize that the solution is found when the space of the soul opens up, and by what the representatives express. Suddenly we realize we are on a different level.

With constellations in motion we have to go to that level immediately. The facilitator has to tune himself and the client into the soul level before the constellation starts. Only if that's the case the representatives will do so as well. This is why it is important to interrupt superficial talk and to create soulful contact with the client before starting the constellation – for example by remaining silent or by keeping eye contact without speaking. One does not have to do it just the way Bert Hellinger does, one can use words of course – but still, this is quite different from an „interview“. During the constellation itself, there is not much to try out. Too much trial and error is not helpful for the static constellation either, because then it loses its strength – but it does not matter as much as in constellations in motion.

A Constellation in motion will lose its significance or show absurd dramatic art if the facilitator cannot keep the focus on the soul level. So altogether his guidance is much more important and demanding.

In constellations in motion, the facilitator guides by following movements of the soul *he* perceives. So the function of the therapist for the group and the client is basically to keep the soul space as wide open as possible. The participants go as far and the processes go as deep as the therapists allows to in his soul. The degree of his openness defines how far the others can go. His soul has to take the lead so a deeper movement of the soul in the group can follow. As soon as I trust my own soul's movement completely, when I'm ready to follow this movement without any condition, the group will follow me in this, and the representatives will be capable of deep movements. But if my attitude is: „Let's see how they will move“, the process will stay rather irrelevant.

Indeed the therapist of a constellation in motion is guiding the process at the same time more intensively, and he is guiding less because he suspends all control over the process and the possible results and leaves it to the soul. In a static constellation this is possible too, but there are still far greater possibilities of guiding the constellation on the basis of hypothesis, earlier knowledge, and so forth. This way the therapist is much more „master“ of the process. If you follow movements of the soul, there is no more control in this sense. At the same time, guidance is more intense on a different level, because the therapist has to tune in the whole group to the soul level and keep the focus there.

Bert Hellinger allowed less and less talking during his constellations. This has a certain logic but it does not necessarily belong to the method. Language can express movements of the soul too. In a first time I adopted Bert Hellinger's style of (almost) not asking any questions to the representatives when

facilitating constellations in motion. Even when they wanted to speak I often did not allow them to speak. This still occurs. But besides that, I now even allow dialogues between two representatives when that seems coherent to me. I just take care for the dialogue to remain on the soul level. Then the soul of the representatives speaks, and a very deep level can be reached. But for this, we need representatives who can completely tune into this level.

The problem about using language is that usually when speaking we are more superficial and closer to our mind than to our soul. This is why every therapist pays attention to the nonverbal signals of the client. They tell so much more about his psychological state than his words. And this is why we get more quickly into the soul dimension when we ask representatives to follow their inner movements rather than asking for sensations. But this does not allow the facilitator to lean back without checking if the movements are sound and coherent. By being in touch with his soul he contributes to the representatives being soulful in their movements, or likewise for them to be soulful with words. There is a precious advantage to language: All the participants can understand and relate to what happens. Nonverbal communication is more subtle and demands an educated attentiveness. This is why the less words there are, the harder it is for people (who are not involved) to relate to what is going on in a constellation.

There is a greater danger for misinterpretation, too. For example when somebody is staring to the ground: Does he really look at a dead one or a grave, or is he just bending his head because he is ashamed? Or is he trying to avoid eye contact with somebody in order to avoid a conflict? As an observer it is possible to tell the difference by having a close look at it or by tuning into the movement phenomenologically, but this is not that easy. It's easier to ask from time to time. And sometimes very precious information the representatives could give might get lost when they are not asked and not allowed to speak. (for instance: "somebody is missing right here!"). So for me this is not a fundamental question, whether I ask questions and how many questions I ask, or whether I let the representatives speak by themselves and for how long. My choice entirely depends on the situation.

The question of being able to relate to a constellation is of twofold significance. Most important is the significance for the client. I share the point of view that images can unfold a powerful effect in the unconsciousness, even if we don't understand. But we don't know much about how that works. My picture is that there should be at least some aspects in a constellation that can be related to something familiar. Otherwise the constellation remains external to the client, and I presume then it will not reach his soul either. That means you always have to take the client along with you, and pay attention for him to be able to relate at least to the main features of the movements. The second level of significance is about the other group participants. When the facilitator only follows his own soul's inner movements and mental images and does not make them transparent via the feedback of representatives or by explaining them, constellations start to look like a magical rite where spectators or participants are amazed by the magician, but don't understand anymore. When the magician is good this can be fascinating, but I doubt whether this can still be considered to be a method that can be practiced and taught professionally, a method a larger public can relate to⁴.

Some colleagues regret that part of the information is lost in constellations in motion. We normally don't set up the whole system anymore, but just one, two or three persons. Even though many can be added by the time the constellation ends, we usually don't have that clear family picture with a neat subdivision of family of origin and present family any longer. There are only few cases now in which I ask the client to set up the whole family (for example when it is about a patchwork family of a client who

⁴ On www.hellinger.com Bert Hellinger says about a conference in Taiwan the participants there adopted his new style of „spiritual family constellation“ immediately and with great enthusiasm. My picture was that he, Bert Hellinger as a person, was welcomed with enthusiasm. They were impressed by his charisma. But as far as his constellations were concerned, several people gave me feedback, with the dean of the one of the universities organizing the conference, among them, telling me the work of other facilitators was more comprehensible than his. Only by seeing other facilitators work what Bert said before and what he tried to show could be understood. That does not mean Bert' constellations weren't good, and this is not about criticizing him personally either – it just says something about the significance of people doing work that differs from his for the transmission of his approach.

wants to find his place in it, or a good place for the children). When it is about a conflicting relationship, I almost always let both partners stand in front of each other, I don't ask the client to constellate them. By and by this has become my general procedure: First I let the client choose the representatives, then I ask the representatives to go inwards and follow the movement that comes from within immediately and to find positions on their own. So they are not set up into a constellation anymore.

I just noticed that this works out fine. I realized I can spare the old rituals – they are not needed. The representatives move inwards even quicker when they are asked to follow their inner movements from the moment they are chosen. Of course there are exceptions, for example when the client tends to delegate his responsibility. Then I not only ask the client to set up, but also to choose who is to be set up. In general, however, the representatives choose their places by themselves. What we lose with this proceeding is the insight the client can get from the externalization of his inner picture of the family, as well as the chance for the therapist to generate some hypothesis from the initial constellation about the dynamics in this particular family. But if that's really a loss is debatable. A constellation in which I do not set up a spatial arrangement anymore drags the attention away from the problem and directs the focus towards a solution, more precisely towards images and processes effective in the profound psychic structure of the system that will guide towards a solution.

The therapist is not guided by hypothesis anymore. He is forced to detach himself from well-known images and has to follow the movement. This leads all those involved – the facilitator, the client, and the representatives - into the unknown and new.

This kind of facilitating is not guided by hypothesis anymore. Which is why this style is more opened and entirely in the present, whereas hypothesis are always generated out of past experience. So this is simply a different proceeding – that is to say the phenomenological one – in which the next step is not derived from a hypothetical conclusion. Straight from the present perception arises an impulse, which is to be followed.

When I practice this way of working in groups that were only acquainted to the old style previously, people are very surprised at first and they need one or two days to get used to it. But then they realize this work is profoundly connected to the old insights, although it looks so different, and they can see that by the movements of the representatives, movements of conscience and movements of the soul are expressed. What I like about this kind of constellation is that they do a better job than static constellations at reflecting the continuous flow of life and the contradictions that keep life going. Static constellations tend to look like it was the facilitator's job to teach families the right order. The static method makes the aspect of order come to the fore rather than the dynamic pushing life forward.

For me this development of Constellation Work is a continuous process that follows naturally from the phenomenological attitude and from working out of the empty middle. It is also a refinement and a condensation. A development from the coarse towards the more subtle, and thus from the obvious and easy-to-understand towards the less visible. We know similar things from other methods, like the evolution from Bioenergetics to the Hakomi-work or Focusing-work, or within the realm of Primal Therapy from primal scream to very soft and gentle styles. This goes along with a shift from tangible events and relationships (of the client with people we at least know the name of) towards unknown people and unclear events up to energetic traits and processes in systems that cannot be clearly attributed to one person. These energetic processes are easier to display with constellations in motion. Insofar this type of constellation leads to deeper and more subtle spheres. But there is more ambiguity, too. For some people, that's good, for others not. I think it depends a lot on how far the client is in his inner development and what his issue is. If this is true, it does not make much sense to propagate one approach as the better one or even the "right" one. It is about finding out what is appropriate in a specific case – and of course about what a facilitator can do best.

„Spiritual Family Constellation“ or Family Constellation and Spirituality

However, when Bert Hellinger (since early 2006) speaks about “Spiritual Family Constellation” or “The New Family Constellation” he seems to have things in mind that are different from what I described. I have been present when he announced the so called “Neues Familien-Stellen” in Taiwan in April 2006 at the Asia Conference in Taipei. Just like the other Western colleagues (Jane Peterson, Jan Jacob Stam, Heinrich Breuer) I was wondering what was new about it. On a first sight it did not look any different from what Hellinger called „Movements of the Soul“ until then, and his explanations didn’t bring much new things except the replacement of the term “soul” by “Spirit” (at that time he did not yet use the English term “Spirit-Mind”). Only in the context of the explanations he gave on his website later on I started to get a clearer picture. If my picture is right, the „New Family Constellation“ truly means a change of paradigm. The change is not so much about the practical proceeding, but about the underlying philosophy and about Hellinger’s personal role. The Family Constellation is turned upside down.

„Movements of the Spirit“ and “Going with the Spirit-Mind” are terms Hellinger uses as synonyms for “Spiritual Family Constellation”. The word „soul“ that was central to his writing and speaking up to then almost disappeared from his vocabulary. It has been replaced by „Geist“. The German word “Geist” has a double meaning which differs according to the context where it is used. If we speak about “Geist” in an absolute sense it means “spirit” (from the Latin word “spiritus”); if we talk about Geist as a part of a human being it means “mind” (latin: “mens”). The English word Hellinger uses for “Geist” – “Spirit-Mind” seems very strange to me. Instead of making clear what he means – mind or spirit – he is mixing it.

This new terminology was preceded by a time of searching and trying terms like “Applied Philosophy” or “Lebenshilfe” (“Help for Life”) that were supposed to herald a new step in Constellation’s Work. They were quickly abandoned. The term of „Spirit-Mind“ expresses a turn to the spiritual that Hellinger used to avoid, whereas other facilitators have tried for a long time to connect constellations to spiritual contexts, for example by adding meditative and shamanic elements. So it looks like Hellinger is picking up a development that has already emerged in the field of quite some time. And certainly this is the case. However, Hellinger does it in a particular, personal way that is essentially different from his earlier attitude. What does he mean by „Movements of the Spirit-Mind“, what is “Spiritual Family Constellation” and most notably, what is the “Geist” (spirit, mind, spirit-mind)?

First of all, they are different terms that Hellinger uses as synonyms. Even though on a linguistic level, they do not mean the same. “Movements of the Spirit-Mind” refer to a subject called Spirit-Mind that moves itself (or something?), whereas “Spiritual Family Constellation” literally is a specific kind of Family Constellation. So again we find an amalgamation of philosophy and method (like “Movements of the Soul”) that makes accurate understanding more difficult. So first I want to consider them separately. I refer to his presentation of Spiritual Family Constellation in Taiwan as well as the explanations published later on his website under the title „Die Zukunft des Familien-Stellens” (The Future of Family Constellation)⁵. Let’s start with the method: What about this proceeding is different from “Movements of the Soul”?

Changes in Bert Hellinger’s method

At first sight, it looks like a radicalized style of constellations in motion, as Hellinger practiced them approximately since the year 2000. The client does not set up the constellation himself anymore, that means he does not place representatives at a specific spot in an ever different spatial relationship. Differing from the description above, Hellinger himself tells the representatives where to stand or to lie down. Hellinger starts the process with one, less frequently with two individuals, asking them to stand up. When there are two he asks them to stand in front of each other. Frequently he does not take a representative for the client but asks him to stand in himself. Then he waits. When no movement comes up, he intervenes, either by adding a person, mostly to lie down on the floor, without saying and probably without knowing who is represented, or by suggesting a sentence or a gesture. Then he waits again for what comes up. At least during the course in Taiwan, he made the client look at “the Spirit”

⁵ By the time of this translation it is not to find there anymore.

and contemplate it, especially when the constellation was not leading to a clear solution. That means he makes him look far away, beyond time. The viewing contemplation of this eternal “Spirit” puts into perspective personal judgment, values, wishes, happiness and unhappiness, personal and other peoples suffering, so inner peace can arise.

Most of this is not new. But unlike in former times Hellinger does not ask the representatives about what they feel, and he does not let them speak after the constellation. That seems to be a most important difference to me. Apart from short sentences he sometimes uses, the whole constellation proceeds without words. Even before the constellation he often does not ask the client what his issue is. After a short tuning in without words he starts to act. In rare cases he asks for some information about the family or special events. This seems rather like a relapse into the old way of facilitating constellations that does not really belong to the new method. The new method consists of Hellinger relying completely on movements of the representatives and following them. These are subtle movements which are barely perceptible for other observers. More precisely: Hellinger is following his perception, what comes up in him when he tunes in and watches the representatives. Or let’s put it this way: He follows what is emerging in *his* mind by contemplating the client, his system and the representatives.

The function of the representatives is different from before. They do not give explicit information about what they feel or perceive at a specific place or relating to another person, or what they feel inside. They tacitly express it by their movements, but without explaining or describing these movements or how they feel about them. They do not play an active part anymore, and there is no communication between them and the therapist. It seems like they are only needed for Hellinger’s outlook on the system and its dynamics.

It is not true that there are no more interventions. Hellinger does intervene; he even intervenes frequently and massively, for example when he is asking someone to lie down. This of course is a strong intervention which takes a different effect from just placing somebody and waiting what his movement will be. Asking somebody lying on the floor to stand up, to look in a certain direction and to say a sentence to somebody is equally a strong intervention, just like interrupting someone’s movement, turning that individual around and guiding him to another place, or by making somebody look far away and guiding him to contemplate the “Spirit”. These are all strong interventions⁶. The difference to former times is that these interventions are not related to verbal expression of the representatives anymore, but increasingly to the inner images of Bert Hellinger. This seems to be the essential *methodical* difference: What used to be visible externally as a constellation is now largely happening in Hellinger’s mind’s eye. What he sees mentally motivates certain interventions and sentences that actuate a dynamic or bring up a solution. Insofar „Spiritual Family Constellation“ also means an internalization and etherealization of what previously was a more external process.

This is not completely new either. In other types of constellations a next step first appears in the mind of the facilitator, too. This is the essence of phenomenological work: I expose myself to the represented system; I tune in by viewing and wait what comes up in me. In that respect phenomenological constellation work is always a spiritual process. But the representatives play a much more active role in it than in Bert Hellinger’s new work. First of all, they obviously help out with corrections. This is almost not the case anymore with Hellinger’s Spirit-Mind work. This does not only make the process less comprehensible. There is undeniably a great danger for the process to be driven by imagination and projections of the facilitator, which the facilitator could ascribe to the Spirit. So spiritual constellation work requires a deep inner and spiritual purification which might be given to some (for example Bert Hellinger) but that cannot be assumed for everybody. So a long and profound spiritual education would be needed to practice this method. And even then there is a danger of crude

⁶ A colleague of mine told me he does not intervene anymore at all, he just follows the movement the way it comes out without changing anything about it, and without any explanation. He is describing this as a movement of the spirit that’s always right and perfect, so that there is nothing to do for anybody. Probably Hellinger’s work is different from seminar to seminar, which is the case for other people too. But even when working the way this colleague describes, he intervenes by appointing who is set up, if and where somebody stands or lies, when the constellation ends and so on.

misinterpretation, which could easily be prevented or at least limited by asking the representatives questions.

In my own work – other colleagues certainly had the same experience – such deep spiritual constellations emerge without my intentional doing. Suddenly I'm in a space that's energetically so powerful and spiritually so clear that I can't help but working this way. I feel like this happens more and more often. My own inner movement (and thus also the respective field of constellation) is moving in this direction. But I can't do this intentionally; it is rather a movement that just comes up than a method I use. My impression is the group process has to be very deep and dense in order for these constellations to work well and to be digestible for the client. I experience this mainly in longer courses and in training settings, where the participants are tuned in to this dimension. Maybe people attending Bert Hellinger's courses are ready for this anyway, because they are expecting something special. Certainly Hellinger's centeredness helps the participants a great deal to follow him into that space.

Sometimes there is no constellation because wordless communication or even communion takes place, so something is resolved without anybody doing anything, and without visible traits. This happens to me from time to time, and I see it with colleagues from the *eurasys*⁷ training program, and I've seen it in Bert Hellinger's work already years ago. I would not call this a new method or even New Family Constellation, even though I sometimes sense that there is a dynamic that drives the process to become more and more subtle.

I perfectly agree with Bert Hellinger that this inner opening, the continuous extension of what I can host in my inner space, or to put it in other words, my continuous growth beyond mental and emotional structures and constraints is very important. I also agree that this opening of the facilitator is a precondition for new and ever deeper solutions to show up. We can call this movement a spiritual movement, but the picture of an opening soul or growth in ever larger spaces of soul has more meaning to me (because it is more sensual). Likewise I see and experience how this opening modifies my way of working, the first contact with the client, my method of setting up the constellation and even the solution – which in this case often means to renounce to an image of solution. However, I also find an experience confirmed that I frequently make when working with groups: No matter how intuitive we are, how intense and impressive the silent movements are, it does no harm to ask questions to the representatives and the clients, to have them contribute actively to the process. This is definitely helpful.

Turning things upside down – the redefinition of Family Constellation

The visible part of the proceeding is only one aspect of Bert Hellinger's „Spiritual Constellation Work“. Actually he has been practicing this method for three or four years by now, without giving it a name. The question is why he is suddenly putting so much emphasis on the „Spirit-Mind“ and why he states “spiritual constellations” to be a completely new method. This leads us to the second aspect of „Spiritual Family Constellation“. The second aspect is a new philosophy he considers to be the grounding for his work, and which he wants to be the grounding for Family Constellations in general: It's the doctrine of the „Movements of the Spirit-Mind“. Hellinger describes it as a spiritual dimension, which turned up unexpectedly and powerfully. Its power prevails over the old Family Constellation.⁸

⁷ Eurasys (Europäische Akademie für Systemaufstellungen) is an Internatinoal Training Institute chaired by Heinrich Breuer and me (www.eurasys.de)

⁸ He continues: „Some are afraid of it. They want to stick to the beginning of Family Constellation, and disarm this new dimenson...“.

By psychologizing the motives of those who do not follow him Hellinger eludes debate to the purpose. This is harmful for the evolution of Constellation Work. Basically he says: Those who do not follow me have nothing but personal motives. This may be true in many cases, but it's not helpful for our purpose. Likewise one could interpret Hellingers development in psychological and personal terms. *That* would mean to try to disarm what he is objectively saying, just like his psychologizing is a way not to take notice of differing opinions. From an organizational point of view this kind of interpretation splits adherents and those non-adherents, which are suspected to be heretics.

For a long time I kept thinking and I tried to find what this new dimension could be, where, when and how it showed up, but I can't find anything that revealed itself at once. Out of the inner dynamic of constellation work I could notice a tendency of constellation work to become more liquid and subtle, as I mentioned above. More in flow, less restrained to particular forms, it moves from persons and singular events to energetic patterns and is in consequence more opened in its perspectives for finding solutions – even to the point of abstaining from solution. All these are profound changes, sometimes capillary and sometimes obvious. They challenge me to go with the movement and not to cling to old styles of doing constellations. They can not only be seen in Bert Hellinger's work. They seem to be inner processes in the field other constellators are touched by as well, even though there are individual differences in expression. We can call it Spiritualization, but it's nothing new. It accompanies constellation work since I got to know it, in particular since constellations in motion turned up. What I recognize as new is a new *interpretation* of Family Constellations – not a new *dimension*, but just a *reinterpretation of the old*. The whole Family Constellation work is reinterpreted by Bert Hellinger, he puts it into a new frame. He turns it upside down. I mean this literally: Hellinger's "Spiritual Family Constellation" is not grounded in the earth anymore, but grounded in an idea he calls "Spirit-Mind". It thus becomes an ideology.

To justify this he is going back to the very beginning of Family Constellations: He writes: "The decisive insight, the essential, turning point insight *did not come from Family Constellations*. However, this was what gave Family Constellation its direction, it has never stopped heading towards that direction, and we cannot see yet where this road will lead us. *This insight was a mental insight. It was given to me on a spiritual path of cognition.* It is the insight about the functioning of our conscience."

(Highlighting by W.N.).

I repeat:

- 1) „The insight did not come from Family Constellation“
- 2) It was "a mental insight" from a spiritual source
- 3) It was given "to me" (Bert Hellinger).

The following questions result from this:

- 1) If these insights did not come from Family Constellation, where did they come from?
- 2) What is a „mental insight“ (how does it differ from other insights?), what is a „spirit-mind path of cognition, and how does it differ from other paths of cognition?
- 3) Does the word „me“ have a special meaning in this context?

Before I explore these questions, I'd like to remind you that it is all about an *old* insight. Bert Hellinger's achievements about „conscience“ date from the early 1990s, so they are about 15 years old. The insight is not new in itself, he just *reinterprets* it.

How I understood Hellinger is that he gained insights about orders and the role of conscience from empirical observation. This has always been his decisive argument against critics reproaching him to impose his own beliefs about order to his clients. Of course additional steps of insight are required in order to gain this insight about the role conscience plays. But I never heard him say and I never read in his texts about a source completely different from empirical observation. Now he is detaching his insights from Family Constellations and he turns the whole thing around. Now he presents it this way: His insight was not deducted from observation in constellations, but Family Constellation is the fruit of a mental or spiritual insight he happened to have, some kind of enlightenment or epiphany "given" to him. That's why it's not empirical observation and experience that's decisive, but the revelation that does not depend on the former, and the authority this gift came from: the Spirit-Mind. What does this mean?

Every insight is a process involving spirit and mind in the first place. It's trivial to say an insight is something spiritual or mental – except if there is a specific point you want to make by saying so. When I observe, I only observe. When I gain an insight out of it, then it's an action of mind and spirit that goes beyond pure observation. We can do so either by connecting previous observation and drawing generalizing conclusions from it – this is the way theories are constructed. It is the mental way. Or by something that suddenly emerges while we observe. This emergence just happens, we don't need to

think about what we observe, but it is always connected to what we observe. While perceiving the perceived tells me something general about itself. This is the phenomenological path of insight, like Bert Hellinger described it many times. We can call this a spiritual way. And just like any other insight it appears in the mind.

This emergence is different from a theoretical conclusion, it's not an act of thought. It's rather the antipode of thought. It needs an emptiness of the mind. Hellinger called it "the empty middle". He never said precisely, what it was, and maybe it cannot be said precisely, maybe it can only be suggested. But it is quite clear that spiritual education is needed in order to be capable of this emptiness at least rudimentarily. Hellinger was talking about „purification“ in this context, about "the dark night of the soul". These are terms from Christian mysticism. In allusion to eastern spiritual practice we could also speak of meditation, emptiness or "no mind". However named, a practice of the phenomenological path of insight is always a spiritual path, a path to let behind notions, theories, images, beliefs, opinions, judgments and values. And as a constellator it requires a certain degree of spiritual maturity to work in this way. This is why training in constellations is first of all a spiritual process in the described sense⁹.

All this is as old as constellation work itself. If Bert Hellinger just wanted to emphasize it once more, like for purpose of instruction and training of constellation facilitators, he would not have to speak about "new" Family Constellation. It would have been enough to point out: his work had this spiritual background right from the beginning; that this spiritual dimension now becomes more and more visible and this requests a continuous evolution concerning methods and content. This background and the evolution of Family Constellation however have nothing to do with any kind of epiphany or revelation. I assume Hellinger wants to make another point by emphasizing the spirit-mind nature of his insights about the role of conscience.

I see the real novelty in his detachment of the insight (the function of conscience) from empirical perception by highlighting its purely spiritual nature and by stating it did "not come out of Family Constellation", so it did not come from perception, not from observation, but as a gift of the spirit-mind received independently. This is exactly the opposite of his earlier statements. So the insight is metaphysical and exclusive, unlike phenomenological insight. The latter is in principle opened to everybody, its truth can be a shared perception in a group and it can be shared with others who adopt the phenomenological attitude to look at a subject. It requires a special kind of openness, some training and other things Hellinger described as the phenomenological attitude, but it is not exclusive. Since it is a shared insight, it is open for dialogue, we can communicate our perception to each other to correct details, and to access further emerging insights, since the personal perception and insight – as Bert Hellinger pointed out many times – can never be complete. As one of his book titles says, the truth remains "in movement"¹⁰.

Hellinger's new interpretation of a spirit-mind insight independent from observation is entirely exclusive. Its movement is only related to himself. The insight appears as grace or revelation, just like the ones the prophets got according to the tradition. This is the only interpretation this emphasis on the mental-spiritual quality of his insight makes non-trivial sense.

This is a fundamental turn. Sure, we can understand phenomenological insight as grace – but then it remains fluent and cannot be codified without distortion. It always remains connected to emergence and its contemplation, and so it is not fruit of a spiritual dimension that is conceptualized as being independent from and functioning outside of emerging phenomena¹¹.

⁹ But not at all in the sense of a teaching of some specific spiritual point of view or content.

¹⁰ Bert Hellinger, *Wahrheit in Bewegung* (Truth in movement), Freiburg 2005 (Herder).

¹¹ In my book „Das Hellinger-Prinzip“ (Freiburg 2003) (English: *The Healing Power of Reality*) I described the inseparable connexion of the observer, the observed and the insight using the following metaphor: "Unlike the phenomenological attitude – here things have a face and a voice, they are subjects not merely objects. So they are not used and consumed, but we are in the middle of a lively exchange never ceasing to bring up new things. It is adopting this stance that Hellinger can state that truth is not fixated and static (and not preliminary like the truth of empirical science) but *new*, time and again. Like a poem or a symphony: When I

This new point of view of Bert Hellinger very consistently justifies a personal entitlement to leadership he did not claim previously. If we consider observation and sudden „enlightenments“ in constellations to be the point of departure of insight, then the process of gaining insight is a shared perception of those who make these experiences and observations and who communicate with each other about it. That would be a dialogue, in which of course Bert Hellinger would deserve a very special role. But this special role is only justified by the clarity and profoundness of his perception, which would have to be checked by the perception of others – just like a constellator has to accept being corrected by representatives and the group. But since Hellinger’s new view is he alone was „chosen“¹² for this insight he received independently from constellations he does not need to engage in dialogue. As the receiver of a spiritual revelation he is above all discussion, and revelation itself is not to be discussed. You just take it or leave it. So it is not a coincidence Hellinger does not ask representatives for confirmation and barely gives any room for corrections.

Conscience and Spirit-Mind or: Where does the change come from?

All in all “*The New Family Constellation*” is a reinterpretation of Family Constellation which is now presented as a gift of the Spirit-Mind to Hellinger and delivered to the world by him. There are further explanations about conscience stating this clearly, too:

Hellinger writes: „*It was mainly the insight in the functioning of a conscience we nowadays are to a large extent unaware of, which obeys another law than the conscience we are aware of. Only this insight has opened the door for Family Constellations to enter the mental field that obviously links up all members of a family in a particular way, so each member becomes every member’s fate. (...) This mental field resists change while it remains untouched. What is not resolved in one generation will be repeated by the next one in a similar way. But through the “new kind of Family Constellation” another dimension of this mental field turned out to be effective*”.

Three remarks on this:

1) The statement „*This mental field, when it’s left to itself resists change*“ seems objectionable to me. There is a strong tendency to repetition, but not everything repeats itself. There has to be a force *within this very field* to create new things and change, otherwise there’d be no life. This change is real since the beginning of time, even when the field is left to itself. There are changes without Family Constellation or similar processes. For instance, when a man and a woman leave their respective families behind to get together and form a couple. The dynamic of the field itself drives this. To explain this by a theory of conscience alone will make it hard to understand this, but that is another issue. The family soul (another term of Hellinger’s earlier vocabulary) is not only bound to conscience. This means the *theory of conscience* needs a complement, not the field. So there is not only a maintaining force, but also a dissolving one.

2) This insight is as old as human thinking. Rupert Sheldrake calls it – with reference to Plato - the Spirit (Hellinger might have borrowed this term from him), Ken Wilber speaks about Eros and Agape, Karl Marx assumes dialectics of means of production and productive forces, and so on. It is quite clear there is a movement constructing and maintaining forms and another dissolving and destroying forms. Maybe they are not two different principles or agencies, but complementary sides of one and the same movement of life respectively of the evolution.

abstain from interpretation and analysis they show me something new every time, and everything they show to me is right and true. This novelty shines on me through the piece of art for as long as I just expose myself to it. I have to hold in front of the phenomenon, so it can speak to me.” (p.153)

A new version of this book is also published in English. The title is “The Healing Power of Reality” and it can be purchased via info@wilfried-nelles.de.

¹² He has used this expression in personal conversation.

3) Whatever perspective one wants to adopt, it is perfectly clear not only the “New Family Constellation” showed the functioning of this force. Otherwise we could not have found solutions and resorts out of the coercion of repetition until one year ago.

From my point of view, the force that makes us transcend conscience is love. We don’t need a conscious mental effort to transcend the boundaries of conscience, as Hellinger postulates in his book “Innenreisen”. I even think it is a hindrance, since it makes you fall back to the personal conscience. It is love that drives me to be with another person from another family with a different conscience. If I stay within this love, it will guide me beyond the boundaries of conscience all by itself. When I manage to keep up this love for more than just a few people and my family, when this love becomes a love for reality, then boundaries of conscience dissolve in this love. This is a movement of the soul. It is not a movement against conscience, but just beyond it – transcending it. But transcending is not something one „does“, it’s a natural movement of growth, just like one grows from childhood into adolescence. So it is enough to have a loving look at reality, which of course can be quite painful sometimes. An authority called “Spirit-Mind” is not needed for this.

My purpose is not criticizing Bert Hellinger, but to explore what his proclamation of a new, spiritual Family Constellation Work means and what spirituality in Constellation Work is or could be. I have always been deeply impressed Hellinger resisted the temptation to interpret what showed up in constellations and refrained from translating the spiritual profoundness everybody could sense into a concept. He was speaking about „something greater“ or “the great soul”. These are almost childlike terms hinting at some experience without interpreting it, without wanting to possess it. A deep awe and its corresponding demureness were hereby expressed. Consequently he did not want his insights to be considered his, as something belonging to him.¹³ He refused to find exact denominations for the unseizable and invisible resonating in Constellation Work, to call it “spiritual”, for instance. He stuck to the “earth”, to instantaneous experience and he spoke about that border we have to stop at. This is precisely the point: he did not indulge in spiritual speculation, although they suggested themselves, and in my eyes this was constitutive for the depth of his spirituality. I always experienced the spirituality of Constellation Work in fairly ordinary things and to stop there, to what can be experienced instantaneously – and to let it tell its own tale.

Some colleagues thought we already went to far when we were speaking about the soul and its movements. But the soul is more than a concept, we can feel it, and we can share its perception. It is debatable if it is more appropriate to call this ethereal element “Spirit” or “Spirit-Mind” rather than “Soul”, and whether movements of the soul should not better be conceptualized as something spiritual. Just like instead of speaking of a “Great Soul” we could talk about a “Mental Field”, although I don’t like this expression so much for stylistic reasons. But this is not about linguistic nuances. In our case, the Spirit or “Spirit-Mind” is something independent.

The Geist (Spirit)

What is the *Geist* (Spirit)¹⁴? What does Hellinger mean by “Spirit”? It seems he is talking about the creative principle everything comes from. He writes: „The movement of the Spirit is a creative movement that makes anything that moves move and defines how it moves. It brings it into movement and keeps it moving. This is why every movement is its volition. This Spirit is functioning in any movement, just the way it is, and supports it, just the way it is.“

In this description, the Spirit appears as a subject, it has volition, it has an intention: The Spirit “wants” movement, initiates it and “supports” it. This Spirit is not with phenomena anymore, not *in* this

¹³ „It seems completely crazy to me to try to put a reality one can see into one’s own pocket. When someone asks me whether he can use what I said or did it really hurts me. As if I had the right to dispose of realities or insights.” (Bert Hellinger in: Gunthard Weber (Hrsg.), *Praxis des Familien-Stellen*, Heidelberg 1998, 521 f.).

¹⁴ In this context it is absolutely clear that the German „Geist“ has the meaning of Spirit. Therefore in this context I don’t use Hellinger’s construction „Spirit-Mind“.

world anymore, it is standing outside of the world on its own. To me, this constitutes a leap from phenomenology to metaphysics. What Hellinger calls the “Spirit” is in my eyes nothing but God, more precisely God the Creator. What we find described here is a dualistic notion of a creative God (Spirit) and the movement he started and wanted - the creation¹⁵.

This Spirit that Hellinger earlier called the “prime source” is eternal and motionless, but it is the source of everything that moves, the source implementing all the phenomena. As volitional and supporter the Spirit is not within the phenomenon itself but precedes it. So it cannot be perceived in the phenomenon, like phenomenology assumes, but we have to deduce – it is a product of thought.

This interpretation of the Spirit to be motionless and to be what Hellinger thinks to be the origin of movement seems to be contradicted by Hellinger talking about the movements *of* the Spirit. That would mean the Spirit moves itself and thus *is* what is moved (ergo the world). But then it can't be supporting the movement and be volitional of it. This formula implies a difference between the mover (the Spirit) and the moved (the world). Hellinger is not very clear at this point. It seems obvious to me it comes down to differentiating Spirit and World since he makes participants of his courses look at a faraway, ulterior Spirit („look far beyond“). If he could see the Spirit *within* things, it would be enough to look at what happens to come up – like he did in earlier times.

However, I do not deny the beneficial effect of this „look far beyond“. When I say: Let your view become very wide so you can see everything, your problem, your family, your ancestors and their ancestor's ancestors, the living and the dead, the whole mankind, just keep looking, look at the Spirit, look beyond what emerges and what emerged, look far beyond, look at the eternal – when I follow this movement, I can find peace. In front of the eternal and changeless everything temporal and variable loses its meaning, just like the distinction between good and evil, right and wrong don't have any sense in this spot. For some clients, especially incurably sick ones and others that have been hit hard by fate, it can be of great comfort and elatedness to look at their life and their families from there. And new options for the therapist to operate show up when is connected to this prime source.¹⁶ But this is not really new either; it has always been a part of Hellinger's work. What is new is how central a place it occupies, that he gives it a name and subordinates everything to it, or to put it in other words: that he does not see the Spirit *in* the world, but *prior* to the world, as an entity on its own.

In former times Hellinger spoke about the earth we come from and we'll go back to, about the earth, which heals and the heaven that makes sick. In this „Earth“ the Spirit and the Mind were included without being denominated on their own, corresponding to that utmost demureness Hellinger talked about in the above cited interview. The Spirit was at home there and comfortable. It was at home with the human, on earth. It was at home there means: It lived there, we could meet it there. We do not have to go far; he is right here, in every blade of grass. In every Family Constellation, too, in every ordinary constellation. The deepest spiritual movement is in the mean time very ordinary and earthly: bowing to our own parents. I'm very grateful to Hellinger he taught me this. Before that, there were quite a few fancy spiritual ideas in my head that I was lucky to lose. In this movement I arrived, with this movement my search was finished. But the expedition continues, well, it only just started, but the search is over. The spiritual was, and is for me the other side of the ordinary, the commonplace, the earth. The Spirit is neither here nor there, it's here-there.

This has practical consequences for Constellation Work. I don't need to introduce a “Spirit-Mind”, but I have to maintain an attitude that is as supportive to the temporal as it is inclusive for the atemporal – as something that shows up within the temporal. Where else should it arise? Where else is it discernable?

¹⁵ This is completely different from Laotse teachings and Taoism Hellinger referred to in earlier times, in which there is no separation between creator and world, between mover and movement, no Spirit-Mind that wants anything. There is just Tao, impossible to put in words, and indefinable – but it can be experienced. The problem seems to me that Bert unlike before does not content himself anymore with experience and what shows up on its own. Or to put it in his own words: with stopping at the border; he absolutely wants to name it. With this denomination (“the Spirit-Mind”) he fixates the movement and kills it.

¹⁶ For instance: perceiving the disease of a client in a larger sense as the healing of his soul and to open the door for the client to perceive this different perspective.

We cannot see the Spirit except we see it in the temporal, earthly, the here and now, in this woman, this man, and this couple. This Spirit, this Mind has always been in Hellinger's work, but now, as he postulates it to be something apart, it seems to be lost for me, and not to be the same anymore, something less real and more theoretical. Unlike the soul, the Spirit (or "Spirit-Mind") of Bert Hellinger's recent statements is a purely intellectual notion. We can't feel it; we can only deduce it intellectually.

Summary

It seems reasonable and relevant to me to highlight the spiritual background and nature of Family Constellation more clearly than it was done previously. The insights of Bert Hellinger and in consequence all of our insights are due to an attitude based on the audacity to stick to the emptiness of spirit and mind. Whatever there is can flow into this emptiness and reveal itself for a moment. Call it what you like – Soul, Spirit, Mind, Tao, Dharma – or just abstain from denomination:

In constellation work it emerges as a concrete phenomenon, it is perceptible as some kind of resonance, but we can't grasp its essence. This reality can be experienced and it is not exclusive, it is shared with all those disposing of a certain degree of openness. To incarnate this openness of phenomenological capacity is a most important personal challenge and practical learning to me. To educate this ability seems to be the primary aspect of (advanced) training in order to become a constellation facilitator, and in a larger sense it is also an important contribution to societal culture and education. This education is a spiritual process in the sense of an abandonment of all images, ideas, and beliefs, in the sense of attaining emptiness which enables us to let reality flow in and to embrace it just the way it is.

Relating to Bert Hellinger and Family Constellation this is nothing new. It substantiates the continuous flow of work and the resulting insights, but it does not establish any specific insight to form the basis of everything, to determine everything and which, in addition to that, arises from a source different of palpable perception. This is only new in the sense of breaking with the principles of phenomenological attitude and „empty middle“. Family Constellations were an open process up to now, in which Bert Hellinger constantly inspired new impulses. Now he is presenting it as the result of a revelation only he was entitled to. Constellation Work obtains a religious character as a result. For me, this has nothing to do with spirituality. Family Constellations have always been spiritual. By exposing itself completely to reality the spirit that's in everything and works in every thing has always been a part of it.

Marmagen, the 27th of March 2007

Copyright: Wilfried Nelles

Translation by Martin Hell, July 2008