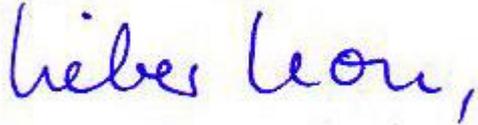


**Hans Werner Gessmann**

### **1.3.2 Humanistic Psychodrama**



our plan to write an experience report about humanistic psychodrama is finally being realized. I've been in Duisburg for two days, at the PIB (Psychotherapeutic Institute Bergerhausen). I am sending you the first report from here, as I know that you are urgently awaiting information. The PIB is housed in an old Art Nouveau villa. Hans-Werner Gessmann gave me a very friendly welcome. He is an older, somewhat plump, rather reserved man with a grey-white beard and alert eyes. When he talks about his work, he gets very lively and is happy to provide information. You can tell that humanistic psychodrama is his life. I received a wealth of answers to my questions, which I can't process all that quickly. I remembered this much: Moreno is the founder of psychodrama, a group psychotherapy. His student Ella May Shearon was Gessmann's teacher. He met her in Germany and has worked with her as co-leader in many different countries for many years. In doing so, he experienced impressively what often rapid changes psychodrama can trigger in individuals and in the group as a whole. After replacing Ella May Shearon, Hans-Werner Gessmann gradually developed humanistic psychodrama. Due to his own career, it became increasingly important for Hans-Werner Gessmann to integrate the approach of humanistic psychology, such as that of Carl Rogers, into his concept. This has changed psychodrama in terms of the role of the leader and the importance of the group, right down to the methods. Since, according to humanistic psychology, every person already has the knowledge of how and in which direction positive growth is possible for him or her, the psychodrama therapist restricts himself to the role of a group leader who orients his approach entirely to the protagonist (the one who is at the center of what is happening in the group) and uses his methods in such a way that they follow the path he has taken. He therefore has no fixed idea of what the result of psychodramatic work on topics should be, but he respects and trusts the protagonist and supports him in achieving the goal that is right for him. The most important methods also serve the protagonist and the group. So the auxiliary ego is chosen by himself (this also means that each group member agrees in principle to take on any role if asked by another group member). The auxiliary ego does not improvise its role, but orients itself towards the protagonist's specifications, which he experiences in the so-called role reversal. The double is a group member who is not chosen but integrates spontaneously into the plot when they feel close to the protagonist. It supports him emotionally by showing him that he understands him. A dialogue begins in which thoughts and feelings are formulated together and suggestions and new aspects of experience are discovered. So far, dear Leon. You already know the most important thing. I still have a bunch of notes I want to organize tonight. You'll find out more tomorrow. I haven't even mentioned the best part yet. At the weekend, the therapist group takes place here, in which one takes his final exam. Mr. Gessmann invited me to take part. Can anything better happen to me than watching a psychodrama live armed with a thick writing pad? I promise you plenty of authentic material for our report! late greetings,

Deine Sonja

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lieber Leon,

Birds from the park-like garden behind the villa woke me up. After breakfast I am now full of energy and am sending you the summary of my notes from the interview with Hans-Werner. (We're on first-name terms now.) I'll send you a summary of his biography later separately. It was an eventful time when Gessmann realized his idea of group psychotherapy. The 1960s had brought unrest and renewal to Germany. Values, norms and rules of behavior of the adults of the Nazi era were examined, thrown overboard and changed. The youth, especially young women, who knew exactly what parents and the church expected of them (how they should be and how they had to behave), suddenly asked themselves: What are we really like? What is important to us? How do we want to live better and more confidently in the future? The interest in self-awareness, in the thoughts and feelings of other people, in allowing and resolving conflicts, in trying out new ways of behaving, was palpable everywhere. Countless "self-awareness groups", "women's groups", "therapy groups" emerged, right up to adult education centres, in which individuals wanted to solve similar problems together with others. Depending on their background interest, a group of trained psychodrama leaders experimented with humanistic psychodrama for children, in teacher training with the question: How can I, as a teacher, stand up to my own problems in front of the class and deal with individual difficult children? How can I teach without falling back into authoritarian behavior or giving up my educational mandate through "laissez faire"? There were no patient groups. According to the understanding of humanistic psychodrama, all people, whether healthy or sick, are on their way to themselves and are called upon to accompany each other. This is how seminars came about in Switzerland and Austria, in which trained leaders, students, people interested in self-awareness and self-realization and others with serious mental problems lived and worked together and all learned from each other. Usually two leaders work together. The groups consisted of 8-16 people, who gathered with the leaders in a circle of chairs to emphasize the equality of all. It is the attitude of the group leader, characterized by acceptance, Authenticity and emotional appreciation, which is transferred to the participants and thus to the group in an exemplary manner. It was a very creative time for all psychodramatists. Everyone looked for and developed new methods for the warm-up phase or the action phase, which they brought together in supervision and passed on. I, too, now feel a definite desire to get to know psychodrama up close. Tomorrow it's time. I heard there are plans to film the whole thing. That would of course also make things a lot easier for us. I am very excited. Greetings from Duisburg, Everyone looked for and developed new methods for the warm-up phase or the action phase, which they brought together in supervision and passed on. I, too, now feel a definite desire to get to know psychodrama up close. Tomorrow it's time. I heard there are plans to film the whole thing. That would of course also make things a lot easier for us. I am

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Deine Sonja

PS: By the way, regarding your question: There is no closed and comprehensive theoretical concept for humanistic psychodrama, because humanistic psychology does not develop a uniform and systematic theory, as is usual in conventional psychology. Humanistic psychology sees itself as a social trend that focuses on the development of a decent life in a humane environment. In addition, value is placed on the personal development of the individual as well as on their responsibility towards the community.

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lieber leon,

the psychodrama meeting has been over for more than a week and I'm only getting around to reporting to you now. Imagine I attended a group session. That was a great experience. I'm sorry that you couldn't be there. A group participant of the therapist training group did his final exam and was given the task of directing a psychodrama play. This was filmed by two other participants. I can send you the most important, already finished part of this film - the

interview and the game scenes - in advance. So that you can better understand the context, I have written down the course of the entire psychodrama game with the preceding topic finding phase (“warming up”) and the concluding so-called “sharing”.

## **There was no more champagne. - Course**

**I. Group and topic finding phase** The impromptu game of the warming-up phase takes the group participants to a lonely island after a long ship voyage due to engine failure, where they settle down for a while and also feel quite comfortable. After some time, another group member arrives on the island as the captain of a small boat to bring the “castaway” back to the mainland. Everyone must now decide what he or she wants to leave behind on the island. In the following chain interview, the group participants share what they personally had to leave behind on the island. The protagonist (Tilly) says firmly that she left nothing behind: "I have nothing to give away. I had to take everything I had there, what I had there. It wasn't much, but it was part of me, that's important to me. I want to keep it that way. At the end of the warm-up, each of the participants formulates their current topic and names a keyword for it. The protagonist says for herself: "Not wanting to give away so much anymore." II. Sociometric choice After the group participants have partially reconfirmed the individual keywords, they choose the one whose topic particularly appeals to them. The protagonist is ready to set up a scene on her theme. III. Interview leader and protagonist are now on the "stage". After being asked by the leader to explain her topic in more detail, the protagonist expresses the feeling that other people are using her. When asked if she can think of a scene, the protagonist describes a specific scene from the recent past. A visit from Klaus, an acquaintance, who invites himself over one evening, tells her about the problems with his wife and becomes more and more intrusive as the evening goes on. IV. Processing phase Scene 1 In the scene that the protagonist sets up together with the director, she is in her apartment with her boyfriend Klaus. They watch a western on TV and drink champagne. Late at night the friend is drunk, feels more and more needy and doesn't want to go home at all. One member of the group is supposed to take on the role of the friend as an auxiliary ego. In order for him to be able to play the role from the protagonist's point of view, she first plays the role of the friend herself. In this way, Heinrich can learn the role. In order to orientate the assumption of roles more and more to the conception of the protagonist, it is repeated several times at the beginning of the game scene. A double occurs to reflect the feelings encountered. The protagonist does not manage to get rid of her boyfriend in the scene, although she feels used, "abused" by him. A feeling opposes what she calls "caring for." A member of the group takes over this feeling as an auxiliary ego. By swapping roles with the protagonist, he gets to know this feeling better. Asked by the leader about a scene in which this feeling of caring was very important, Tilly describes a scene from her childhood. Scene 2 In this scene, 10-year-old Tilly as the protagonist is alone with her little brother Franzi in their parents' apartment. Tilly does her homework and at the same time has to take care of her little brother, who is constantly crying and wants to be taken care of. The protagonist feels overwhelmed and wants to have time for herself, but her mother gave her the task. Another member of the group takes on the role of the mother

who forces her to keep looking after her little brother because she has to work herself. When Tilly fights back, her mother hits her. But Tilly manages to make it clear to her mother that this is not her job and finally eludes her. The protagonists formulate for themselves that they no longer feel like “pulling the coals out of the fire” for their mother. So that she can tell her mother as an adult Tilly, she sets up a scene together with the director in which she deals with the distant mother. 3. Scene The following scene takes place again in the present. Tilly tells her mother over the phone that from now on she can no longer look after her for professional reasons. The protagonist ends the conversation of her own accord and does not engage in any discussion. Tilly realizes for herself that the feeling of "caring for" does not belong to her and sends it back to her mother. 4th scene The original scene with Klaus is set up again. Tilly is now able to get rid of her unloved visitor: "Now listen to me carefully. The television is over, we've run out of champagne, we've run out of wine and you can go home now." She appears energetic and makes her own needs clear. V. Conclusion Group participants share how they felt emotionally involved during protagonist play,

I think you can now get a good picture of the protagonist play in humanistic psychodrama. So much for now. I'll call you tonight and tell you exactly how I felt this weekend. There are many other ways of working on topics in the group in addition to playing the protagonist. Best regards see you later

*Deine Sonja*

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**Here is the video film "There was no more champagne" in its short version:**

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## Biography of Hans Werner Gessmann

**Hans Werner Gessmann** grew up in modest circumstances in the post-war period. The experiences of his childhood and youth have shaped him. His mother expected him to make an effort in school so that he could "have a better life". She supported him in all his endeavors to acquire knowledge and skills. She struggled to keep the small family together and looked after her husband, who was ill with pneumonia for months. Whenever possible, she took on part-time work to earn some money and looked after a single uncle in the tiny apartment until his death, "because there was nobody else who could have done it." From her, Hans -Werner Gessmann certainly learned: "One must never give up" and "One is responsible for the other".



The father was a plumber and installer. He took his job very seriously. Although it cost him his health, he continued to work tirelessly whenever he could. Her father died of bronchial cancer at the age of 53. He choked. His last words to his 16-year-old son were: "Hans-Werner, help me!" This sentence weighed heavily on him for years and is still a motive for looking for solutions and help in apparently hopeless situations. The cramped spatial conditions of his childhood certainly also influenced him. Until he was 6 years old, the family only had two small rooms. He hardly owned any toys. With a few wooden blocks, the little one was sometimes allowed to play on the table while standing on the sofa, because there was no space on the floor. When the family later found a 3-room apartment, it also included a small garden. Here he had all the freedom he wanted. He bred bantams, developed plant fertilizers, studied plants and animals, and made chemical experiments. Already in primary school, and later in secondary school, he founded theater groups with which he rehearsed scenes that were regularly performed in class. As an only child, following youth groups, he found a replacement for the siblings he had always wanted. Especially the cramped conditions at home and the lack of material goods meant that the adolescent tried to realize his ideas and fantasies about living together in the community together with others. After studying education and psychology, he first worked as a high school teacher and at the same time founded an educational and psychological counseling center. During this time he met the Moreno student Ella Mae Shearon in a training seminar and was trained in group psychotherapy "classical psychodrama". As her co-therapist, he worked for several years in almost all European countries and in the USA and gained extensive experience in the psychodrama training centers that were active at the time. In Germany, Hans-Werner Gessmann founded a psychodrama center in the Wasserburg Bergerhausen near Cologne in 1976, which became known for the first use of psychodrama in child therapy, in bibliodrama, in the treatment of sexual disorders, in teacher training and by combining psychodrama with hypnosis. Through his consistent classification of psychodrama in the values of humanistic psychology, he developed the "humanistic psychodrama" in contrast to "classic psychodrama". In 1989 the first educational films on the theory and practice of humanistic psychodrama, book publications and an international journal were made. Today, Hans-

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