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in Vilnius**

**Keynote Speech on the occasion of the 10th int. Congress of PifE e.V.**

## **20 Years on the European Stage**

Ladies and Gentlemen,  
dear colleagues and friends of Psychodrama!

Here I stand before you to open the 10th international Conference/Congress of the Psychodrama Institute for Europe and to pay respect to the 20-year existence of our Institute – but also to celebrate together with all of you.

When I received the list of delegates I realised that only a few of the psychodramatists of the first and second generation could be found there and that I would have to hold this speech for a new psychodramatist generation. This is a challenge for me and I am glad to have the chance to be able to tell you something about these twenty years.

Let's try to briefly sketch the beginnings:

We find ourselves in the middle of the eighties and at that time I was already an established psychodramatist in Germany, mainly teaching Psychodrama in upper level groups. I had several particularly talented candidates in training, not only of German origin but for example of Polish or Rumanian or Hungarian origin. All of them were enthusiastic about the miraculously effective method that they had been learning.

At this time there were crowds of training institutes and young psychodramatists in West Germany. I was frequently in Hungary - in my native country - and noticed how much people there could benefit from group psychotherapy. However, this was enormously difficult to organise in the socialist system of those days, a system which had great misgivings about letting people become more self-assured or self-analytical. Every sort of individual or group psychotherapy was perceived as being against the system. And we psychodramatists in West Germany asked ourselves: What does 'man' need? Many people spontaneously said: „Bread“. Others said: „Work“. What would be the answer of you as psychodramatists?

My answer was first of all quite simple: „VISIONS!“ Yes, we need VISIONS!

Human beings need images and pictures of hope, for which it is worth getting up for, making an effort, in order to march onwards through the day.

They need to feel their creative energies, to sense that they are able to master the challenge of their lives.

We – in our western affluence - had already experienced a certain saturation regarding such needs but I looked at the east - my home region and also the neighbouring socialist countries - and the vision emerged within me to take psychodrama to them.

It did not take long before I had found allies – primarily the candidates who themselves originated from eastern European countries. They are sitting here among you. Their collective energies and knowledge have flowed into the establishment of our Institute. As pioneers of this work I would briefly like to mention: Hilde Gött, Gerd Pischetsrieder, Sonja Beloch and Helmuth Beloch as well as many others. Last but certainly not least I would like to mention my daughter who wrote the record documenting the Foundation in Amsterdam in 1989. Although Helmuth Beloch is not present today I would like to thank him here and now for having organised the structure of the Institute with such tremendous energy. Without him the Psychodrama-Institut für Europa would not have been founded.

### The Way

The Way has been long and sometimes difficult. At this point I would like to express my appreciation for the work which we have taken upon ourselves from the very start until now. Immediately after the institutional foundation we were already confronted with the first hindrances in West Germany. Established training institutes united against us and tried to legally prevent our existence. The problem was one of the „Psycho Market“ in West Germany and we were not supposed to take our European idea so seriously. Many of these institutes of that period which were organised for profit-making no longer exist. Time has meanwhile shown that we were able to secure the form of association of our European Institute and made a timely change in the leadership.

The Way included not only the initial competitive situation in the west, but also the working conditions we found in the east. We once held a conference in a delapidated synagogue without doors or windows. Once in the conference rooms of a psychiatric hospital in which there had been no heating for the previous four or five years. We had to apply to the relevant police authorities in order to be able to assemble, as it was forbidden for people to assemble without permission from the state. We had persons from state supervisory institutions in the training groups who

were supposed to pay attention as to whether we western trainers were making any type of regime critical statements or initiating actions hostile to the state.

We had to try to guarantee political minorities the same chances of development within the group as the majority and to find a balance regarding the historical animosities between Hungarians and Rumanians or between Russians and White Russians - and I believe that we succeeded in doing so quite well.

In dealing with these processes the group dynamic knowledge of the group leaders was just as much required as was tact and diplomatic skill, all employed for a higher goal:

„sociometric equality of opportunity“.

And due to this our Institute gained a very good reputation. In our training groups we had delegates who originated from Kamchatka or from the Mongolian frontier. Thus our training groups are not just psychotherapeutic further education in action-oriented psychodrama but also a high-level schooling in intercultural tolerance and competence.

What do we get across in our training groups? Alongside training in psychodrama theory and practise we also convey humanistic and Christian values, tolerance for the diversity of others, since these values suffered severely under socialist regimes. The transparency which we introduced into our groups was quite a new thing and contradicted everything which had been experienced in socialism in terms of caution, mistrust and fear. The condition of rooms and buildings we encountered were in part so devastating that we grabbed brushes, dusters and mops – and also requested our participants to do so, to the great astonishment of the medical doctors and psychologists in the group in particular. We had to - of necessity - become role models. Making agreements about money and enforcing these was often objected to as a capitalist attitude. We nevertheless did it - in order to show it as an example of consistent and meaningful dealings with money. Although the payments were very low then and are still partly so today.

For this reason special thanks are due to the German national association which bore the greater part of the costs for the training groups in Eastern Europe during this period.

I would like to take this opportunity to say a very special thank you to the Norwegian Psychodrama Institute which has helped us from the very beginning - as the only Western European training institute - in terms of staff, human, and moral

support. It has proved itself for twenty years to be a wonderful partner in terms of reliability and solidarity. Sincere thanks are particularly due here to Eva Roine and Eduardo Verdu.

### My personal summary on the organisation of our association

At the foundation 20 years ago I was still convinced that we were all a great family – independent of the organisational form chosen. In the course of the years we became aware of and suffered under how ponderous and clumsy such an association was when making decisions. An association is a moloch that swallows up every personal effort made, without any thanks. For those active members in the committees it means a lot of work without any financial compensation.

Nevertheless:

Looking back at the 20 years, I can say in comparison with person and profit oriented training institutes in Western European countries

Working in an honorary capacity leads to the association always being newly impacted by members and officeholders motivated by idealism.

The structure of the association with its regular new elections make a generatio change possible from the founder generation to the one in office today.

The European Association is a fine collection of idealists from 13 European countries today. This means that the values of the founder generation - the torch - which formed the basis but also the existential sense of the Association, has been successfully passed on during these 20 years.

20 years – this is the arrival at about the age of adulthood. This is the occasion for me as founder of this Institute to withdraw from the work of the Association. My speech here, today will therefore be my final speech. My „last lecture“. I would therefore like to pass on some thoughts to you from my psychodramatic experience for the way ahead.

We had VISIONS and we have put them into practice. **In Visions our Institute was always far ahead:**

1. We established a European Institute, just 2 months before the fall of the

Wall. (Isn't that „time-tele“ in the sense of Moreno? ) The foundation of Fepto, the establishment of a Federation of Psychodrama Training Organisations, took place because this supra-European idea was a brilliant precursor.

2. We established the 4 specialist areas within our Psychodrama Institute consisting of Therapy, Pedagogics, Organisational Development and Theatre. This division has meanwhile been adopted by almost all Psychodrama Institutes.

I would like to make you acquainted with my new Vision:

There is a danger that there will be too many psychodramatists in future and that its application will nevertheless be inadequate. In West Germany this is already the case. The market there is saturated with psychodramatists. In a shorter or longer period this will become the case in Eastern Europe. We should not wait for this to occur for in the first instance it is a matter of using the effectiveness of psychodrama in a practical way. It is a question of the application i.e. the **Psychodrama-Institut für Europa has to support the users from the viewpoint of a future perspective**, encourage them, offer training possibilities for the various professional fields if it is a question of wishing to serve the spreading of psychodrama IN SOCIETY as for instance in Brazil. (There psychodrama has been used comprehensively for the employees of the ten-million Sao Paulo conurbation in order to strengthen citizens initiatives and civil courage. Source: Der Spiegel, 13/2001). The Institute should not leave its qualified graduates, after they have concluded their training, to their own resources when searching for suitable fields of application and testing out psychodramatic skills and techniques in their own professional day-to-day existence.

I am fully convinced that psychodrama is not only a very effective form of group psychotherapy; it is also a philosophy of life. That's why I'd like to tell you what makes a good psychodramatist for me – assuming of course a regular and proper training as a pre-condition.

These are my absolutely personal guiding lights, which are not to be found any any particular training book:

**Hear with the „third ear“;**

i.e. it does not depend on what is said, but how something is said.

**Scenic thinking**

Scenic thinking means for me that I am already seeing the representational potentials of the protagonist's pictures and images on the stage while I am listening.

**Ability to shape relationships**

The first step must always be taken by the one who knows more.

**Responsibility and care of our social network**

**Readiness for Sharing**, in order to help a person to open up

**Genuine ability for confrontation**, without breaking the other

Supreme rule : **Transparency in the group**. Everyone is informed about everything. There are no secrets shared with the leader.

**Confidence in one's own intuition** - „What's come to mind has come to mind!“

and courage to communicate own intuitions.

I have trained many of the colleagues present here and they might not formulate it in this manner, but I know that they have these abilities within themselves and I am very proud of that.

You will come across these abilities and skills at this conference. You will learn a lot, cry, laugh and dance. You will have existentially important encounters. Perhaps quite new and young delegates to this conference will become great psychodramatists. Important for this a characteristic that every psychodramatist has to train and develop himself in, the ability of a person who studies nature. I'd like you to listen to this story:

**The Story of the Eagle that did not want to fly \***

A man went into the woods to catch a bird that he could take home with him. He caught a young eagle, took it home and placed it in the chicken run together with the chickens, ducks and turkeys. And he gave it chicken food to eat, although it was an eagle, the king of the birds.

After five years he got a visit from a man who knew a lot about nature. And as they were walking through the garden, the man said, "the bird over there isn't a

chicken; it's an eagle!"

"Yes," said the first man, "that's true. But I've raised it to be a chicken. IT is no longer an eagle but a chicken, even if its wings are 3 metres wide."

"No," replied the other man, "it is still an eagle, for it has the heart of an eagle. And that will let it fly up high into the heavens."

"No, no," said the first man, "it's now a real chicken and will never fly away."

So they resolved to do a test. The man who knew a lot about nature picked up the eagle, raised his hands up high and said encouragingly, "you who are an eagle, and belong in the skies and not on this earth, spread out your wings and fly!"

The eagle sat on the raised fist and looked around. Behind it it saw the chickens pecking at their grain, and it jumped down to them.

The first man said. "I told you it's a chicken!"

"No," replied the other, "it's still an eagle and it has the heart of an eagle. Let's try one more time; tomorrow I will get it to fly!"

The next day he climbed onto the roof of the house with the eagle, lifted it up and said, "you who are an eagle, spread out your wings and fly!"

But when the eagle saw the chickens scratching away in the run, it jumped down to them once again and joined in their scratching. The first man said once more, "I told you it was a chicken!"

"No," replied the other, "it's an eagle. I'll try it tomorrow once again!"

The next morning he got up early, picked up the eagle and took it out of the town, far away from the houses to the foot of the high mountain. The sun was just rising and covering the top of the mountain in golden light, every peak shone in the joy of a wonderful morning.

He raised up the eagle and said to it:

"Eagle, you are an eagle. You belong to the heavens and not to this earth. Spread out your wings and fly!"

The eagle looked around, trembled as if being filled with new life - but did not fly. Then the man with a knowledge of nature directed it's look towards the sun. And suddenly it spread its mighty wings out wide, rose up with the cry of an eagle, flew higher and higher, never to return.

The story has a happy-end. It is a best case story. An eagle lives in a chicken run without dignity and misses its destiny – but it does not notice it. Doesn't this happen with many people? For many this does not matter. A psychodramatist sees his or her protagonists as the creatures they really are – with all their possibilities. With patience and dedication the man always gives the eagle new chances. The eagle's decision to fly, however, cannot be taken away from it. At the end of the

story it is the sun and the heavens that beckon the eagle and stimulate it to rise up.

I wish that you are all or will become such people with a knowledge and understanding of nature, one that knows what an eagle is and what an eagle needs.

For all of us I wish an inspiring conference rich in encounters, and finally thank you for your attention.

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\* James Aggrey, „The Eagle that did not want to fly“, Jugenddienst-Verlag, Wuppertal 1985  
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