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## **Wurzburg Panel Talk**

### **International Systemic Constellation Congress – 2003**

By Jane Peterson, PhD

*In April of 2003 I was asked to be on a ten member panel that spoke at the International Congress in Wurzburg, Germany. Each of the members of the panel spoke for a different country in which the Systemic Constellation work of Bert Hellinger has taken root. This is a reconstruction of the talk I gave while serving on that panel. Of course, this article represents only my own ideas and observations. I cannot speak for all those who do this work in such a large diverse country as the United States. --Jane Peterson, October 2003.*

Hunter Beaumont's question in his email to all panel members “What is unique about using the constellation method in the U.S.?” is a difficult question to answer. Among those born in the U.S. and raised in this culture, constellations have really taken off in the last five or six years or so. The work is still relatively new in the U.S.

The people now coming to our workshops are “early adopters,” so those of us who are facilitating spend much of our time explaining what Systemic Family Constellations are. For example, when I booked the room for Albrecht Mahr's workshop in Portland in 2002, the site manager wanted to know what kind of astrology he did! This also points up the fact that in the U.S. there are probably over 400 different methods of working on personal issues, from psychiatry to shamanism.

As those of you who have traveled and worked in the U.S. know, the dominant culture here is obsessed with speed. We create ever more new gizmos and ways of “saving time” from instant coffee makers to fast food. Most of us are captives of our day timers and palm pilots. Many of us work for big corporations and get only two weeks vacation per year, unlike the four plus weeks more typical for German companies for instance. Deciding how to spend that precious “free” time is a decision not made lightly for most folks. Running a four day workshop as is often done here in Germany is very difficult in the U.S., especially if you are not at a retreat or some other “vacation” setting. For example, I offer a monthly workshop in Portland, my home city. It's only one day and I still get calls from participants begging me to let them come for only a half a day because Suzie has a soccer game that afternoon or they can't find a sitter for the whole day.

Another important consideration as to how the constellation work is unfolding in the U.S. is the fact that the U.S. is a tossed salad of ethnic, cultural and regional groups and socio-economic classes. It is a mistake to think of the U.S. as being represented by Cola-cola,



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McDonalds and Nike. That is the commercial culture of the U.S. There is a rich, multi-layered cultural tapestry here woven with threads of cultures from all over the world into the loom of the First Nations peoples.

Thus far in the history of constellations in the U.S. the work has been picked up primarily by two groups: white, European descent, middle class folks who can afford to pay for workshops and personal growth seminars, and the First Nations peoples.

In answering Hunter's other question "How is the work applied in the U.S.?" you might get different answers to this question if you were to speak to members of these two groups. The concerns, stories and lived histories that drive these two groups are both unique and deeply entangled. A representative of the First Nations peoples should also be on this stage with me in order for this question to have a fair answer. I can only respond to this question as a white, middle class woman.

From my perspective, my sense is that constellation work is a great gift and blessing to the various peoples in the U.S. Constellations offer us a powerful way to address unique issues, many of which are close enough that they still seem to be too painful to face as a nation. Desegregation only began in earnest in the U.S. in the 1960s. We are still not that far away from the issue of slavery of the black people in the U.S. The number of young, black men in U.S. jails is itself a criminal situation. Especially if you know as many as 40% of the people who confess to crimes are innocent. There are documented cases of "profiling" of non-whites by police departments in the U.S. Still painful is the fate of many Vietnam war veterans. Some 60% of vets who saw active combat have been or are incarcerated. Go back in time and you encounter the wrongful internment of Japanese citizens in WWII. Further back and you find the deep scar of the genocide of the First Nations people. Colonization of the new world by the old came at a great price for many. Our nation was founded on acts of violence. There is much to heal in our personal histories and we must realize that different peoples here have different lived histories, whether it is a newly immigrated Russian immigrant, a blue-blooded great-great grand-Daughter of the Revolution (an elite group that can trace ancestry back to the first European settlers in the U.S.), a black woman who's ancestry is lost in the blur of slavery or a First Nations man who heard only the last tattered fragments of his native tongue from a great grand parent.

How constellations will unfold in the U.S. is still an open question. We don't know yet what place this way of working will find here. A familiarity with histories and events beyond our own borders is important for U.S. facilitators since so much of "American" history is tied up with other nations. Right now many of the constituencies of the peoples in the U.S.



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are not represented in the constellation work being done here. How will the work look here when the black community picks it up? Or the Muslim community, or Hispanic or Asian? Or when the work is done with those who have lived in poverty for generations? There is research in the U.S. that indicates families in generational poverty may organize around a matriarchal structure. How will the Orders of Love hold in that case? The questions that Hunter posed may not have answers in the U.S. for 10 to 15 years.

I am deeply grateful to Bert to have his work available in the U.S. For the first time, I am hopeful that we can begin to heal old, deep wounds in the soul of our entwined and interdependent lives. We ask for your encouragement and support as we pick up the work and weave it, in our own uniquely “American” way, into the complex tapestry of our lives.

Thank you.

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