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### Aesthetics in Negotiation: Part Two: The Uses of Alchemy

Michelle LeBaron

*Allard School of Law at the University of British Columbia*, [lebaron@allard.ubc.ca](mailto:lebaron@allard.ubc.ca)

Nadja Marie Alexander

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## Aesthetics in Negotiation: Part Two—The Uses of Alchemy

*Michelle LeBaron & Nadja Alexander*

*Editors' Note: The authors here pursue the logic of their Part One chapter further. Showing how negotiators tend to concentrate on a limited range of skills and stimuli, while overlooking others, they argue that the ancient concept of alchemy works in conjunction with modern concepts of neuroscience to unlock a whole series of aesthetics-derived, embodied strategies and approaches. These, they contend, make it possible to advance “stuck” negotiations in which progress is stalled, as well as to improve a whole range of less complex negotiation processes.*

In Part One, in this volume, we discussed the four classic elements—earth, water, air and fire—as paths via which beauty can infuse negotiation. Another way these four elements can be explored is through the organizing concept of alchemy. Alchemy, historically concerned with

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Professor **Michelle LeBaron** is a conflict transformation scholar/practitioner at the University of British Columbia Allard School of Law whose work is animated by creativity, culture and interdisciplinarity. She has done seminal work in many types of conflicts including intercultural, international, family, organizational and commercial, exploring how arts help shift intractable conflicts. She is a fellow at the Trinity College Long Room Hub Arts and Humanities Research Institute in Dublin and holds a Wallenberg Fellowship at the Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Studies, South Africa. Her books include *The Choreography of Resolution: Conflict, Movement and Neuroscience*; *Conflict Across Cultures: A New Approach for a Changing World*; *Bridging Cultural Conflicts*; and *Bridging Troubled Waters*.

**Nadja Alexander** is Academic Director at the Singapore International Dispute Resolution Academy, and Visiting Professor of Law at Singapore Management University. An award-winning (2011, 2007, 1997) author and educator, Nadja also works as a policy adviser and conflict intervener in diverse dispute resolution settings. Her work on cross-border and cross-cultural conflict embraces interdisciplinary approaches to deepen conflict engagement. Nadja has been appointed Honorary Professor at The University of Queensland, Australia, and Senior Fellow of the Dispute Resolution Institute at Mitchell Hamline School of Law in the United States. Her books include *International and Comparative Mediation*, *Global Trends in Mediation*, *Negotiation: Strategy Style Skills*, and *The EU Mediation Handbook*.

changing states and physical properties, including turning one substance into another, is essentially concerned with transformation. Given that negotiation—when optimal—may also yield transformation, we examine what alchemical concepts may have to offer here.

Alchemy has a long history, appearing in the myths and legends of ancient China and texts from Egypt dating back to 1900 BCE (Cockren 2016). 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 (Conniff 2014). It also has roots in ancient Greek philosophy (Ball 2004) and Buddhist and Hindu teachings in India (Gurmet 2004). Centuries later, the Swiss psychologist Carl Jung associated alchemy with the process of individuation, integrating inner and outer aspects of our beings (Jung 1980). He imagined the four elements of earth, water, air and fire as symbolically associated with differentiation and transformation (Jung 1980).

Drawing on Jung’s and others’ work, this chapter explores how integrating understandings of alchemy via natural metaphors into negotiation can change our embodied experiences of processes, of each other and of negotiation 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 negotiation. Just as humans individuate in the process of maturing in ways that are still not well understood, negotiators and negotiations may mature. An understanding of how alchemical processes help us think about the maturation process is the subject of this chapter.

### **Jungian Perspectives on Alchemical Processes and Individuation**

According to Carl Jung, individuation involves the integration of internal and external elements toward maturation or, in his words, “coming to selfhood” (Jung 1966: 266). This individuation always has collective elements, as Jung acknowledged when he wrote: “As the individual is not just a single, separate being, but by his very existence presupposes a collective relationship, it follows that the process of individuation must lead to more intense and broader collective relationships and not to isolation” (Jung 1966: 266). Individuation both has predictable patterns, and is unique for each individual. Thus, normal babies learn to form sounds into words and walk within predictable bands of time, but the processes by which they do so are still not well understood. As we progress, individuation continues cognitively, emotionally and physically. Jung believed that individuation or self-realization continues throughout

life as we become more and more able to integrate internal and external aspects of ourselves and the world into meaningful wholes.

Jung used alchemical processes associated with the four elements to describe the process of individuation, believing that the processes that alchemists of old pursued to change base metal to gold had psychic parallels. At the same time, given that historical alchemists— as far as we know—were not successful in changing base metals into gold, and that little definitive writing about their quests survives, it is not clear exactly what the sequences were or how they worked. This left Jung with the freedom to constellate alchemical processes in relation to individuation according to his intuition and experiences with psychoanalysis. Though his writing on the subject is complex and not fully developed during his lifetime, alchemy provides an intriguing way to think about individuation and, by extension, negotiation. From it, we take this treasure: *negotiation always involves combining elements in ways that we can explain and in ways that are mysterious*. Jungian ideas of alchemy help us peer with a bit more clarity into the mysteries.

Parallels between negotiation and the individuation process are fruitful to examine. As individuation involves integrating inner and outer aspects, so negotiation requires the same. While working with material dimensions of problems and potential solutions, our internal geographies are necessarily invoked. As discussed in Part One, these geographies serve us best when we are as aware of self and other as possible.

The four alchemical processes of *coagulatio*, *solutio*, *sublimatio* and *calcination* will each be described below, with discussions of how they might expand our awareness and thus our capacities for effective negotiation. Though each will be described in isolation for clarity's sake, it is in their combination that the alchemical processes are most potent.

### **Coagulatio: *The Element of Earth***

In *coagulatio*, the element of earth is central. It relates to things taking on solid form, or coalescing. This is the condition at the beginning of negotiation: people arrive with solid positions and clear ideas of what the optimal material outcome should be. When negotiation works well, other elements come in to unsettle the solidity of earth. Put differently, negotiating parties come into an attunement one with another 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 negotiation as breakthroughs occur and parties gradually come to establish a way of proceeding that coheres. One way that *coagulatio* has been pursued scientifically is through the phenomena of resonance and attunement.

### ***Coagulatio and Attunement***

Resonance is a physical phenomenon imaged by religious scholar Christopher Bache as “lateral bands of colored light stretching horizontally across a room” between people (Bache 2000: 178). Bache postulates that resonance is “always trying to happen” between people, giving examples of phase locking from chaos theory (Bache 2000: 178). “Phase locking,” he writes, “occurs in nature when individual oscillating systems shift from a state of collective chaos to integrated resonance.” (Bache 2000: 178) 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.

When negotiation works well, do the parties come into resonance approaching phase lock? What role does attuning have in fostering collaboration? Two points here, from opposite directions. 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 (Accattatis 2014: 2). 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 coherence, by preventing phase lock with others and disrupting connection with positive sensory anchors.

On the positive side, music was used in one of our negotiation classes by collaboration expert Hussein Janmohamed, who taught a group of twenty-five lawyers and other professionals a vocal round of devotional songs from diverse world religious traditions. We had spent four days studying and dialoguing together and the atmosphere had been warm and positive. At the end of thirty minutes with Hussein, something new had constellated. The music had brought an entirely different dimension of attunement, opening us up to the ground of our shared humanity, alive with the quality of wonder and shimmering with awe at the beauty generated through song.

The solid ground we stand on as negotiators, then, can be strengthened and made more robust by awareness of moments of *coagulatio*—literally, when things come together. While it may be difficult to imagine parties singing together in advance of or during a negotiation pro-

cess, the imaginal challenge is worth taking. Perhaps a better question is to ask where parties can find trusted resonance in their midst. As was illustrated in our chapter on aesthetics and negotiation, the source of resonance often comes via arts and experiences that accent physical, sensory dimensions.

For example, a recent issue of the United States Institute of Peace newsletter *Insights* discusses arts in peacebuilding and negotiation as an idea whose time has come. The lead article 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” (Wood 2015: 1). 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” (Wood 2015).

In South Africa, meanwhile, as a political prisoner, Nelson Mandela turned to the arts to incrementally build and nurture a collaborative negotiation spirit with his jailers, the then-apartheid government. During his 27 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 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 the beauty of empathy and genuine 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* in the form of newly grounded relations arising from his genius for empathy.

Arts practices are universal ways of invoking *coagulatio*, though different forms are accented in different cultures. Throughout the South African struggle, for example, the arts played vital roles in galvanizing people and transforming unfairness. South African Constitutional Court judge and anti-apartheid activist Albie Sachs explains the importance of guarding nuance and complexity in art: “In the case of a real instrument of struggle, there is no room for ambiguity: a gun is a gun is a gun, and if it were full of contradictions, it would fire in all sorts of directions and be useless for its purpose. But the power of art lies precisely in its capacity to expose contradictions and reveal hidden tensions—hence the danger of viewing it as if it were just another kind of missile-firing apparatus”

(Gerhart and Glaser 2010: 696; Allen 2005). This passage reminds us that when art is instrumentalized, it can lose its power. Sachs also writes: “What are we fighting for but for the right to express our humanity in all its forms, including our sense of fun and capacity for love and tenderness and our appreciation of the beauty of the world?....Let us write better poems and make better films and compose better music” (Sachs 1998: 240, 247).

From Sachs’ invitation, we take this: that we should not only infuse negotiation with aesthetic sensibilities because it will work better and more holistically (though we do believe this is true), but also for the sake of pleasure—and that is partly because the pleasure turns out to be *functional* in bringing about *coagulatio*. If, as negotiators, we feel more fully alive and secure in our capacities to relate one with another, our negotiations will actually be more grounded in reliable progress and good feeling. In addition, we will be better able to adopt another piece of South African wisdom, the idea of *Ubuntu*. Judge Sachs pleaded eloquently for mediators and negotiators to recognize the importance of *Ubuntu*—an African concept referring to the essence and interconnectedness of being human. *Ubuntu* can look very different in diverse contexts, but always involves engaging the senses (Sachs 2010).<sup>1</sup>

### ***Applications for Reflexive Negotiation Practice***

How does *coagulatio* inform negotiation practice? Above descriptions of attunement and resonance offer some ideas, as does our discussion of arts and *Ubuntu*. Negotiators may also:

- Watch for moments when things “gel” and find ways to signal or mark these so that collective experiences of *coagulatio* build;
- Emphasize interdependence as a reliable way to generate solid relational and substantive outcomes;
- Notice how experiences of time change in the course of negotiation, moving into *kairos* territory. As William Isaacs wrote: “The process of dialogue helps us to rediscover and appreciate *kairos*....People become quite reflective and aware of the conversation as taking place in time, but also lose track of it and begin listening more for the sense of meaning that is unfolding.” (Isaacs 1999: 289-290) In other words, dialogue and negotiation help cultivate *coagulatio* as people begin to listen for shared meaning rather than focusing on advocating their preferred outcome.

### ***Solutio: The Element of Water***

Water is associated with the alchemical operation of *solutio*, turning a solid into a liquid. In many negotiation processes, this operation arises. Consider two people whose positions are very far apart. They come in feeling “solid” and “attached” , and not only to their way of framing the

issues and their perceptions of their counterparts. Along the way, resentments and enmities may dissolve, another aspect 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).

### ***Solutio in Negotiation***

This operation of *solutio* does not happen in every negotiation; sometimes parties come to an agreement or fail to do so, and leave with their "ground of being" unaltered. But negotiation 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. As negotiation educators, we can help others 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 negotiation 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 negotiation is classic *solutio*.

The operation of *solutio* is also germane to addressing impasse in negotiation. When things are stuck, referencing 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 merger, 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. This 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 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.

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 (Lipton 2008). At the heart of neuroplasticity is the principle that neurons that fire together wire together, while neurons that wire apart, stay apart (Beausoleil and LeBaron 2013). This means that we create patterns and develop 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 negotiations, 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 again. 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.

***Movement in Negotiation: Solutio Mobilized***

In negotiation, movement is fundamental. Without it, parties are hard-pressed to reach agreements. Water flows around whatever is in its path; it takes the shape of whatever container it is in, yet does not lose its coherence. Movement-based experiences can therefore be useful in assisting negotiators 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 aesthetic collaboration. Over the past several years, we have worked extensively with physical movement in negotiation education, finding that learners report dramatic shifts in their capacity to work with others arising from their experiences of this channel into *solutio* (LeBaron, MacLeod and Acland 2013).

Recent scientific discoveries bolster the case for movement as a way of teaching negotiation 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 (Beausoleil and LeBaron 2013). 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,... [was] dance our first language?" (O'Donohue 2003: 129). 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's not surprising that humans read body language better than verbal language. It's 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 isn't quite right, although we can't 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. [NDR: Thompson et al., *Nonverbal*] 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. Thus, we see echoes of Jung's insight that individuation (and alchemical processes) are never only individual; they are always collective.

So how can we access *solutio* as part of alchemical knowing, and put it to work for us in negotiation? In a recent workshop for people working on conflicts with religious and political dimensions, dancer Margie Gillis used a number of physical metaphors in designing shared experiences. For example, she asked participants to explore “yielding” and “resisting” in various movement activities. Gillis also helped participants learn to understand and navigate the gaps between themselves and other parties, and to welcome them as generative. As we moved, we began to physically understand the concept of “negative space” between and around us.

So connected are brain and body that dance (and other physical movement—see Honeyman and Parish 2013) has the ability to release us from mental habits when we feel locked in negotiation impasse. For example, dancing or 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 (Beausoleil and LeBaron 2013). Taking that walk through nature or going dancing one evening in the midst of negotiations can transport us to surprising spaces that help transform perspectives and attitudes, surfacing insights and options not noticeable in the midst of conventional negotiations (Beausoleil and LeBaron 2013).

Another movement form helpful to negotiators is aikido. *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 (Ringer 2006; Palmer 2016). [See also NDR: Lee & Shanahan, *Martial Arts*] 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” (Palmer 2016). Indeed, given that our bodies are primarily water, it makes sense that effectiveness in negotiation is really about learning to find flow.

### ***Applications for Reflexive Negotiation Practice***

While movement is a way of cultivating “flow” in negotiations, there are several other things negotiators can do, and ways they can pay attention to summon *solutio* into their processes. These include:

- Cultivate comfort with strong emotions. Strong emotions are always part of complex conflicts, and it is often true that hearing them helps dissolve bad feelings;
- Learn your inner geography in relation to flow states; when do you feel most able to give yourself to a process wholeheartedly? Try to include as many of these conditions in the processes you design as possible;
- Use water as an experience of fluidity and flow. Make paper sailboats and write your worst fears for a negotiation on them, then sail them away on a lake. Go swimming. Take a long drink. Look at a beautiful image of the sea while listening to its tidal rhythms. Water is restorative and inspiring.

### **Air: The Spacious Negotiator**

So far, we have explored the interplay of the alchemical elements of earth and water as resources for negotiators. We have looked to notions of resonance and attunement to help us navigate the gaps between representations and meaning, and at moments of flow as ways of getting through tight spots.

We explored *coagulatio* and *solutio* in our previous sections, noting how they help 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 element of *sublimatio*, we enter the invisibility of air, asking about identity and other things that not solid yet are very real. In this section, we examine who we are as negotiators, and as human beings engaging in negotiation.

*Sublimatio* is related to the element of air which—as we know—is largely invisible. Air reminds us that things can move quickly and that many invisible things influence the course of negotiations. It is thus related to intuition and imagination. It is also related to being able to see ourselves as if from above, and from the perspectives of others. We begin by examining the internal aspects of our identities, which are always

powerful and frequently invisible both to ourselves and others in negotiation.

German communication psychologist Friedemann Schulz von Thun refers to the multiple voices within us as members of our “inner team” (Pörksen and Schulz von Thun 2014: 92). 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. [See NDR: Deutsch, *Internal Conflict*] 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 addiction? If I don’t, 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. Yet, it is always related to *sublimatio*, because others do not see this inner negotiation process taking place. [See also NDR: Deutsch, *Internal Conflict*] 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. (Richards 1998: 232)

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” (Richards 1998: 233). 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. We begin to be able to look with more acuity and to see patterns more clearly, products of the process of *sublimatio*.

A related concept to the inner team or family is intersectionality, which “acknowledges an individual’s multiple social identities, thus creating a more complete portrayal of the whole [embodied] person” (Wijeyesinghe and Jones 2014: 10). 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, generating unique gaps in motion (Goodman 2014: 99-108; Alexander, Howieson and Fox 2015). There will always be a gap between the experience that comes through “encounter” and the representations we create to understand and explain the encoun-

ters we have. Gaps create space for insights to emerge, for truth to be experienced, for embodied ways of knowing and being to be embraced, and for us to know and engage the artistry of flow in negotiation. *Sublimatio* is a practice of noticing gaps and insights for the gold they are in negotiation. It need not be only individual, it can also be collective.

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 flowing—like water.

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 next (Goleman 2006). In other words, we are continually noticing and adapting our behavior in relation to those around us. [NDR: Schneider & Ebner, *Social Intuition*] 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 (Lifton 1993). [See also NDR: Adler, *Protean Negotiator*] The process of *sublimatio* is to be aware of this, to cease insisting that we or others remain unchanging, and to instead embrace the mystery of our unfolding.

Intersectionality and *sublimatio* therefore offer ways to think about our essential interconnectedness and porousness as human beings, and highlight the potential for rapid change as well as incremental shifts, both often beyond conscious effort. Peace scholar Louise Diamond once challenged a room full of graduate students to explain how change happens. Their explanations were somewhat ponderous, full of prescriptions and step-by-step progressions. After listening, she asked everyone whether they could recall a time in their lives when change happened very quickly. It turned out they could. Perhaps it was associated with a pivotal event (either global or personal) or with a surprising shift in a relationship. The element of air and the associated process of *sublimatio* remind us that things can happen slowly or with great rapidity. The world readers will be in when this chapter is published may be a very different one from the world that exists as we are writing it.

***Applications for Reflexive Negotiation Practice***

In addition to being aware of our inner teams and intersectionality as described above, 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, both in relation to negotiation processes and outcomes. Draw your magic solution and share it with a counterpart. Imagine a world when the problems you are negotiating are solved: how does it feel in your body? Can you bring some of that feeling into the negotiation itself as a way of introducing more spaciousness into the process? Spaciousness is always associated with the element of air;
- Suspend negotiating as usual and invite all present to “rise above” the process for a fixed time. What do you see? Where are the strengths? What is precarious? How does the clarity of the view from above help you think about moving forward?

***Calcinatio: The Element of Fire***

*Calcinatio* is associated with the element of fire. Consider the many properties of fire: its warmth, coziness, beauty—and its destructive potential. *Calcinatio* tends to be associated with anger and resentment and with their potential to erupt into violence. As with each of the other processes, it is important to befriend *calcinatio* so that its violent potential can find form in ways that mobilize negotiation progress.

*Calcinatio* can be 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 (Damasio and Damasio 1994; Damasio 1994). 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 reminds us that we need to cultivate ways of standing in the fire of disagreement, both within and in the external world. One way of imaging effective negotiation, then, is as a state of attunement amongst members of our “inner team”. Attunement opens the possibility of infusing our negotiation identity and processes with more nuanced texture, depth, tolerance for passion and flexibility. Remember that this

attunement can shift quickly because of external events or the way a particular interaction stimulates an old wound, just as fire changes quickly. This is another reason that negotiators need the fire of *calcinatio*: fire lights, helping us see clearly and to “right” ourselves when we have been thrown off by what psychologists call a negative trigger. Consider, for example, the effect of seeing an image of a beloved family member when you have been feeling less than clear or anxious. It can bring you back into your body’s home and back into attunement with your “inner team”.

### ***Calcinatio and Attunement: Constellations at Work***

Another manifestation of the element of fire, with its capacity to move quickly and shift the landscape, is the process of systemic constellation work as pioneered by Insa Sparrer and others (Sparrer 2007). Just as fire consumes a territory touching everything in its wake, constellation processes become containers for dynamics to be seen and to shift in ways that are mysterious, yet effective. Constellation work offers an illustration of the curious experience of change that Diamond’s students (referred to in the previous section) were not able to explain.

The theory and practice of systemic constellations offers an embodied approach to problem-solving that 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 particularly challenging issue in a negotiation, 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 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 he or she perceives it. The resulting constellation—the spatial arrangement of the representatives as a whole and the kinesthetically-felt reactions of the representatives to one another—reproduce 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 better 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, relationships and actions in response to the relations themselves.

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 embody “catches fire” within them, and they 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 smart decision-makers do not see them as separate. Similarly, though we imagine ourselves as contained individuals, mirror neurons and other relational processes mean that we cannot shut our minds and bodies off from those around us.

Increasingly, systemic constellation work is being used in a range of settings, from organizational development to family therapy. 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 viv-

idly 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 process of *calcinatio* 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.

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. Thus, it "catches" and is shared amongst us without conscious awareness, another illustration of *calcinatio*. Sparrer calls this phenomenon transverbal language and explains that it exists among representatives, 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. Constellation work makes the embodied wisdom of the collective accessible for the benefit of another (Sparrer 2007).

### ***Applications for Reflexive Negotiation Practice***

In addition to the constellation work described above, here are some other ways negotiators may infuse their work with the wisdom of *calcinatio*:

- Befriend anger in yourself and learn to relate to it, rather than resisting or retaliating when it is expressed by others. In three decades of training negotiators, we have become convinced that problems relating to anger thwart processes in multiple ways that could be ameliorated by this work;
- 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;
- Work within narrative and process redlines, or zones of safety, to prevent the destructive power of *calcinatio* from blocking or destroying negotiation progress.

### **Conclusion**

As we have seen, the use of systemic constellations is one way to come closer to the ineffable gaps we have been discussing and, therefore, closer to alchemy. It literally offers a bridge between what we conventionally understand as knowable and unknowable. Further, it brings all of the elements together. While we have foregrounded its kinetic and illuminating *calcinatio* properties, constellation work literally involves finding new forms (*coagulatio*) that bring to the surface patterns that were previously invisible (*sublimatio*) and that dissolve preconceptions, initiating a new flow of understanding (*olutio*). 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.

As constellation work demonstrates, we have the ability to move beyond metaphors and literally put ourselves in another negotiator's shoes. But it is more than this: we have the capacity to enter a collective embodied space, drawing on all four of the alchemical processes. So the self finds itself in the other and then connects to the wider contextual world in effortless and immediate transformation.

While our alchemical exploration ends here, there are many more applications to negotiation and conflict engagement that can be imag-

ined. When a situation feels too hot (too much fire), we ask ourselves how properties associated with water might cool it down. If a negotiation feels as though it is wandering and off track (too much air), we consider how to bring more of the earth element into our midst. When things seem stuck (too much earth), we consider 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 find ways to invoke the clarity of fire by breaking them into component parts or finding new ways to name our experiences.

The ancient process of alchemy, endlessly transforming earth, water, air and fire, offers us a dynamic understanding of negotiation practice that points the way to virtuosity and increased pleasure in processes, and to more satisfying, full-spectrum outcomes. As alchemy was used by Jung to refer to individuation, so it provides inspiration for negotiators to be alive to combinations of elements in ways that import multi-dimensional possibilities into negotiation.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See also Phyllis Bernard (2013) as to the relationship between *Ubuntu* and the concept of *muntu*: “ubuntu translates the ineffable, transcendent muntu into understandable social norms that reinforce the bonds of the life force among community members” (Bernard 2013: 177). In other words, negotiating from an awareness of Ubuntu is a way to coagulate connection.

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