

Essays on Mediation

Dealing with Disputes in the 21st Century

Edited by
Ian Macduff



Wolters Kluwer

Published by:

Kluwer Law International B.V.
PO Box 316
2400 AH Alphen aan den Rijn
The Netherlands
Website: www.wklawbusiness.com

Sold and distributed in North, Central and South America by:

Wolters Kluwer Legal & Regulatory U.S.
7201 McKinney Circle
Frederick, MD 21704
United States of America
Email: customer.service@wolterskluwer.com

Sold and distributed in all other countries by:

Turpin Distribution Services Ltd
Stratton Business Park
Pegasus Drive, Biggleswade
Bedfordshire SG18 8TQ
United Kingdom
Email: kluwerlaw@turpin-distribution.com

Printed on acid-free paper.

ISBN 978-90-411-8366-8

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Printed in the United Kingdom.

To
Jacob Bercovitch
(1946-2011)

Professor Jacob Bercovitch, University of Canterbury, New Zealand was a pioneer in statistical approaches to international mediation, creating the first database entirely devoted to such efforts. He was a prolific writer, influential thinker and editor publishing sixteen books and 100 scientific articles and book chapters in the field of international relations, mediation and negotiations.

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Summary of Contents

Editors	vii
Contributors	ix
Acknowledgement	xxix
Essays on Mediation: Introduction <i>Ian Macduff</i>	1
CHAPTER 1 'Mediation: Elephant or Heffalump?' <i>Kevin Avruch</i>	5
CHAPTER 2 Remembrance of Pleasures Past: Reflections of a Practitioner <i>Howard Gadlin</i>	13
CHAPTER 3 The Future of Mediation Worldwide: Legal and Cultural Variations in the Uptake of or Resistance to Mediation <i>Carrie Menkel-Meadow</i>	29
CHAPTER 4 Two Failed Mediations and the Lessons Learnt from Them <i>Michael Hwang</i>	47
CHAPTER 5 Challenging the Status Quo <i>John Sturrock QC</i>	53

Summary of Contents

CHAPTER 6		
Elder Mediation: Context, Opportunities and Challenges		
<i>Dale Bagshaw</i>		63
CHAPTER 7		
Munich, Majors and Mediation		
<i>Peter Wallensteen</i>		81
CHAPTER 8		
Collaborative Dispute Resolution Assistance for Refugees, Internally Displaced Persons and Host Communities		
<i>Christopher Moore</i>		89
CHAPTER 9		
The Roles of Culture: Muslim Country Leaders, NGOs, and European Small-Country Leaders as International Mediators in Southeast Asia		
<i>Bruce E. Barnes</i>		125
CHAPTER 10		
Rocks on the Road: Inside the Pandora's Box of Culture		
<i>Peter S. Adler</i>		137
CHAPTER 11		
Social Mediation Forms in France		
<i>J.-P. Bonafé-Schmitt</i>		153
CHAPTER 12		
Embedding Mediation and Dispute Resolution into Statutory Civil Law: The Example of Germany		
<i>Thomas Trenczek & Serge Loode</i>		177
CHAPTER 13		
The HOW and the WHAT: Precise Conflict Resolution in Complex Processes through the Example of the Mediation, "Zukunft Landwehrkanal Berlin" (Future Landwehrkanal Berlin)		
<i>Beate Voskamp & Stefan Kessen</i>		193
CHAPTER 14		
Digital Conflict and Digital Justice		
<i>Ethan Katsh & Orna Rabinovich-Einy</i>		205
CHAPTER 15		
Leaving Disputants to Their Own Devices: The Vulnerable Potential of Mobile Access to Justice		
<i>Ian Macduff</i>		219

CHAPTER 16

The Alchemy of Mediation: Aesthetic Wisdom for a Fragmented Age

Nadja Alexander & Michelle LeBaron

249

Index

271

Table of Contents

Editors	vii
Contributors	ix
Acknowledgement	xxix
Essays on Mediation: Introduction <i>Ian Macduff</i>	1
CHAPTER 1	
‘Mediation: Elephant or Heffalump?’ <i>Kevin Avruch</i>	5
Bibliography	11
CHAPTER 2	
Remembrance of Pleasures Past: Reflections of a Practitioner <i>Howard Gadlin</i>	13
§2.01 Preface	13
§2.02 Doing Good Work	14
§2.03 Art and Tools of the Craft	14
§2.04 <i>Theory versus Practice</i>	15
§2.05 Understanding Effectiveness	16
§2.06 The Workman	17
§2.07 Improvisation	20
§2.08 The Repertoire	22
§2.09 Connections and Grooves	23
§2.10 The Reflective Observer	24
Bibliography	27

Table of Contents

CHAPTER 3

The Future of Mediation Worldwide: Legal and Cultural Variations in the Uptake of or Resistance to Mediation

<i>Carrie Menkel-Meadow</i>	29
§3.01 Legal Variations in the Use of Mediation	35
§3.02 Cultural Factors in the Use of Mediation	39
§3.03 Some Concluding Thoughts	45

CHAPTER 4

Two Failed Mediations and the Lessons Learnt from Them

<i>Michael Hwang</i>	47
§4.01 Case 1	47
§4.02 Case 2	49

CHAPTER 5

Challenging the Status Quo

<i>John Sturrock QC</i>	53
§5.01 Some Questions	54
§5.02 Choosing How We Respond	55
§5.03 Challenges for Mediators?	57
§5.04 Looking Ahead	59
§5.05 A Movement of Mediators?	61

CHAPTER 6

Elder Mediation: Context, Opportunities and Challenges

<i>Dale Bagshaw</i>	63
§6.01 Introduction and Background	63
§6.02 What Is Elder Mediation?	64
§6.03 Challenges for Elder Mediators	66
[A] Ageism	66
[B] Elder Abuse	66
[C] Gender and Power	68
[D] The Issue of Culture	69
§6.04 Guiding Principles and Ethical Issues in Mediation	70
[A] Impartiality	70
[B] Self-determination	70
[C] Where an Older Person has Diminished Capacity	71
[D] The Principle of Affirmation, Encouraging Feelings of Self-Worth	72
[E] The Role of Support Persons	72
[F] Confidentiality	72
[G] Best Interests and ‘Substituted Judgment’	73
[H] Mediator Competency	73
§6.05 Determining Whether Elder Mediation Is Appropriate	74

§6.06	Conclusions	75
	Bibliography	76
CHAPTER 7		
Munich, Majors and Mediation		
	<i>Peter Wallensteen</i>	81
§7.01	Challenges to Mediation	81
§7.02	Dealing with the Munich Syndrome	82
§7.03	Dealing with the Major Power	83
§7.04	A Final Note on Institution Building	85
	Bibliography	86
	Electronic Resources	87
CHAPTER 8		
Collaborative Dispute Resolution Assistance for Refugees, Internally Displaced Persons and Host Communities		
	<i>Christopher Moore</i>	89
§8.01	Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons: A Serious Human Cost of Wars	89
§8.02	The Current Refugee and IDP Crisis	90
§8.03	Causes of the Humanitarian Crisis and What Is to Be Done?	91
§8.04	Collaborative Dispute Resolution, Refugees and IDPs and Affected Communities	92
§8.05	Situations and Types of Conflicts Encountered by Refugees, IDPs, and Affected Communities	94
[A]	Emergency Situations	94
[B]	Transit	95
[C]	Brief or Extended “Temporary” Settlement During Protracted Crises	95
[D]	Post-conflict Returns	98
[E]	Permanent Resettlement	98
[F]	Compensation for Losses	99
§8.06	CDR Responses to Humanitarian Crises: Institutional Arrangements, Service Providers, and Procedures	100
[A]	Unilateral International Governmental Organization (IGOs) CDR Assistance and Coordination with National Governments	100
[1]	UN Habitat and the UNHCR in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)	100
[2]	United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Government of Timor Leste’s Ministry of Social Solidarity (MSS)	101
[3]	UNHCR, National Governments and NGOs and Dispute Resolution in Refugee Camps	102
[4]	UNHCR and the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran’s Dispute Settlement Committees	104

Table of Contents

[B]	National Governments	105
[1]	The Government of Timor Leste, Ministry of Justice, Land and Property Directorate	105
[2]	The Government of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka and World Bank’s North East Housing Reconstruction Program (NEHRP)	106
[C]	International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs)	108
[1]	The Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) in Afghanistan, Liberia, Lebanon and Jordan	108
[2]	Mercy Corps’ CDR Assistance in Iraq and Jordan	112
[D]	National NGOs and CBOs	113
[1]	Local Peace Committees in Liberia and the United Nations	113
[2]	<i>Commissions d’Accueil et Reinsertion</i> (CAR) and NRC in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)	114
§8.07	Issues in Providing CDR Assistance	116
[A]	Bargaining in the Shadow of the Law and Substantive and Procedural Justice: But Which Law?	116
[B]	Managing Power Differences between Disputants and Protection of Vulnerable Parties	118
[1]	Legal Status and Enforcement of Agreements	121
[2]	Sustainability—Temporary or Permanent Solutions and Promotion of Ongoing Peace	122
§8.08	The Future of CDR for Displaced Persons and Affected Communities	124
CHAPTER 9		
The Roles of Culture: Muslim Country Leaders, NGOs, and European Small-Country Leaders as International Mediators in Southeast Asia		
	<i>Bruce E. Barnes</i>	125
§9.01	Culture and Muslim Country Leaders, NGOs as International Mediators in Southeast Asia	125
§9.02	The Status of Mindanao Muslims: Population Comparisons and Trends	126
§9.03	The MNLF and MILF: Developments in Mindanao Conflict Resolution, Peace Processes and the Role of Multiparty Mediation	127
§9.04	International Mediation in Aceh, Indonesia	128
§9.05	Southern Mindanao: Mediating Fault Lines?	128
§9.06	Mediator Selection and Cultural Considerations in the Mindanao Conflicts	129
§9.07	Sabah, Malaysia: Connections to the Bangsamoro Conflict	131
§9.08	Mediation Style: Indonesia: Culture, Standing and Informal Diplomacy	132
§9.09	Malaysia’s Role Facilitating the GRP/MILF Peace Talks, Ancestral Domain	133

§9.10	Lessons for International Mediation in ASEAN and Other Global Fault Lines	135
	Bibliography	135
CHAPTER 10		
Rocks on the Road: Inside the Pandora’s Box of Culture		
	<i>Peter S. Adler</i>	137
§10.01		137
§10.02		139
§10.03		141
§10.04		144
§10.05		147
§10.06		149
§10.07		150
CHAPTER 11		
Social Mediation Forms in France		
	<i>J.-P. Bonafé-Schmitt</i>	153
§11.01	Social Mediation: Conceptual Fuzziness	154
	[A] The Original Conceptual Fuzziness	154
	[B] Maintaining Conceptual Fuzziness	156
§11.02	Social Mediation Related to Dispute Resolution	158
	[A] Para-Judicial and Municipal Neighborhood Mediations: A Rationale of Social Integration	158
	[B] Neighborhood or Community Mediation: A Rationale of Reappropriation	161
§11.03	Social Mediation Related to Communication	163
	[A] The Mediation Activities of “Femmes-Relais” (Relay Women): A Rationale of Intercultural Communication	163
	[B] “PIMMS” Mediation Activities: A Rationale of Instrumental Communication	167
§11.04	Social Mediation Related to a Security Rationale	169
	[A] Mediation Activities in the Public Transportation Sector: The Security Rationale	169
	[B] Mediation Activities in Public Areas: A Rationale of Social Pacification	171
§11.05	Conclusion	174
CHAPTER 12		
Embedding Mediation and Dispute Resolution into Statutory Civil Law: The Example of Germany		
	<i>Thomas Trenczek & Serge Lode</i>	177
§12.01	Introduction	177
§12.02	The Constitutional and Legal Context: The German Justice System	178
§12.03	The Development of Mediation in the German Context	180

Table of Contents

§12.04	Definitions and Requirements in Mediation According to the <i>German Mediation Act 2012</i>	182
§12.05	Mediation in Practice in Germany	186
	[A] Access to Mediation Services in Germany	186
	[B] Areas of Mediation Practice	187
	[1] Commercial Mediation	188
	[2] Family Mediation	188
	[3] Victim-Offender Mediation	189
	[4] Community Mediation	189
	[C] Process Considerations	190
	[D] Mediator Qualification and Accreditation	191
§12.06	Conclusion	191
CHAPTER 13		
The HOW and the WHAT: Precise Conflict Resolution in Complex Processes through the Example of the Mediation, “Zukunft Landwehrkanal Berlin” (Future Landwehrkanal Berlin)		
<i>Beate Voskamp & Stefan Kessen</i>		
§13.01	Introduction	193
§13.02	Mediation “Zukunft Landwehrkanal Berlin”: The Beginning	194
§13.03	Public Event and Preparation Phase	195
§13.04	The HOW before the WHAT	196
§13.05	Dynamic Multi-level Design	197
§13.06	Precise Clarification of Interests	198
§13.07	Specific Results and Achievements	201
§13.08	Concluding Observations	202
CHAPTER 14		
Digital Conflict and Digital Justice		
<i>Ethan Katsh & Orna Rabinovich-Einy</i>		
§14.01	Introduction	205
§14.02	More Disputes: ‘Conflict as a Growth Industry’	207
§14.03	More Resolution: Resolving Disputes through Technology	209
§14.04	More Prevention: Data-Driven Dispute Prevention	213
CHAPTER 15		
Leaving Disputants to Their Own Devices: The Vulnerable Potential of Mobile Access to Justice		
<i>Ian Macduff</i>		
§15.01	Context and Provocation	219
§15.02	Foundations	223
§15.03	Current Developments Revisited	226
§15.04	Digital Intermediaries in Crisis and Conflict Setting	233
§15.05	Implications	237

§15.06	Impact	238
§15.07	Conclusion	245
CHAPTER 16		
The Alchemy of Mediation: Aesthetic Wisdom for a Fragmented Age		
<i>Nadja Alexander & Michelle LeBaron</i>		249
§16.01	Introduction	249
§16.02	Preparing the Ground for Mediation: The Element of Earth and the Alchemic Process of <i>Coagulatio</i>	250
	[A] <i>Coagulatio</i> in Action: Science and Aesthetics	251
	[B] <i>Coagulatio</i> in Mediation Practice	253
§16.03	Flow in Mediation: The Element of Water and the Alchemic Process of <i>Solutio</i>	254
	[A] <i>Solutio</i> in Action: Science and Embodied Aesthetics	255
	[B] <i>Solutio</i> in Mediation Practice	257
§16.04	Exploring the Space of Identity in Mediation: The Element of Air and the Process of <i>sublimatio</i>	259
	[A] <i>Sublimatio</i> in Action: Theory and Practice	259
	[B] <i>Sublimatio</i> in Mediation Practice	261
§16.05	Dynamics and Mobilization in Mediation: The Element of Fire and the Process of <i>Calcinatio</i>	262
	[A] <i>Calcinatio</i> in Action: Contagion	263
	[B] <i>Calcinatio</i> in Action: Embodied Resilience	264
	[C] <i>Calcinatio</i> in Mediation Practice	265
§16.06	Alchemy in Conflict Resolution Practice: Systemic Constellations at Work	266
§16.07	Conclusion	269
	Index	271

CHAPTER 16

The Alchemy of Mediation: Aesthetic Wisdom for a Fragmented Age

Nadja Alexander & Michelle LeBaron

§16.01 INTRODUCTION

We live in a fragmented age of mediation. Diverse disciplines make a claim to mediation; they include communication, psychology, human resources, international relations, law, restorative justice, gender studies, peace and conflict studies, cultural studies, counseling, neuroscience and others. As with all disciplines, they have their own theories, systems, literature, models, jargon, processes and practices and many mediation scholars remain within their own academic silos, resulting in a fragmentation of the field.

While there is a plethora of propagated advice on techniques and models that seek to explain the transformative potential of mediation; the field lacks a common core. There is no shared language for mediation, no “obvious” starting point, no accepted map of the mediation territory. Yet as we move towards an epistemology of mediation, we need to integrate aspects of these various disciplines and apply them to our areas of concern, adapt and develop them and make them our own. We need to find a shared door through which we can enter the world(s) of mediation. Beyond this door we might imagine a series of interconnected paths leading us to encounters with diverse languages, maps and cultures of mediation.

In this chapter, we turn to the notion of alchemy with its rich history and varied applications, as an organizing concept for mediation – a possible shared door – and one which offers fresh insights into the transformative territory of mediation.

Alchemy, historically concerned with changing states and physical properties, including turning one substance into another, is essentially concerned with transformation. Alchemy has a long history, appearing in the myths and legends of ancient China and texts from Egypt dating back to 1900 BCE (Alchemy Lab). Western ideas of

alchemy, as a process that blends the four basic elements of earth, water, air and fire in different ways to create change and transformation, trace their origins to the Egyptian god, Hermes Trismegistus, with whom the ancient Emerald Tablet is associated.¹ It also has roots in ancient Greek philosophy² and Buddhist and Hindu teachings in India.³ Centuries later, the Swiss psychologist Carl Jung associated alchemy with the process of individuation, integrating inner and outer aspects of our beings.⁴ He imagined the four elements of earth, water, air and fire as symbolically associated with differentiation and transformation.⁵

Drawing on Jung's and others' work, this chapter explores how integrating understandings of alchemy into mediation via aesthetic and sensory engagement can change our embodied experiences of processes, of one another and of mediated outcomes themselves. We use the four elements – earth, water, air and fire – and their corresponding alchemical processes of *coagulatio*, *solutio*, *sublimatio* and *calcinatio* to open a path towards a deeper, more holistic and aesthetically-grounded understanding of mediation. Just as humans individuate in the process of maturing in ways that are still not well understood, people in conflict have the capacity to mature during the course of a mediation. An understanding of how alchemical processes help us think about the maturation process and its attendant mysteries in mediation is the subject of this chapter.

The four elements of earth, water, air and fire and their alchemical processes will each be described below, with discussions of how they might expand our awareness and thus our capacities for effective mediation. Though each will be described in isolation for clarity's sake, it is in their combination that the alchemical processes are most potent.

We begin, as mortals must, on the ground.

§16.02 PREPARING THE GROUND FOR MEDIATION: THE ELEMENT OF EARTH AND THE ALCHEMIC PROCESS OF *COAGULATIO*

How can we support disputing parties to prepare for mediation? Before coming to mediation, it is useful for parties to first “ground” themselves, clearing the mind of other tasks and being able to come into their physical centre. When an electrical current is grounded, it protects users from dangerous exposure if electrical insulation fails. Grounding gives the current a place to go, a place that absorbs its energy without damaging things around it. Humans ground using variable means including physical and imaginal practices that may produce some of the same protective effects. To be

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1. R. Conniff, “Alchemy May Not Have Been the Pseudoscience We All Thought It Was.”, *Smithsonian Magazine*, February 2014, <<http://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/alchemy-may-not-been-pseudoscience-we-thought-it-was-180949430/?no-ist>> .
 2. P. Ball, *The Elements: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press 2004).
 3. P. Gurmet, “‘Sowa – Rigpa’: Himalayan art of healing”, *Indian Journal of Traditional Knowledge* 3 (2004): 212–218; G. Rimpoché, *How the Mind Works* (A. Warren eds., Jewel Heart Corp 2014).
 4. C. Jung, *Psychology and Alchemy*. (Collected Works of C.G. Jung Vol. 12, 2d ed. New Jersey: Princeton University Press 1980).
 5. *Ibid.*

grounded is to feel a connection with our core, to have a strong and rooted sense of ourselves. When we are in a grounded state, we are less susceptible to being upset by unpleasant emotions or unexpected tactics; we react with more equanimity.

By extension, as we ground, we may also feel a connection to the earth with its powerful properties of stability, creativity and coalescing. This leads us to the alchemical process of *coagulatio*, which relates to things taking on solid form, or coalescing. This is the condition at the beginning of mediation: people arrive with solid positions and clear ideas of what the optimal material outcome should be. When mediation works well, other elements come in to unsettle the solidity of earth. Put differently, parties in conflict have the opportunity to come into attunement with one another in a way that coagulates into a new form. This new ground becomes one from which the parties can proceed, one even more reliable because it is shared. In this way, *coagulatio* can happen many times in a single mediation as breakthroughs occur and parties gradually come to establish a way of moving forward that coheres. One way that *coagulatio* has been investigated scientifically is through the phenomena of resonance and attunement.

[A] *Coagulatio* in Action: Science and Aesthetics

Resonance is a physical phenomenon imaged by religious scholar Christopher Bache as “lateral bands of colored light stretching horizontally across a room” between people.⁶ Bache postulates that resonance is “always trying to happen” between people, giving examples of phase locking from chaos theory. “Phase locking,” he writes, “occurs in nature when individual oscillating systems shift from a state of collective chaos to integrated resonance.”⁷ For example, when individual cells from the heart of a chicken embryo are separated, they beat erratically. If a number of the cells are brought back together, they begin to beat coherently in what is called phase lock. In humans, this phenomenon is obvious in choir singing, but also happens in subtler ways such as the synchronization of women’s menstrual cycles when they live together.

The opposite has been demonstrated also. The U.S. military is well aware of the power of music and has used it frequently in recent engagements. Marco Accattatis explores relations between music and violence, commencing with the Homeric legend of the sirens, whose song killed anyone who heard it.⁸ He goes on to detail the use of round-the-clock hard rock and heavy metal music directed at the Papal refuge of General Manuel Noriega, Panama’s military dictator who had fallen out of favor with Washington. Several other examples of the use of loud music to irritate, disorient and intimidate range from its use in the Branch Dividian siege in Waco, Texas to interrogations of detainees in Guantanamo Bay. In these instances, music is pressed into the service of destroying resonance within, and fragmenting connection and

6. C.M. Bache. *Dark Night, Early Dawn: Steps to a Deep Ecology of Mind*, 178 (New York: SUNY Press 2000).

7. *Ibid.*

8. M. Accattatis, *Music, Violence, and Militarism: A Study on the Reflexivity of Culture*, 2 (New Jersey: Rutgers University 2014).

coherence, by preventing phase lock with others and disrupting connection with positive sensory anchors.

Turning our attention to mediation, we ask: when mediation is working well, do parties come into resonance approaching phase lock? What role does attuning have in fostering collaboration? When parties ground themselves before entering a mediation process, they literally embrace a bigger sensory world, one that widens their apertures and increases their perceptive and reflexive abilities and, in turn, their capacity to attune with one another. Doing so embeds a spirit of inquiry into mediation processes by importing vitality into the often-narrowed worlds in which mediations occur and lays the foundations for resonance and attunement. For example, imagine that prior to participating in mediation – perhaps as part of a pre-mediation meeting – mediators would invite parties to walk silently in a nearby woodland, to notice and later share an image from their walk that speaks to their aspirations for the process. By connecting to the earth and tapping into its resonance, parties are, by extension, able to *re-connect* with one another. As parties share, aesthetic pleasure associated with these images infuses the mediation process, heightening imagination and possibility rather than the more bounded rational thought that is usually accented. And so it was that the scholars who designed the Oslo mediation process to bring together Israeli and Palestinian negotiators in the 1990s chose a remote, rural Norwegian setting. They built in time for nature, such as walks in the woods, and time and space for contemplation surrounded by natural beauty. One powerful aspect of natural beauty is the resonance it evokes and the attunement between parties it enables.

In addition to the natural beauty of the earth, the arts can offer a vehicle for *coalgulation* in conflict resolution settings. In the context of peace-building, Wood advises negotiators with Russian counterparts to stop reading “jargon-filled scholarly analysis from those political science journals” and to turn to works by Russian literary giants, such as Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, and Solzhenitsyn.⁹ According to the author, literature is the way to understand Russians and their leader, Vladimir Putin, because these artists illuminate Russia’s worldview, nationalism, and endurance like nothing else can. Quoting four star U.S. Admiral Stavridis, the article asserts that:

[l]iterature is the true lens. If you want to understand the Russian mind, remember that no other culture esteems its writers more than Russia. Every Russian can – and frequently does – quote Pushkin, Tolstoy and Gogol; whereas you would be hard pressed to get a line of Whitman, Hemingway or Toni Morrison out of a typical American.

A powerful illustration of *coalguation* in action comes from South Africa, where, as a political prisoner, Nelson Mandela turned to the arts to incrementally build the foundations for, and nurture, a collaborative negotiation resonance with his jailers, the then-apartheid government. During his twenty-seven years in prison, Mandela learnt not only the language of his oppressors, he also familiarized himself with their poetry, their literature, their music and their rugby. He got to know the prison guards and – in

9. K. Wood, ‘The Arts and Peacebuilding: An Emerging Approach’, *United States Institute of Peace Insights Newsletter* (2015): 1.

some cases – their families. He learnt their stories. Negotiations ultimately led to his release from Robben Island prison and facilitated his rise to power as president of South Africa in 1994. Through genuine empathy and engagement, Mandela was famously able to negotiate a new inclusive political climate for his country and avoid the bloody civil war that so many had assumed would be inevitable. Using alchemical language, Mandela invoked *coagulatio* that emerged in the form of newly grounded relations arising from his genius for empathetic attunement.

Finally, *coagulatio* as enacted through resonance and attunement invokes the African notion of *Ubuntu* – a concept referring to the essence and interconnectedness of being human. *Ubuntu* can look very different in diverse cultural contexts, but always involves engaging the senses.¹⁰ The human senses – visual, kinesthetic, auditory, gustatory, olfactory – open up aesthetic and artful opportunities for disputing parties to reconnect on a human level. In other words, negotiating from an awareness of *Ubuntu* is a way to coagulate connection.¹¹

[B] *Coagulatio* in Mediation Practice

Drawing upon the element of earth and the alchemical process of *coagulatio*, mediators can create an environment to support parties to “ground” themselves as they prepare to engage in the mediation process. Here are four illustrations:

- (1) Invite nature into the mediation. Choose a natural setting such as a park or rural setting. Integrate time for engaging with nature: something as simple as a walk after lunch can help parties and mediators to reconnect to their centers. It can also sow the seeds of transformation from an “us and them” to a collective “us” as parties share the experience of enjoying the gifts of nature.
- (2) Invite aesthetics into the mediation. Consider introducing a variety of art forms into the mediation space – music, painting, dance, song and others – to strengthen the common ground the parties share, and to build foundations for identifying, understanding, and beginning to bridge the inevitable gaps in understanding and perception. Equally, doing so can contribute to new language and new ways of talking about issues, paving the way for creative inspiration to infuse talks. This could take place through informal conversations, a site visit to a festival, performance or exhibition of some kind, or a pre-mediation workshop.
- (3) Watch for moments when things “gel” and find ways to signal or mark these so that collective experiences of *coagulatio* build. For example, as dialogue and negotiation deepen, and parties listen for shared meaning rather than

10. A. Sachs, Keynote Address Given at the National Mediation Conference (Adelaide, Australia, 2010).

11. P. Bernard, ‘Muntu meets Mencius: Can Ancient Principles Guide Modern Negotiations on the Export of Africa’s Natural Resources to China?’, in *Educating Negotiators for a Connected World*, eds. C. Honeyman, J. Coben & A. W-M Lee (St. Paul: DRI Press 2013).

focusing on advocating their preferred outcome, their experience of time may change; capturing these moments helps to cultivate *coagulatio*.

- (4) Emphasize interdependence as a reliable way to generate solid and sustainable relational and substantive outcomes for all parties.

Not only can these approaches help parties connect across gaps, they can bring everyone involved to deeper mutual presence with one other. The importance of mutuality and reciprocity across aesthetic experience and mediation leads us to the next element: water. Water connotes flow, fluidity and clarity, all of which involve reciprocity.

§16.03 FLOW IN MEDIATION: THE ELEMENT OF WATER AND THE ALCHEMIC PROCESS OF *SOLUTIO*

The ability of water to appear in different forms, namely gas, solid or liquid forms, resembles the variety of the human condition in conflict. Human responses to conflict may appear as:

- solid, fixed, entrenched positions which compete against one another (solidified water, ice);
- invisible ways of avoiding conflict or accommodating someone else's entrenched position (water as steam or gas);
- fluid responses characterized by flow, exploration, connection, movement (liquid water).

Water is associated with the alchemical operation of *solutio*, turning a solid into a liquid. In many mediation processes, this operation arises. Consider two disputing parties whose positions are very far apart. They enter mediation feeling "solid" and "attached" to their way of framing the issues and their preferred outcomes. The presence and interventions of a mediator can help to generate a flow between parties as they encounter a perspective larger than their own – and find a way to dissolve into it. When it works, parties find themselves holding a larger world, putting things on a bigger grid, and trying in partnership to find a way into a positive momentum or flow. Along the way, resentments and enmities may dissolve, another aspect of *solutio*.

Of course, this operation of *solutio* does not happen in every mediation; sometimes parties fail to come to an agreement and leave with their "ground of being" unaltered. But mediation is essentially about change, about finding a meeting place that dissolves some amenable aspects of our positions while still leaving us a reliable place to stand. It is also about affective change, yielding a fluidity of being that allows all parties more space and flexibility going forward, especially when there are ongoing family, business or community relations. Mediators can help parties see that all things are in flux, and that the opportunity to come to agreements and closure is to participate in that flux rather than merely standing on the edge of the flow. The words of a man who experienced *solutio* in a marital mediation are illustrative: "I am at the center of a great city watching a vast stream of humanity pass by – individuals of every type and

description. It's like the flow of a great river. I am fascinated." This man's experience of touching into a bigger grid in a mediation setting is classic *solutio*.

[A] *Solutio in Action: Science and Embodied Aesthetics*

In the previous section, we saw how nature and aesthetics can invoke *coagulatio*. In relation to the mobilization of *solutio*, we highlight the compelling role of embodied aesthetics – the aesthetic experience as embodied interaction and integration.

In mediation, movement is fundamental. Without it, parties are hard-pressed to reach agreements. As water flows around whatever is in its path, so too do parties need engage with conflict by moving in and around it. When water flows, it takes the shape of whatever container it is in, yet does not lose its coherence. Similarly, parties have the capacity to move from their established positions while continuing to send a coherent message about what is important to them, their priorities and needs. Movement-based experiences can therefore be useful in assisting mediators to apprehend and incorporate flexibility, flow and clarity into their approaches. They can help parties literally learn, in embodied ways, how to move across continua or paradoxes. Finally, they provide powerful anchors for mutuality and reciprocity, both of which are central to collaboration.

Aikido is a movement form helpful to mediators and the parties they support. Aikido is increasingly used to assist learners to physically experience the differences between yielding and movement, and the counter-productive effect of resisting given its likelihood of eliciting a similar response in a counterpart.¹² Practitioners physically learn to cultivate and inhabit “flow”. Wendy Palmer, a well-known American aikido master, writes about the flow state as experienced via movement this way:

Most of us have experienced the phenomena often called the “zone” or the “flow state”. This happens when we have the experience of effort as we do an activity, then beginning to tire and backing off a bit, and suddenly the activity becomes easy, effortless. Often people will describe this as, “something was coming through me/us”. This phrase, “something was coming through me/us”, points to the idea that the energy or inspiration came from outside our body – it came from the space or environment around us. This idea presupposes that space is not empty and our bodies are not solid. From a scientific point of view, our bodies consist of trillions of atoms. Atoms are primarily space with very small particles within that space; from this we deduce that we are not as solid as we sometimes feel. Indeed, we might say that the feeling of being solid is more of a belief than a fact.¹³

Indeed, given that our bodies are primarily water, it makes sense that effectiveness in mediation is really about learning to find flow: *solutio*.

12. J. Ringer, *Unlikely Teachers. Finding the Hidden Gifts in Daily Conflict* (Portsmouth, NH: OnePoint Press 2006).; W. Palmer, ‘Search Outside Yourself.’ <<http://www.embodimentinternational.com/author/wendy/>> .

13. W. Palmer, ‘Search Outside Yourself.’ <<http://www.embodimentinternational.com/author/wendy/>> .

Scientific discoveries bolster the case for movement as a way of teaching conflict resolution as they highlight the interconnection between physical and verbal expression. Both activities are located in Broca's area of the brain, where speech neural pathways overlay sensorimotor circuitry; apparently, linguistic forms of expression arose later in human brain evolution and are intricately interwoven with physical experience.¹⁴ These findings point to movement and gesture as early pre-verbal forms of expression, cognition and communication. And so we ask whether, "[w]hen we fell out of animal presence...dance [was] our first language?"¹⁵ In evolutionary terms, we have vastly more experience with movement than with words, yet academic study has traditionally focused on the part of the brain with which life on Earth has had least experience; namely, the rational brain (or neocortex). This focus has led our attention away from our bodies, and has been cemented in place by Cartesian dualism, which privileges cognitive ways of knowing over physical wisdom.

Given millions of years communicating kinesthetically, it is not surprising that humans read body language better than verbal language. It is easier for others to lie to us with words than with their bodies because we intuitively and accurately read body language, detecting authenticity or a lack of it in our negotiation counterpart. We know this on a kinesthetic level, often below conscious awareness, when we experience intuition or the weird feeling in our stomach that something is not quite right, although we cannot think of a logical reason not to believe what they say.

Similarly, it must come as no surprise that babies communicate with body language long before they acquire the capacity for words. How does an infant summon the capacity to shrug her shoulders to communicate "I don't know" (or "I want you to think that I don't know") or to hide something from you by putting it behind her back and distracting you with cute smiles and innocent blinks of the eye? These highly complex messages are physically practiced, refined and mirrored even before birth. What experience and wisdom must then repose in our collective corporeal selves! For movement is not the wisdom of one person but the pooled kinesthetic know-how and know-why of our genetic evolution. Here we see echoes of Jung's insight that individuation (and alchemical processes) are never only individual; they are always collective.

Another aspect of the operation of *solutio* relates to our capacity for creativity. The ability to create space allowing for movement and flow is an essential aspect of creativity and problem-solving. We now know that our brain is not a fixed piece of hardware but rather a malleable, adaptive living organ that has the ability to transform its own function and structure. Research on neuroplasticity demonstrates how our beliefs can shift our biology and change our brain anatomy.¹⁶ At the heart of neuroplasticity is the principle that neurons that fire together wire together, while neurons that wire apart, stay apart.¹⁷ This means that we create patterns and develop

14. E. Beausoleil & M. LeBaron, 'What Moves Us: Dance and Neuroscience Implications for Conflict Approaches', *Conflict Resolution Quarterly* 31 (2013): 133-158.

15. J. O'Donoghue, *Divine Beauty* (Great Britain: Bantam Press 2003).

16. B. Lipton, *The Biology of Belief* (United Kingdom: Hay House 2008).

17. E. Beausoleil & M. LeBaron, 'What Moves Us: Dance and Neuroscience Implications for Conflict Approaches', *Conflict Resolution Quarterly* 31 (2013): 133-158.

habits as we repeat thoughts and behaviors. Over time, these become comfortable superhighways that we drive along without conscious thought. We turn to autopilot as we traverse the well-travelled terrain of neurons that have fired together countless times. These patterns are not easy to shift: in conflict resolution processes, such habits of thought lead us down the slippery slope of positional posturing towards blockages and impasse. Yet it is possible to bring movement into the brain. Here, the alchemic process of *solutio* is at work. Through conscious practice, we can discover spaces that have fallen victim to our blind spots and link them into our active neuro-grid of highways, major roads and T-junctions. By seeking out opportunities to create different neural routes – as simple as taking a different way to work every other day – we can begin to break limiting patterns and create space for creativity to enter and thrive. Then, we notice that T-junctions turn into intersections, and intersections into roundabouts, as previously unnoticed opportunities appear in front of us. Cul-de-sacs open up into new districts as we enter into a state of biological flow with mind and body connected, operating in concert.

[B] *Solutio* in Mediation Practice

So how can we access this kind of knowing and put it to work for us in mediation? Here we offer suggestions in relation to:

- (1) developing reflexive practice; and
- (2) addressing impasse in mediation.

Reflexive practice requires an awareness of the fluid nature of one's experiences and the ways that meaning evolves through interaction with others and in the mediation context. As mediators, we can enhance our own and parties' capacities for flow and reflexive practice by asking: How am I attuned to my physical sensations and spatial relations (physiological dimension of awareness) within my own body (proprioception)? How attuned am I to the quality of physical presence of my counterpart in relation to me? We can increase our awareness of context, by noticing what the atmosphere is like when the mediation flows. How fluid are the roles and relationships (including power relations) among the parties and others within the larger network of relations and social contexts?

An awareness of our bodies as spacious and fluid helps us imagine and then experience a state of flow. Recall a point in a past mediation when things began to move with positive momentum. Effort was reduced, and things fell into place with relative ease. Now reflect on the precursors of that flow state. What helped it come about? What aesthetic textures accompanied it? Did it feel smooth, soft, elastic or fluid? What experiences can you imagine that would help you touch into and then incorporate a route into a flow state so that you can access it more easily? The above questions are designed to take your attention into your body, where memories and feelings are experienced as physical sensations. Often, these physical sensations are just below conscious awareness; they only grab our attention when they turn into pain or

irritation. But tuning into them is a very helpful thing to do in the midst of mediation; they give us important clues about our state, our comfort level with the way things are proceeding, and what we need to feel safe and engaged going forward. When wanting to help parties enhance their mindfulness and the ability to access a state of flow, subtle interventions such as moving to a different space e.g., place to have lunch, a park to walk, a coffee shop for private sessions can create a shift in surroundings that will support a dialogue centered on the above questions.

The operation of *solutio* is also germane to addressing impasse in mediation. Here referencing multi-sensory aesthetic experiences may be helpful. Once, when working with members of a group who needed to renegotiate their ways of working with each other following a reorganization, one of the authors invited everyone to draw their experience of their present relations. Pictures ranged from a sinking ship to a collapsing building to a placid lake with monsters beneath the surface, viscerally representing the intensity of upheaval shared by group members. Speaking from the pictures, participants framed their concerns aesthetically, inhabiting the gap between their frustration and their images of how to move forward. While concrete, the sensory images also introduced fluidity, as all of them depicted movement and many of them included water. These opened conversations about how to craft new systems and reclaim an experience of flow in the midst of unfamiliar configurations.

Later, while addressing leadership questions in the same organization, the participants were invited to move around the room and to find a physical, aesthetic way of representing their experiences. From a table full of various media and assorted materials, they chose multi-colored yarn which they wound around their leader to represent their experience of him being unavailable, immobilized by the demands of his new role. Seated in their midst with yarn spun all around him, he was viscerally able to articulate his experience of trying to negotiate new sets of relations and job requirements while feeling tied down and held back by conflicting expectations and the challenge of creating a new, hybrid culture out of two distinct group norms and patterns. Everyone understood that the leader's main need was mobility, and they were then able to problem-solve ways that his maneuverability could be enhanced and made more available and fluid. The operation of *solutio* was at work here as those involved found new fluidity, beginning to relate to the problem as something amenable to action.

Movement is an excellent way to shift uneasy dynamics when things feel stuck. When, as mediators, we feel ourselves blocked and not knowing how to make the next move, we can use movement to release us from mental habits. For example, walking through breathtaking nature can resonate with us at emotional and unconscious levels, thereby accessing and shifting the neural processes of firing and wiring, referred to previously. Dance has been explained as highly complex, synchronized body work facilitating social bonding.¹⁸ Going dancing one evening in the midst of a mediation can transport us to surprising spaces that help transform perspectives and attitudes, surfacing insights and options not noticeable in the midst of conventional mediations.¹⁹

18. *Ibid.*

19. *Ibid.*

To shift the parties in a mediation from a stuck place to flow, shift modes of operating. If analyzing, check what is being sensed. If sitting still, take a walk. If stuck on one issue, try another. If trying hard to see, listen. If locked in the business mode of the office, move way from a “business as usual” location. If overwhelmed by talking, take time for silence, breaks and meditative time. If stuck on the horns of a dilemma, focus on a different part of the beast. If taking issues too seriously, infuse sessions with an appropriate amount of playfulness. And, for those of us who still listen to LPs, we know that when the needle gets stuck, we need to move it either back or forward to the beginning of the track or to another song. When we do this, the air is again filled with music. This brings us to the third element: air.

§16.04 EXPLORING THE SPACE OF IDENTITY IN MEDIATION: THE ELEMENT OF AIR AND THE PROCESS OF *SUBLIMATIO*

We explored *coagulatio* and *solutio* in our previous sections, noting how it helps us to (a) ground ourselves and enlarge the grid of our interactions, (b) feel alive and increase our capacity to connect with others, and (c) enter a state of flow. With the alchemical process of *sublimatio*, we embrace the elevated quality of air. Air is related to being able to see ourselves as if from above, and from the perspectives of others. In his book, *Getting Past No*, William Ury famously wrote about the importance of “going to the balcony” during difficult negotiations.²⁰ Going to the balcony allows you to rise up above the problem; it breaths fresh air into the staleness of a stuck situation; it potentially brings in new insights and allows you to shift perspectives. From the balcony you can take a moment to breathe deeply, calm yourself and assess the conflict from a bird’s eye perspective. You can think constructively for both sides and look for a mutually satisfactory way to resolve the problem.

Air is invisible. The process of *sublimatio* reminds us that many invisible factors can influence the life of a conflict such as aspects ourselves that are contributing to the problem. We turn now to examine the internal aspects of our identities, which are frequently invisible both to us and others in a conflict resolution setting.

[A] *Sublimatio* in Action: Theory and Practice

German communication psychologist Friedemann Schulz von Thun refers to the multiple identity characteristics within us as members of our “inner team”.²¹ He explains that, as in any collaborative group, the members of each person’s individual inner team represent different views, perspectives, interests, characteristics and values. For example, I may have a strong value for loyalty, but this value can come into conflict with self or ethical interest. Do I break confidentiality after a colleague in my law firm who is a valued member of a negotiating team confides in me about her drug

20. W. Ury, *Getting Past No* (Bantam 1991).

21. B. Pörsken & F. Schultz von Thun, *Kommunikation als Lebenskunst: Philosophie und Praxis des Miteinander-Redens*, 92 (Heidelberg: Carl-Auer Verlag 2014).

addiction? If I do not, our clients, our firm and others may suffer. Yet, doing so requires me to violate my value of loyalty, as well as, perhaps, a specific promise. Thus, negotiating amongst members of the inner team is a primary act, a precondition to effective negotiation with another. It is always related to *sublimatio* because others do not see this inner negotiation taking place, Mary Catherine Richards puts it this way:

[It is important to get to know] one's inner family: for example, the fearful child, the scornful brother, the sorceress, the fanatical seeker, the possessive parent, who stand in the shadow and create difficulties.²²

As members of our inner family or team interact with one another, and also with team members of other inner teams, encountering innumerable complex and emergent contextual factors, challenges necessarily arise. Richards advises that we learn to listen to all of these voices as far as we are aware and able, so that we find ourselves “peaceably at war, neither victorious nor defeated.”²³ For it is in recognizing the insights of these different voices, in ourselves and others, that we are able to see more of a full spectrum, and what was hitherto invisible becomes visible. We begin to be able to look with more acuity and to see patterns more clearly, products of the process of *sublimatio*. One way of imaging effective mediation, then, is as a state of internal attunement amongst members of the “inner team” of each mediation participant. Attunement opens the possibility of infusing our identity, and, as a result, our capacity for engaging with conflict, with greater openness, tolerance and flexibility.

A related concept to the inner team or family is intersectionality, which “acknowledges an individual's multiple social identities, thus reaching for a more complete portrayal of the whole [embodied] being.”²⁴ Intersectionality looks beyond the “additive” nature of multiple identity characteristics and instead focuses on the ways that different aspects of identity simultaneously and repeatedly encounter one another.²⁵ Intersectionality explodes the illusion of separation – we cannot separate mind, body and soul, nor can we separate ourselves from one another. As human beings, we are designed to dance, to interact, with one another as whole porous beings – taking and giving, pulling and pushing, always influencing, always moving through air.

Daniel Goleman uses the term social intelligence to highlight the communicative nature of our senses – visual, auditory, kinesthetic, olfactory and gustatory – all of which offer pathways to who we are at this moment and who we are becoming in the

22. M.C. Richards, ‘Separating and Connecting: The Vessel and the Fire’, in *Fabric of the Future: Women Visionaries Illuminate the Pathways to Tomorrow*, ed. M. J. Ryan (Berkeley, CA: Conari Press, 1998), 232.

23. *Ibid.*, 233.

24. C.L. Wijeyesinghe & S. Jones, ‘Intersectionality, Identity, and Systems of Power and Inequality’, in *Intersectionality & Higher Education: Theory, Research and Praxis*, eds. D. Mitchell, C.Y. Simmons & L.A. Greyerbiehl (New York: Peter Lang Publishing 2014), 9-19.

25. D. Goodman, ‘The Tapestry Model: Exploring Social Identities, Privilege and Oppression from an Intersectional Perspective’, in *Intersectionality & Higher Education: Theory, Research and Praxis*, eds. D. Mitchell, C.Y. Simmons & L.A. Greyerbiehl (New York: Peter Lang Publishing 2014), 99-108; N. Alexander, J. Howieson & K. Fox, *Negotiation: Strategy, Style, Skill* (Sydney: Lexis Nexis 2015).

next. In other words, we are continually noticing and adapting our behavior in relation to those around us.²⁶ In part because of intersectionality, we are ineffective at predicting behavior. It is virtually impossible to know how the complex inner and outer senses will interrelate in any one person at any one time. And, despite our beliefs to the contrary, we are not consistent from moment to moment or setting to setting. Robert J. Lifton and others have criticized the notion of a stable personality in which our senses always interact in predictable ways, arguing that we are always changing and adapting within, with others and with our environments, in a condition he calls protean.²⁷ The process of *sublimatio* is to recognize that identity moves. It darts and ducks. It slides and shifts, eliding in the thin air of our awareness. Our identity calibrates and calculates with every moment of every encounter.

When different aspects of our identity clash, these contradictions can generate an inner impasse. This state of stasis, with associated emotional and embodied tensions, can block our ability to mediate effectively and impartially and parties' ability to negotiate effectively. When it is particularly intense, neuroscientists label such a blockage "emotional hijacking", in which the rational and emotional parts of our brain cease operating in concert as team players, and input from the rational brain center is inhibited.²⁸

The process of *sublimatio* connects attunement and intersectionality. Neither of these phenomena can be seen, yet they are powerful forces, just as the wind is powerful. Mediation is more effective when we are aware of our inner terrains and notice when we or others are blown off course. It is almost always unproductive to continue engaging when tempers escalate and blaming, negative words hang in the air. Take a break, name what is happening, do some deep, meditative breathing, or find another way to change the climate of the mediation. When you are able to do so, stress-associated brain activity will gradually lessen. In a state of calm, perspective returns, and proportionality and balance is again possible.

[B] *Sublimatio* in Mediation Practice

The process of *sublimatio* opens up pathways to mindful mediation practice for both mediators and parties. When reflecting on past mediations, it is useful to ponder an experience of when a mediation process was unable to move past deadlock. Connecting *sublimatio* with identity, ask: How often have *I* posed the greatest obstacle to moving a mediation forward? If my inner team is locked in an ethical dilemma (as a mediator) or in a positional battle (as a party), is there space to breathe? Is there a pathway open to my grounded center? Can I see beyond my narrow trajectory? Do I have peripheral vision; do I feel very small? If so, then no matter how much I might try

26. D. Goleman, *Social Intelligence* (Bantam Dell Pub Group 2006).

27. R.J. Lifton, *The Protean Self: Human Resilience in an Age of Fragmentation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 1992).

28. D. Goleman, *Social Intelligence* (Bantam Dell Pub Group 2006).

to make myself bigger, I remain small. The greatness of a mediator, and also a party negotiating in a mediation setting, lies with her ability to step into and embrace the vastness of her identity – an identity that recognizes that it is at once grounded in a sense of self, and at the same time continually evolving, as it moves into hitherto uninhabited spaces connected to others and to our inner worlds.

In addition, the process of *sublimatio* reminds us to:

- Be aware of and open to change that does not seem to have a clear antecedent, in ourselves and others. Notice dynamism and welcome intuition, yours and others’;
- Consciously invoke imaginative ways of engaging the parties. Help parties imagine a world when the problems they are negotiating are solved. Ask them to share how it feels in their body? Are they able to bring some of that feeling into the mediation itself as a way of introducing more spaciousness into the process? Spaciousness is always associated with the element of air.
- Suspend mediating as usual and invite all present to “rise above” the process for a fixed time. What do they see? What do you see? Where are the strengths? What is precarious? How does the clarity of the view from above help you and others present think about moving forward?

§16.05 DYNAMICS AND MOBILIZATION IN MEDIATION: THE ELEMENT OF FIRE AND THE PROCESS OF *CALCINATIO*

Calcinatio is associated with the element of fire. Raff explains: “Fire was a central symbol in the alchemical lexicon. *Calcinatio*, the process of burning a substance and reducing it to ash, served as a method of purification. Fire also effected separation, splitting the ash or the body material from the spirit.”²⁹ In the language of conflict resolution: fire can illuminate a problem, while the process of *calcinatio* has a purging effect, clearing the negotiation ground of clutter and confusion, separating the problem into its different components, and reducing it to its essence, its core.

Consider the many properties of fire: its warmth, beauty and its destructive potential. Replete with kinetic energy, it is dynamic, unpredictable and stunning. It can also be destructive, leaving charred remains in its wake. Fire is contagious: when it occurs in one area, it easily catches nearby, reminding us of the power of emotional contagion, explained below.

What is crucial is our attitude towards the intense fire of disagreement. As with fire, we have to know when to try eliminate conflict and when to try to capitalize on it, when to see what work we can make it do for us. It is difficult to dialogue with a fierce and formless fire. Once we deepen our understanding of its dynamics, however, we gain the capacity to tap into its unrivalled energy and passion to fuel the process of transformation.

29. J. Raff, *Jung and the Alchemical Imagination*, 9 (Florida: Nicholas Hays Inc. 2000).

[A] *Calcinatio in Action: Contagion*

As with each of the other processes, it is important to befriend *calcinatio* so that its destructive potential can find form in ways that mobilize progress in conflict resolution settings and utilize its contagious qualities in a constructive manner.

One example, recent at the time of this writing offers illuminating insights. It demonstrates the capacity of *calcinatio* to move quickly and shift the negotiation landscape. The 2015 Paris climate talks were multi-party negotiations where a lot was at stake. Now that we know unequivocally that human actions are causing potentially catastrophic climate chaos, there is international urgency to negotiate coordinated action. Yet complex negotiations between parties some of whom, in other contexts, may literally be firing weapons at each other, is difficult indeed. One of the ways that the negotiations were successfully concluded was via an African process called an indaba. In this process, parties work in small groups, naming their bright-line boundaries not to be crossed, but also tasked with naming places where progress is possible. The indaba process became a container for the fiery dynamics of climate change negotiations to be seen and to shift in ways that were mysterious, yet effective. During the Paris talks, multiple indabas occurred all through the days and nights, ultimately generating a contagious flame of momentum that led to a successful agreement.³⁰

The contagious nature of fire mirrors the scientific phenomenon of emotional contagion. Studies in neuroscience explain the contagion of the sensed and felt experience, and how feelings can move between us without our being consciously aware of the exchange. This process begins at birth and is made possible by mirror neurons in the brain, which fire up and “mirror” the physical signals of another. A wealth of data demonstrates that when we observe others experiencing emotions, our own brains engage the same neural circuits that are active in “the other” – the basis of empathy.³¹ Through the activation of mirror neurons, these “shared representations” allow us to experience vicariously what is felt and expressed by someone else. This phenomenon helps to explain how we can be transported to the place of our deepest fears by a painting or moved to tears by a dance performance, and how we can have empathy for people we encounter without ever speaking to them. It also helps to explain the unexpected twists and turns of a mediation process – when disputants suddenly feel enlightened by a new perspective or ignited with a flame of compassion that serves to rapidly connect them with those against whom their inner fire had been previously raging.

30. A. Rathi, ‘This Simple Negotiation Tactic Brought 195 Countries to Consensus’, <<http://qz.com/572623/this-simple-negotiation-tactic-brought-195-countries-to-consensus-in-the-paris-climate-talks/>> , Dec. 12, 2015.

31. V. Gallese, “‘Being like me’: Self-other Identity, Mirror Neurons and Empathy”, in: *Perspectives on Imitation: From Cognitive Neuroscience to Social Science*, eds. S. Hurley and N. Chater, Vol 1 (Cambridge MA: MIT Press 2005), 101-118.

[B] *Calcinatio* in Action: Embodied Resilience

Calcinatio can be further understood by imagining a tango. Each part of your body that interacts – embraces, melts, asserts – with each part of your partner’s body generates an embodied relational identity experience that helps define you at that moment. Our embodied emotional identities have been studied by numerous neuroscientists starting with Antonio Damasio.³² What we come to experience as our truest emotions or feelings are in fact interpretations of physical sensations or impulses to act generated through social interactions. These social interactions are always the product of multiple factors in context, and are influenced by mysterious and unseen forces as well. When we do the tango well, we literally yield to a state of union that contains our two wholes: we melt as we experience *calcinatio*.

This operation of *calcinatio* reminds us that we need to cultivate ways of standing in the fire of disagreement, both internally and in the external world. How can mediation processes be as dynamic as fire, and as energized, without causing great damage? How can we harness our passions for justice, fairness and possibility even in the face of potentially dangerous consequences if we do not?

Mary Catherine Richards had some powerful insights into this question as she, a few years before her death, was writing a chapter on conflict called *Separating and Connecting: The Vessel and the Fire*.³³ She encountered great difficulty in writing about conflict, which surprised her because her work as a potter and educator had put her in the midst of many conflicts. She felt challenged to write about conflict in a way that was not watered down, but addressed its true dynamism, complexity and paradoxical gifts as an engine of change and a possible vehicle of destruction. Though Richards was reaching for a holistic way of writing about conflict, the words seemed too wooden, too thin. Then, one night, she had a dream. In the dream, there was a large fire on the horizon, spreading toward her neighborhood. Forced to evacuate, she and a neighbor gathered up a few of the most precious of her pots and drove away. As they were leaving, they encountered a man they knew who came into the room with her pots and just stood there. Though they admonished him to leave, he remained.

Days later, when in her dream they were allowed to return, Richards went immediately into the charred remains of the room with her pots. To her surprise, they were still there intact. The only difference was that they were more beautiful than when she had left. And the man was also still standing where they had left him. When they asked him how this was so, he said, “Everything is still here. Only the color is deepened.” As the pots stood in intensity of the fire, their colors came out more strongly and with more nuance than before. From this dream, Richards found a way to describe one of the paradoxes of conflict: that if we can withstand its ferocity, it can

32. A. Damasio & H. Damasio, ‘Cortical Systems for Retrieval of Concrete Knowledge: The Convergence Zone Framework’, in *Large scale Neuronal Theories of the Brain*, ed. C. Koch & J.A. Davis (Cambridge MA: Bradford Book 1994); A. Damasio, *Descartes’ Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (New York: Putnam 1999).

33. M.C. Richards, ‘Separating and Connecting: The Vessel and the Fire’, in *Fabric of the Future: Women Visionaries Illuminate the Pathways to Tomorrow*, ed. M.J. Ryan (Berkeley, CA: Conari Press 1998).

burn away those things within and between us that keep us attached to being right rather than living in peace. As she writes:

When color deepens, it adds both darkness and light to itself; it contains more color. Goethe said that color is “the sufferings of light”. *The sufferings of light!* That is, what light undergoes, *we* undergo; as vessels, we are deepened by our capacities for darkness and for light. It is an inner light that wakes in the lustrous stone. It is our darkness, our guilt and guile and greed and hopelessness that, undergone like a fire, may flame through our consciousness, through our sense of ourselves, deepening our capacities, changing into colored light. Though we may feel annihilated in the process, we are intact.³⁴

As human beings, we have an incredible capacity to emerge out of the ashes of conflict’s blaze, shaken yet somehow stronger. Could it be that our capacity for resilience is related to our ability to tap into the soul of our collective humanness, which after the shared experience of savage conflict, is left exposed, raw, vulnerable and accessible, in new ways?

Richards’ work points to another Jungian idea, that of the shadow, defined as “the guardian of the threshold.”³⁵ Individually and collectively, we have shadows – those parts of ourselves or our group that are dark and often unacknowledged. Worse, they can be projected onto others. In a mediation setting, when one party accuses the other side of inflexibility, stop and explore whether that intractability is reciprocal. When one party associates the other with negative traits, encourage the first party to explore what she is not acknowledging about herself that might be keeping the process from progressing. When engaged in conflict, people tend to perform largely unconscious mental and emotional gymnastics to situate themselves positively and others in alternative, negative positions. But this human tendency may get in the way of facilitating progress. Mediators can recognize that all of us are vessels for darkness *and* light and support parties who are willing to take a full spectrum look at themselves and others. Illuminated by this thinking, mediation becomes a process where the sufferings of light can show a way forward.

[C] *Calcinatio* in Mediation Practice

In addition to the ideas presented above, mediators may infuse their work with the wisdom of *calcinatio* in the following ways:

- Learn to assess when the *calcinatio* property needed is a floodlight (to illuminate all corners of an issue) and when it is a candle (to softly, deftly move through tender terrain. Both forms of *calcinatio* are powerful;
- Befriend anger in yourself and in others. Learn to relate to it rather than resisting or retaliating when it is expressed by parties;

34. *Ibid.*, 234.

35. *Ibid.*, 232.

- Work within narrative and process redlines, or zones of safety, to prevent the destructive power of *calcinatio* from blocking or destroying mediation progress.

Further, by drawing on the process of *calcinatio*, mediators can assist parties to enhance their reflexive capacity as negotiators by supporting these and other practices:

- Have the courage to explore negative characteristics that surface in conflict. Ask: Does the fire of conflict deepen our coloring? Does it reveal darker, less attractive sides of us? How do these aspects of ourselves and others inhibit the flow of relations and the spread of ideas in a mediation setting?
- Encourage parties to be on the lookout for the conditions that may ignite a fire of connection. For example, sharing personal information over a meal prior to mediation may illuminate paths to previously unknown networks and linkages.
- Fire moves quickly, as do opportunities for change. Watch for opportunities associated with intense dynamics in mediation. How can I step into a fire and be a catalyst for constructive contagion?
- When the destructive path of fiery conflict has seemingly destroyed all hope of resolution, pause for a moment and take stock. Am I still intact? And the parties? What has changed? Has the torching and scorching of each of the parties' assumed order of things introduced more nuanced hues into the mediation landscape? Can they see things that were previously hidden to them? As a mediator, what do I notice now? Have power relations shifted and if so, how?

§16.06 ALCHEMY IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION PRACTICE: SYSTEMIC CONSTELLATIONS AT WORK

As indicated at the beginning of this chapter, alchemical processes are most potent when they operate in concert. In this section, we draw upon alchemy as a metaphorical vehicle to explain the transformative power of systemic structural constellation work in conflict resolution as pioneered by Sparrer and Varga von Kibéd.³⁶

The theory and practice of systemic structural constellations offers an embodied approach to conflict resolution that is grounded in embodied collectiveness, encourages participants to embrace a flow-state, makes the invisible visible and is fire-like in the speed and accuracy with which it unfolds.

In this process, a person (client) who wishes to gain deep insights into a conflict, selects any number of individuals (so-called representatives) to assist in creating a physical constellation that depicts the situation from the client's perspective. It is not necessary for the client to brief the representatives about the exact nature or details of

36. I. Sparrer, *Systemische Strukturaufstellungen: Theorie und Praxis* (Deutsch: Carl Auer Verlag 2009).

the issue, although this may occur in some practices to varying extents. The client then physically directs the representatives to take positions in a way that depicts the current situation as she perceives it. The resulting constellation – the spatial arrangement of the representatives as a whole and the kinesthetically-sensed reactions of the representatives to one another – reproduces the structure and dynamics of the situation (system) the client is describing. Following the initial placement, a series of interventions may be undertaken by the constellation leader (host) or the client to rearrange the spatial scene until the representatives feel greater congruence in the constellation and the client perceives the new geometrical arrangement as coherent. Finally, the client has time to absorb the rearranged scene, which in turn, can lead to new insights in relation to the conflict dynamics and action that can be undertaken.

One of the fascinating aspects of constellations is the importance of placing physical bodies in relation to each other in space. Over and over again, the system that representatives create and embody can go through numerous processes of *coagulatio* as it shifts shape and eventually settles. Representatives move into a collective flow state in *olutio*; they are able to rise above the problem through *sublimatio* and see what could not be previously seen. As the constellation “catches fire” in the process of *calcinatio*, representatives report suddenly feeling something outside their own experience that relates to an element of the system or story they are representing. Through physical placement, constellation processes ignite representatives’ embodied, affective experiences that reliably match the corresponding elements of a relational system, or the relevant parts of a client’s story. Perhaps this phenomenon is less perplexing when we recall the scientific findings that debunk the two myths of separateness discussed earlier, the myth of separateness of mind and body and the myth of separateness of human beings. As we have seen, though we speak of feelings and rational thinking as if they are mutually exclusive, nothing could be further from the scientific truth. Woven tightly together in the finest of cerebral tapestries, effective negotiators and problem-solvers do not see them as separate. Similarly, though we imagine ourselves as contained individuals, mirror neurons and other relational processes show that we cannot shut our minds and bodies off from those around us.

Increasingly, systemic structural constellation work is being used in a range of settings, from family therapy to business mediation. Both of us have experienced it, and felt its potency to ignite understanding. Here is an account from one of us of a first encounter with it:

I had heard about constellation practice in Europe and was keen to see how the practice worked in action. A friend of mine told me about a constellation session where I could offer to be a representative in a constellation. Intrigued and excited, I went along. After a short introduction by the constellation host, we got started. The first client outlined her situation very briefly and then was invited to select representatives. As the second person to be selected, I was placed in a particular position in the room. I was a little nervous; I still didn’t really know what was expected of me. Everyone said not to worry; just to embrace it ... but I wasn’t feeling really comfortable. Once all the representatives had been placed, the client hesitated. “She’s not right”, she said pointing at me, “Can I swap her?” It turns out that I was so consumed with my own performance that I had forgotten to inhabit my body and maintain my open and curious focus on the constellation. The client

was absolutely correct – I was all wrong. Yet how could she know? Sheepishly, I went and sat down again. Someone next to me whispered that she had never seen a representative be replaced before. I wanted to disappear beneath the floor.

As the first constellation unfolded, I soon forgot myself and I was drawn deeply into its process. I saw vividly that constellation work asks us to be exquisitely present in our bodies and to our intuition, clearing our minds and hearts as we make ourselves available to the process.

Next time around, I was given another chance to be a representative. This time I was ready: relaxed, aware, and breathing deeply. At first we were told nothing about the client's situation, yet when asked what I was feeling, I could immediately talk about my physical sensations and the accompanying feelings of rejection and isolation that I was experiencing as a representative. "Yes", the client chimed in, "that's because of this incident and that relationship." How could I have known? It was as if I had breathed in spaciousness and embraced my porosity, thereby enhancing my capacity to connect with the earth and inhabit a collective tableau. The constellation host invited the client to reposition me in the space; she came and guided me to another position with her hand on my back, this time not standing but sitting. The kinesthetic impact was immediate and powerful. It felt amazingly different. I could hardly believe how the dynamic we were inhabiting had caught fire amongst us. As a fire burns through a forest, the constellation took on its own shape, showing itself as system that could shift in space and time. When we had finished, I could not explain the transformation that had occurred. The client reported that the changes made gave her many insights into how to work with the real situation; it was as if the foliage had been stripped away and she could see the underlying structure of the forest more clearly and ground herself deeply in the collective earth.

According to Insa Sparrer, the key to transformation in physical constellations may be something pre-verbal, in line with scientific hypotheses presented earlier. Sparrer goes even further, suggesting that this pre-verbal something is somehow known collectively, even though this knowledge cannot be formulated verbally. She calls this phenomenon transversal language and explains that it emerges from the representative perception of the group, and therefore goes beyond verbal and non-verbal language of individuals. It is not just about relational inter-representative insights, she explains; it is about relational systems as a whole, always more than the sum of their parts. While representatives may be asked how they are feeling and how rearrangements of the spatial geometry affect them, the perceptions they report relate to the client's situation rather than the representatives' subjective experiences. Somehow, in taking on the shape of the story, they literally inhabit it, in all of its affective, sensory dimensions. Constellations work makes the embodied wisdom of the collective accessible for the benefit of us all.

Constellation work brings all four of the alchemical processes together: it literally involves finding new forms (*coagulatio*) that surface and illuminate patterns (*calcinatio*) that were previously invisible (*sublimatio*), and dissolve preconceptions, initiating a new flow of understanding (*solutio*). The phenomenon of representative perception demonstrates that we have the ability to move beyond metaphors and literally put ourselves in another party's shoes. But it is more than this: we have the capacity to enter a collective embodied space. So the self finds itself in the other and then connects to the wider contextual world in effortless and immediate transformation.

Because the nascent work of constellations is just developing, there is much that is unknown. As such, it is an apt comparator for alchemy: both stress the imperatives of enactment and embracing mystery. At the same time, the accessibility and effectiveness of the practice of constellations offers us a bridge between what we conventionally understand as knowable and unknowable. Future research will no doubt shed light on the principles by which this works. For now, it is enough to sit in the glow of its effectiveness and use it, because it functions to illuminate and deepen our understandings. Just as mediators drive cars to their sessions whose mechanical systems they may not understand, those seeking to improve their mediation effectiveness can use constellation work without knowing or understanding exactly how it works.

§16.07 CONCLUSION

While our alchemical exploration ends here, there are many more applications to mediation and conflict engagement that can be imagined. When a situation feels too hot (too much fire), we can ask ourselves how properties associated with water might cool it down. If a mediation feels as though it is wandering and off track (too much air), we can consider how to bring more of the earth element into our midst. When things seem stuck (too much earth), we can think about how to increase airy spaciousness, whether by taking a break or shifting focus. And when things are uncomfortably opaque or murky (too much water), we can find ways to invoke the clarity of fire by breaking down themes into component parts, clearing away the non-essential items and focusing on core issues.

The ancient process of alchemy, endlessly transforming earth, water, air and fire, offers us a dynamic understanding of mediation practice that points the way to more satisfying, full-spectrum outcomes. As alchemy was used by Jung to refer to individuation, so it represents a door for mediators and their clients – which, once opened, leads to encounters with combinations of elements in ways that import multi-sensory meaning into mediation. Such encounters present opportunities to dissolve the stifling silos of professional disciplinary that continue to fragment our field.

