

In the Spotlight

Systemic Constellation Work meets Mystical Principles

Conversation between Stephan Hausner and Thomas Hübl



Thomas Hübl is a modern mystic, a spiritual teacher whose work integrates the essence of the great traditions of wisdom with scientific knowledge and his own personal experience.

With uncompromising clarity, Thomas shows how to shift from the culture of the personal towards the birth of new 'we-cultures'. He has the special gift of truly understanding people and being able to apply the timeless knowledge that has been revealed to him when engaging with them, enabling people to gain a deeper dimension of self-awareness and responsibility. This radical transcendence of the ego-centric world view opens the door to a depth of authentic expression, to service to the world, and to a focus on the absolute.

Thomas Hübl has devoted his life to the task of exploring awareness and supporting others in their quest for greater awareness. His work has world-wide resonance and has deeply transformed the lives of thousands of people.

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Thomas Hübl is a contemporary spiritual teacher, dedicated to healing. His teachings about 'the mystical principles' and his work helped me a lot to understand what I am doing in my own work, applying systemic constellations in the field of complementary medicine and also allowed me to understand the process of healing on a deeper level.

The following conversation took place in Spring 2015. Annetta Apol has transcribed it, so I was able to convert it into a more readable form and Nicola Dunn helped with the final editing. I would like to thank them for their contributions and I would especially like to thank Barbara for providing us with the opportunity to share our dialogue with the constellations community.

Thomas: In mysticism we say that there are natural principles that we find in both the universe and in life and that how we create our own lives also depends upon these transpersonal principles.

What I know from conversations with you and others is that there are similar principles in family constellations. What do you consider to be the most important principles that family constellations work is based upon?

Stephan: This is a question with many layers and I can only answer it from my background in holistic medicine. I am sure that there are many different points of view and if you were to ask other colleagues you would get a range of different answers.

At my first workshop with Bert Hellinger, I understood that symptoms or illnesses cannot be reduced purely to a personal phenomenon. If we work with clients, who suffer from health issues, very often we only find a solution when we look at their symptoms or illnesses within a greater context e.g. the family or even beyond. When we set up constellations within the fields of psychosomatic or complementary medicine, we often add a representative for the symptoms or illness to the client's family constellation. What we then often notice is that this representative is somehow needed to provide a kind of balancing effect on the family system. We see how symptoms and illnesses

are related, not just to the patient who is carrying them, but also to other family members, or to transgenerational aspects and traumas that have occurred in this family. The constellation shows the interconnectedness between symptoms and illnesses, and reveals that it is not only individuals that have a longing for wholeness and integrity, but also that family systems have a memory and are looking for balance and wholeness by including and withholding issues from the past that are unresolved.

That is beautiful and in my explorations I would say that the personal perspective of one's life, which is commonplace but important, is not sufficient to adequately describe the larger dynamics.

By including illness and symptoms in systemic constellation work we have seen that the representatives of illness are often connected to previously excluded issues i.e. excluded in the sense that they are unresolved. This happens because at the moment that they occurred there were not enough resources to deal with them. It seems that there is an underlying principle, which determines that what is unresolved does not disappear and instead remains alive throughout the generations. Whether we want to or not, we need to learn how to deal with these issues, because even if we are not conscious of them, the more we try to hold them at a distance, the more they find a way to express themselves in our daily life, either through symptoms and illnesses or through recurrent patterns that we cannot resist.

The benefit of a constellation is that through the representatives' unexplainable connectedness, these unconscious issues become visible and the client has the possibility to relate to them once again. Through this process of becoming aware of these unresolved issues and their effects, there is a chance to integrate them, which in turn leads to a new balance within the system. With this broader consciousness, there may be less suffering and more freedom and flexibility for growth, potential and evolution.

One principle in constellations is to bring these so far excluded aspects to the surface and by opening ourselves up for a constellation workshop, we usually experience an expansion. Our view on our life and living situation widens and in addition we cannot help but acknowledge that we are connected to many more things than we might ever have thought before. From my point of view this leads us

to another principle of constellation work, because the next step is to relate to these unresolved aspects and integrate them i.e. to consciously identify with them in order not to be unconsciously entangled with them. This movement of integration of the past is an active reaching-out movement, acknowledging that parents and family history, especially the unresolved and unintegrated aspects, are alive within us and searching for expression. Mostly we tend to avoid these identities but experience shows that instead of fearing and fighting them, through giving them a place in our heart and even in our whole body, these aspects can evolve. As a result we experience more freedom and peace and also have the opportunity to transform.

Thomas: That is a beautiful description of the way mysticism also looks at this process. From the mystical perspective we would say that energy that cannot be processed or consciously experienced leaves a residue. As a result, this residue of energy will continually try to be integrated and therefore will create recurring patterns in order to surface and be released. When we become aware of it, we re-identify with these subconscious or unconscious aspects and the energy has an opportunity to be experienced so that it is then free to continue its development. I think this is one of the basic elements of looking at the creation and how reality is created and you described the process very beautifully.

Is there another important principle that you would consider to be one of the pillars of constellation work?

Stephan: Yes something I discovered in my work is that if someone hasn't yet taken in life, you do not need to reflect on or work with their entanglements. I have met a lot of doctors in my family constellation workshops around the world. Again and again. I told them the same thing. As long as your patients have not, as you say Thomas, surrendered to life, you do not have to deal with their symptoms. I know from your work that surrendering to life is a core principle. I have worked now with family constellations for over 20 years and I have many clients who have done a lot of constellation work on both health issues and family dynamics and entanglements, but one of the deepest healing movements, that of reconciling with the parents, through whom they received life, has often been left out. This is one aspect that I am focusing on a lot i.e. enabling a client to reconcile with their parents so that they are able to take life in through them. Supporting clients in this movement, is for me one of the essential principles in my healing work and I have seen a lot of symptoms withdraw when clients have been able to say, 'Yes' to life on a deeper level.

Thomas: That is beautiful and in my explorations I would say that the personal perspective of one's life, which is commonplace but important, is not sufficient to adequately describe the larger dynamics. However, if instead I see my life as part of a huge stream of evolution, whereby I

am coming from somewhere and going to somewhere, and that the water is ever flowing in this evolutionary riverbed, then it makes sense that when someone adds a green essence about 100 metres further up the riverbed from where I am standing, the water that passes by will also be green. Using this same metaphor, if there is an unresolved trauma from two or three generations previously, I will see it in the stream that flows through me. This principle also applies to our relationship with our parents, because if I cannot host my parents' life within myself, there will be a breaking-point which in turn will create waves in the water flowing through me. Your words were a beautiful way to describe this interconnectedness. It is not enough to just look at my own separate life. I think we are moving into a time where we will see that relatedness and communication are fundamental aspects of human life both within ourselves and in the outside world. We will see that communication is actually a flow of intelligence. As I understand it, family constellations are a way in which these streams can be revealed and Bert Hellinger found a way to make the invisible visible. With this method, it is as if you can take a series of photos of the water, including its colour. This supports the client to really relate, tune in, feel and experience within themselves what has been fragmented. So this method is a very beautiful approach.

Now in your experience how sustainable are these changes and how much do you believe that both presencing and internalising the constellation process need to be an on-going process so that the results can stabilise?

Stephan: This is a question I have been dealing with since the beginning and sustainability starts with the first step. For me a good result of a constellation process is when the client is able to make one step forward. So the work starts with clarifying what would be a good solution or result for the client not just personally, but also from a broader perspective.

In this phase of the interview we try to find out what elements we need to set up as representatives in order to understand the client's question. Then when we set them up, we mostly see that some elements are missing and it becomes clear what patterns are currently running. In most cases one can see that the system needs to be enhanced so that a new movement can take place.

In line with this, I like the image of the open Zen circle, which means that when there are patterns running in a system, the system is actually too small or even closed and that to overcome these patterns, the closed circle needs to be opened up so that intelligence from 'outside' can come in and the patterns can be dissolved.

The necessity of opening can be shown through the constellation, but it actually needs to take place within the body of the client. My experience is, the more it is a physical experience for the client i.e. an experience

that is anchored in the body, the more it may lead to a sustainable change. So for me the important thing in constellation work is not the constellation itself but what is happening inside the client while they watch the constellation i.e. how the client is dealing with what they are experiencing. By following the deeper movements and the rhythms in the client's body I can get a sense of what aspects of the constellation are causing stress. I also get to know what aspects the client has difficulties being in tune with i.e. are too difficult to integrate.

For me the process of integration is more important than the process of the constellation itself. I think that a lot of colleagues who are working with constellations still focus too much on the constellation and too little on the client and this process of integration. Once you know how to do constellations, it's pretty easy to create a solution in the constellation. However, if during this process the client becomes overwhelmed or shuts down or even disconnects, in my opinion you cannot create something sustainable. You may experience a nice constellation, but not one with much effect because the client hasn't been able to relate to what they saw. This is one aspect that I think is important.

In relation to the metaphor you shared with us before Thomas, my image is that the life of a client runs like a film and when you set up a constellation you sort of stop this film for a moment and you have the opportunity in the present to re-order or restructure the image, so that the film can change direction. However, for this to happen the client needs to be both open to this 'surgery' and able to surrender to the situation i.e. to be supported to be present with what is.

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As a therapist, if I want to help or support in that way, I need to know when a client is disconnecting from what is happening, because in such a moment I need to stop the constellation and the representatives and give the client the time and the space for the process of integration i.e. give the client the time and conditions to be able to relate to what they see in the constellation and to help them, so that the process of the constellation can also happen inside their body and be contained. In that way I see the constellation also as an externalisation of an inner process or in the words of Heraklit: *'Inside is outside and outside is inside'*. Only when this happens, do I see a sustainable change through systemic constellation work;

so you could say, sustainable systemic constellation work is systemic bodywork or systemic medicine.

In order to achieve that, there is one thing that I do, that is contrary to the traditional way of working with constellations. In the traditional way, once you have found a solution, you have usually found a good place for the client in the constellation. Following this the client is exchanged with his representative i.e. the constellations facilitator brings the client into the constellation to stand in their place and connects them with the other family members from this position. Sometimes I do this, but usually I leave the client in the participants' circle next to me so that they can watch the constellation from the outside and I leave the client's representative in the constellation for the entire process. Then I work directly with the client at my side with what they are experiencing in the constellation. Usually, when the client is able to be present with what is and when they are able to integrate some of the significant aspects or to relate in a new way to their family members from this meta-position, their awareness expands and usually all group participants experience change. They can feel and even see how a change in the attitude of the client towards his family members leads to a change in the constellation.

You need to do a lot of personal work on yourself, as your own body is the only mirror you have to look at and the more unclarified aspects there are in your body, the less clear your mirror will be.

In this way the client gets immediate feedback about how their inner change leads to a change for them personally and in the whole system. The participants understand, that because they are part of the system they also have an influence on the system. If they change, all the others need to change too, and the whole system can be 'reset'. Very often this process also leads to an extended perception and awareness of the client within their family system, and the new felt relationships to family members allow a new order to unfold in the constellation. This happens because the creative forces, that are revitalised in the system create a connecting movement and what has been separated in the past can now come together in the present. Similarly, when unresolved aspects from the past are still alive in the present, the past stays active in the present and hinders evolution.

Thomas: This is a beautiful description of the process of integration and I think I would underline much of what you have said. I especially like the precision of stopping when the client dissociates from the process that they are experiencing. The reason why the symptom exists in the first place is dissociation, so this is a crucial moment. If you catch this point at the right time and you stop, you bring into view the origin of the symptom, which is an important condition for evolution. This is where a new electrical circuit can be established i.e. an expansion of conscious awareness in this area by releasing the unconscious material, making it conscious and allowing it to continue its movement.

You also said something else that I liked a lot: that the change in the client actually has both a retrospective and prospective effect on the system i.e. that the effect goes back into the past as well as into the future. If you release the karma or what is stuck in the past, you actually change your future. So if we become aware of something now, that will change the river's flow; that is another beautiful parallel.

It also seems that it is key that the person holding your role i.e. the constellation facilitator has both a refined and a high-level of awareness in order to notice these subtle dissociations. Therefore my question is, in general, to what degree do you see these competencies of both presence and energetic awareness demonstrated by constellation facilitators? Is this something that they are trained in?

Stephan: Well, in all honesty, I personally miss these aspects in a lot of the training courses that I know of. I have always tried to include these elements in the training workshops I have given, but it has always been challenging because for me over the years of working with energetic medicine it has become a pretty natural process. I am constantly looking for useful tools and ways to train students' perception within a constellation training and this was one reason I participated in your so-called Timeless Wisdom Training.

My learning about body awareness began in the field of medical radiaesthesia i.e. developing the ability to sense disturbances or disharmonies in the body of my patients and the corresponding remedies needed. I intensified this learning process by attending workshops in kinesiology and cranio-sacral therapy. So, I started learning about family constellation work from this background. In the beginning I felt very shy about starting to work with constellations, because I hadn't completed a psychotherapy training and it took me many years to understand that my way of looking at the client and in consequence working with constellations, whether with individuals, couples or organisations, was a special gift, because I naturally included body awareness, which is basic in focusing on physical illness.

Today I would say that in my work usually it is the body of the client that either leads the constellation or that

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guides the way so that constellation work is actually subtle bodywork. In relation to that belief I really like the metaphor you use of a conductor of an orchestra, who knows exactly which musician is out of tune and needs some support or correction. From my point of view, the important tasks of the constellation facilitator are, firstly to sense what is the relevant information coming up in the constellation i.e. useful for a movement towards a solution and in that way essential for a movement towards healing and secondly the facilitator needs to know whether the client can allow themselves to surrender and follow this movement.

A lot of solutions that are revealed in the constellation are impossible for the client to follow, because they touch upon a personal, transpersonal or even collective trauma. Once again the body of the client is the indicator. Like your conductor of the orchestra, who knows which violin needs to be adjusted, the constellation facilitator needs to sense if and indeed how the body of the client is responding. The relevant movement is not the solution in the constellation, but instead the response in the client's body to the movement of resolution. Here I like the term used by Raja Selvam, a well-known trauma therapist in the tradition of Somatic Experience, when he talks about 'upper belly therapy' i.e. that a lot of therapy only affects the body from the belly upwards, which from his perspective is pretty ineffective. In your words, Thomas, you might say, that the client is not able to be fully present to their experience and instead they are pulling their energy into the upper parts of the body. This is already a separation from the experience and the first step towards dissociation. So, from my perspective a constellation experience is most effective, when the client is able to allow the constellation to take place within their body and the facilitator needs to develop a capacity to sense and facilitate that process.

From my background in medical radiaesthesia I sometimes sense that the ill or insufficiently included parts of the client's body relate to special aspects in the constellation and the rest of the body is relating with other, often less conflictual aspects of the constellation. Therefore the split that is in the family system often takes place also within the body of the client. It is neither the task nor the responsibility of the client to resolve the split in the family, but they need to find a way to be with the split without having a corresponding division in their own body.

At this point constellation work becomes primarily bodywork or even trauma therapy and the focus needs to shift from the constellation to the client. In order to make this point very clear, I point out to my students and also to my clients that for me, the constellation is not the most important aspect. For me, what is most important is what is happening in the client's body, whilst they are watching the constellation and relating to the information arising from it.

Once you get to the point where the movement within the client is more important than the movement in the constellation, body awareness comes into play – not only the client's – but also your own. To sense and to facilitate these processes of integration or non-integration, you need to know your own body at a highly precise level. Basically this is the only reference instrument that you have. As systemic therapy suggests, you need to get an awareness of 'the difference that creates the difference' and for this you need to do a lot of personal work on yourself, as your own body is the only mirror you have to look at. The more unclarified aspects there are in your body, the less clear your mirror will be.

What I like very much Thomas is the tool that you apply in your work with your students, i.e. 'Transparent Communication'. Through these exercises, you are helping them to clarify what it is they are mirroring in the client at the same time as teaching them body-awareness. The way you teach your students to listen is pure training in body-awareness, both of their own body and at the same time of the body of the person they are with. To teach someone to develop a permanent awareness of connectedness at the same time as sharing, involves sensing into your own body sensations in connection with your sharing partners. It also includes being aware from which place within themselves they are speaking i.e. what rises within your own

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body when you listen. Is there coherence or incoherence between the information that is given and the body? Is the whole body speaking or is part of the body excluded when certain themes are mentioned? Helping students become aware of all these aspects during conversation helps to teach them a kind of subtle perception, which is essential for all therapeutic work with people.

The reason why the symptom exists in the first place is dissociation, so this is a crucial moment.

At the moment I am exploring what are good and powerful ways to integrate Transparent Communication into Family Constellation Trainings. I have found it very helpful for trainees to move beyond observing constellations and instead to really digest the constellation processes they watch and bring their personal experience of the constellation process into contact with other trainees, but not in a sense of talking about the constellation, but more about themselves and their own experience. In that way the constellation of one student creates a field of deep learning and self-experience which always goes together and cannot be separated. So the way you and your assistants train your students with that approach helps them to develop competence in being able to sense the difference between coherence and incoherence on a very subtle level, which is crucial to understand, to guide and to facilitate movements towards healing. This perception and awareness is key in all therapeutic work

and by integrating transparent communication more into the trainings of constellation work, I hope to reveal more of the essence of constellation work in general.

Thomas: I think that is very beautiful, because it seems that it ultimately boils down to the fact that as a therapist or a facilitator the clarity of your own sphere of consciousness is the limiting factor of any kind of interaction. As Hellinger put it, it is not so much about intellectual understanding, which is of course important in its sphere, but it is far more important that we have clarity within these multiple layers.

You said that one core principle for everybody who works with clients is the work that we do on ourselves, which is the key for increasing our awareness.

As I said at the beginning of this session following our recent talks together, I had the feeling that there would be a lot of common ground between us. Today has just underlined what I have already said. It has strengthened my intuition that there are many parallels between the two approaches and I think that this exchange has been very fruitful and I would be happy if we could continue our conversation another time.

Stephan: For me it has been a real pleasure, thank you Thomas.



*Coming from a background in Traditional Chinese Medicine, Homoeopathy and Osteopathy, **Stephan Hausner** applies Systemic Constellation Work to the field of chronic illness and health. For more than 20 years he has worked, taught and trained in 45 countries and is dedicated to exploring the profound healing potential of Systemic Constellation Work. In more recent years Stephan has been including Mindfulness Based Therapies, moving from solution toward transformation-orientation.*

Stephan is the author of: Even if it costs me my life: Systemic Constellation Work and Serious Illness, which is available in eleven languages.

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