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# Mediation: tactics and vision

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## Political commentary on ADR

# Mediation: tactics and vision

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Mediation is a way of engaging creatively with conflict. To engage creatively we need tactics and we need vision. During the latter part of the 20th century, vision in Western democracies became somewhat limited, faded, obscure – perhaps invisible. Tactics, on the other hand, became somewhat inflated, perhaps to the point where vision has become the preferred tactical manoeuvre, given a range of options.

In our current era of Western visionless tactics, creativity in many fields is reduced to versions of the same. The kind of time which predominates is the time of waiting for the next version. Time becomes more instinctive or embodied and less reflective. We produce and consume endless ‘different’ versions of being-in-place without being-in-time. If place is the echo of time and time the echo of place, Western culture may eventually lose its credibility if we continue in the silence of visionless tactics.

We can become slaves to being-in-time, which may go some way to explicating much contemporary terrorism. Innocent people are killed and maimed using the age old excuse that the vision justifies the tactics. We can also become slaves to being-in-place. Over-identifying with time or with place results in conflict becoming something we can engage in only destructively.

If the reader is wondering what all this has to do with mediation, the answer is as follows. Traditionally, mediation is a way of ‘getting out of’ conflict creatively. Our situation in Western democracies today calls for, in addition to traditional mediation, a kind of mediation which enables us to ‘get into’ conflict creatively.

By drawing on aspects of political theory and theories of human evolution this article seeks to formulate assumptions relevant to conflict theory and apply these to mediation. Traditional mediation is understood as the intervention in a situation of conflict by an acceptable third party, a mediator, who has no authoritative decision-making power, is neutral and impartial and who assists the involved parties to voluntarily reach a mutually acceptable settlement of the issues in dispute.<sup>1</sup>

### The end of vision?

During conflict people take sides. By using place and time as ‘sides’ it is hoped that a discussion of conflict can proceed without becoming too entangled in cultural presumptions. An assumption made now is that ‘the West’ is a cultural entity evolving through the ongoing circulation of meaning. This cultural construct is the setting for the opening section of this article, Western political theory, mainly from the mid-20th century, being the focus since conflict is central to politics.

Politics was defined succinctly by Laswell in 1936 as a process of deciding who gets what, when, and how.<sup>2</sup> Politics is essentially about recognising differences and achieving commonalities.<sup>3</sup> It is a process where conflict is identified and, in Western liberal democracies, is managed through a representative voting procedure. According to some writers (for example, Gramsci) conflict in such democracies is managed by a dominant group or class through an ongoing restructuring of the conflict. Gramsci describes the process as ‘hegemonic’ with the dominant class or group making compromises, forging alliances, exerting moral and intellectual leadership and creating networks of institutions and social relations in order to create a basis for



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consent of the people from all classes and sections in society.<sup>4</sup>

Another interpretation is that conflict is managed in Western liberal democracies by the state acting as guardian of the peace and as mediator between group and individual interests while allowing groups and individuals freedom to choose the form of life they wish to pursue.<sup>5</sup> Proponents of the earlier hegemonic version would maintain that the state represents the interests of the dominant group or class and so cannot be a credible mediator. The counter-argument is that if groups and individuals are allowed to compete with as little state regulation as possible, no group or class can maintain its dominance indefinitely. These two visions of managing conflict, the Marxist or socialist vision and the liberal or free enterprise vision, competed for supremacy until the emergence of 'new politics' in the 1970s.<sup>6</sup>

New politics sees no grand struggle, no central conflict unfolding such as a dominant class or the state manipulating the rest of society. Rather, there is a proliferation of struggles or conflicts, which continue indefinitely and unpredictably. A 'grand narrative' of historical change disappears and is replaced by a proliferation of histories or the 'temporal disunity of history'.<sup>7</sup> Human beings are less and less beings-in-time and more and more beings-in-place. According to Foucault, the nature of power as manifested in politics (that is, in conflict) is not bipolar, as 'old politics' assumed; it is unipolar and all-encompassing; it is always already there and no one is outside it.<sup>8</sup> Everyone is in-power. This unipolar, all-

encompassing power is essentially irresistible; it will have its way. Systems evolve as they are going to so any conflict arising from attempts to change a system will never be resolved and if we persevere, the new system will be no better or worse than the old one.<sup>9</sup> All we can do is try to manage systems as well as we can, always seeking to be globally competitive (for the ongoing enhancement of place).

It is not surprising, therefore, that by the late 1980s new politics in the West had become the politics of governance whereby vision is subsumed by tactics. Governance is understood as 'the processes (tactics) by which institutions (systems), both state and non-state, interact to manage a nation's affairs (vision)'.<sup>10</sup> So we arrive at the present state of visionless tactics. Now the political goal is to avoid conflict in my system while seeking to inspire conflict in your system. Pollsters, political analysts, minders and spin-doctors assume a crucial role. Clichés such as 'disunity (conflict) is death' abound. Conflict avoidance within a system, usually called issues management, becomes the holy grail.

Within each system, engaging with conflict usually does not move beyond risk management. This is understandable if all we have is place. We are certainly not going to put our only link to meaning at risk. Perhaps if vision does exist it would be 'business as usual', or more accurately the preferred tactical option to remain in-power; in that 'always already there, irresistible power'. For inhabitants of a consumer culture perhaps this translates to remaining in-consumption. For the religiously fanatical, perhaps it is to

contributions

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remain in-religion. These may be called 'powers that be' as distinct from 'powers that are becoming'. Each system is 'safe' from a creative engagement with conflict; only a destructive engagement is possible. Place/time becomes place-time. Reciprocity/intercourse is all but impossible. It is highly unlikely that the new (reality) will emerge.

An example of contemporary visionless tactics is provided by Australia's National Competition Policy which was endorsed by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) in 1996. The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) is the initial arbiter (backed up by the courts, if necessary) in regard to competition – or the lack of it – practised in Australia's various markets. Competition within this policy is both process and outcome; both means and end; both tactics and vision – or visionless tactics. National Competition Policy has 'elbowed alternative policy approaches out of our parliaments, our public service and many of our advisory bodies.'<sup>11</sup> It is the classic case of 'competition' not wanting to be in competition, the preference being for everyone to be in-competition.

This policy may be seen as normalising compulsive or addictive competition. Other forms of compulsive behaviour – for example, substance abuse or addictive gambling – are sometimes criticised because people are pretending that there is no tomorrow. National Competition Policy asserts there that is no tomorrow; that is, unless we keep striving to be globally competitive, which means whatever people-in-power want it to mean so that they can remain in-power. Competition inflates to hyper-competition which delivers hyper-consumption where the many are in-desire for what only the few can ever have. The acceptable 'new' totalitarianism emerges.

Totalitarianism is understood as total or absolute capitulation to place or to time by 'enough' individuals. Capitulation to each is equally seductive

given that we have a 'primal hunger'<sup>12</sup> for systemic authority that protects and affirms. We may be willing subordinates but there is no recourse beyond the superordinate. One may be said to be in-reality as distinct from being in reality. It may be useful to recall that in the former USSR there were regulatory bodies (as the ACCC is) but they did not make that nation less totalitarian.

### The devising of tactics

In his 1784 essay, 'An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?', Kant suggested that the core of the answer to this question is *sapere aude* (dare to be wise); have the courage to use your own understanding without the guidance of another.<sup>13</sup> 'Another' may mean religion, guru, political philosophy, and so on. The tactics to achieve Kant's vision may be called rational-analytic knowing. This is a way of knowing reality that uses primarily language, especially the language of concepts. It could be called a joining-the-dots way of knowing; a sorting and naming process. It is the way of

of human endeavour.

The non-Kantians (for example, Derrida and Lyotard) were drawn to an awareness that meaning is produced by language and that language possesses people, not vice-versa. Society is not composed of human beings; it is composed of the language by which meaning circulates among these human beings.<sup>15</sup> So there is no point in trying to resolve so-called persistent problems as if the solution is 'over the horizon'. Reality is horizonless because language is horizonless. It is all-place-and-no-time other than the time of birthdays, leaving school, catching the bus, beginning the meeting, retiring from work, funerals. Vision is tactics.

To what extent Kant's vision (or the Enlightenment) has faded is, of course, still a matter of debate. Rorty suggests that within the awareness of non-Kantians, nothing can be certain except perhaps 'what our peers will let us get away with saying'.<sup>16</sup> Possibly, the key word in that quote is 'saying'. Within neo-Kantian awareness, reality is *structured* by language; it is not

Within neo-Kantian awareness, reality is structured by language; it is not produced by language as the non-Kantians claim. But ... as Gadamer argues (for both neo-Kantians and non-Kantians) language is not just one of our tools or possessions in the world; language determines if we have a world at all.

knowing that most of us have grown up believing to be the only 'real' way of apprehending reality.

According to Rorty, during the 20th century there was a parting of the ways as regards rational-analytic knowing; a division into neo-Kantians and non-Kantians.<sup>14</sup> The neo-Kantians (for example, Habermas and Gellner) continued to embrace the basic thrust of Kant's vision. They continued to argue that individuals, using rational-analytic knowing, could gain clearer and clearer views of persistent problems in any field

*produced* by language as the non-Kantians claim. But for both groups, language is pivotal. After all, as Gadamer argues (for both neo-Kantians and non-Kantians) language is not just one of our tools or possessions in the world; language determines if we have a world at all.<sup>17</sup>

The assumption now made is that the prevailing understanding of reality from Kant (and earlier) to Habermas and Derrida depends on what may be called *compulsive* rational-analytic knowing whereby verbalising is also rendered



compulsive. If it can't be verbalised or symbolised (the use of symbols other than speech and writing), what can it mean? It is meaningless. It isn't real. However, as Boff points out, reality is far too subtle and mysterious to be captured in any place or time by our 'nets of language and symbolism'.<sup>18</sup> Part of it remains mysterious. There is always more to know – to the extent that knowing is collaborative. What we call reality is 'immeasurably greater than our reason and our will to dominate it by knowing.'<sup>19</sup>

### The re-embodiment of tactics

Rational-analytic knowing is being understood as a joining-the-dots way of knowing. It is by nature a 'passionate'<sup>20</sup> way of knowing. Its passion is essentially in asking questions. According to Lonergan, when non-human species have nothing to do they tend to go to sleep; but when we humans have nothing to do, we may ask questions.<sup>21</sup> It could be added: we usually supply answers which 'cause' us to ask more questions and so on. The emergence of rational-analytic knowing is usually seen, unambiguously, as an enormous step forward in evolutionary terms.

The assumption now made is that in leaving behind the species who apparently prefer sleeping to asking questions, we left behind much of our awareness of the knowing which provides the foundation of the dots we so love to join. A question then arises: could some of the dots we join be without foundation? However, since the knowing we left behind is given the pejorative term 'non-rational' or 'irrational' the claim of dots with no foundation is not taken seriously.

The passionate commitment to the authenticity of all dots is referred to here as compulsive rational-analytic knowing; a kind of fundamentalism which sees the empowerment of other ways of knowing as threat. Part of the price we pay as addicts of this process is the regular submerging in triviality when we could be experiencing the joy – and sometimes the pain – of emerging reality.

Because our rational-analytic knowing is compulsive, this is the only way we know how to know. So even if

we try discussing the 'other' knowing we left behind, we are still not going to be able to be in-touch. Perhaps the following assumptions regarding human evolution may stimulate our passionate way of knowing into at least being open to what is being referred to as the re-embodiment of tactics.

It seems we emerged as a unique and distinctive species some 4.5 million years ago, evolved into our bi-pedal mode (*Homo Erectus*) about 2 million years ago and as *Homo Sapiens* we have been around for some 200,000 years.<sup>22</sup> Spoken language evolved around 100,000 years ago.<sup>23</sup> An assumption which informs most of the remainder of this section of this article is that rational-analytic knowing, which presumably emerged some time in the last 4.5 million years, represents not only an evolutionary asset but also an evolutionary deficit.

The deficit that would be most obvious to our ancestors of many years ago would probably be in terms of our physicality. To them we would be bipedal, almost hairless creatures with skin that is nearly translucent and providing almost no protection to vital organs, teeth and nails barely visible reminders of what was once a physically formidable creature. They would not be aware of another deficit: we are no longer in-touch; we no longer know reality nor communicate by means of the 'other' ways.

The evolutionary process referred to above may be understood as the evolution from compulsively knowing reality, which may be written as place-time towards collaboratively knowing reality written place/time. In the former, the ways of knowing place and time may be called instinctive or embodied; in the latter, reflective. Embodied ways of knowing (or tactics) were 'lost' or 'left behind' as rational-analytic knowing emerged. The central suggestion of this section is that these tactics can, in a sense, be re-embodied and experienced collaboratively with rational-analytic knowing.

We still have experiences involving these 'lost' embodied ways of knowing. For example, a catchy tune begins playing and one foot is tapping before we realise it has happened. We may be reading an article or listening to a

speech or watching a performance live or a televised presentation when 'something' causes us to experience an involuntary chuckle or a shiver or goose bumps or the formation of tears. The 'something' has a problematic connection with rational-analytic knowing. In discussing newspaper cartoons Leahy says that the best cartoons make the reader laugh first and think later.<sup>24</sup>

There are many stories of individuals in widely different fields who have joined dots in a way that thrilled and captivated people; in other cases, people felt dismayed and destroyed by the conflict that arose.

The communication of these embodied ways of knowing is usually by means of some bodily reaction or emotional release, or intuitive realising. Verbalising appears to be linked with this embodied knowing given that a few milliseconds before our vocal chords begin to vibrate, the muscles of our hands and face begin to twitch.<sup>25</sup> Shlain's proposition suggests that the evolution of the left hemisphere of the human brain may be the crucial evolutionary development in the 'loss' of embodied knowing in that this hemisphere may be 'a new sense organ designed by evolution to perceive time.'<sup>26</sup> In other words, the right hemisphere's ways of knowing reality (place-time) were 'lost' when right and left hemispheres began the evolutionary journey of collaboratively knowing reality (place/time).

How can the discussion in this section be linked to conflict? Four points can be made: (1) we live on a planet of evolving species; (2) to evolve is to engage at times with conflict; (3) our evolving rational-analytic knowing means that we may at times engage instinctively with conflict and we may also engage reflectively; (4) reflection enables choice which may seek not only individual survival but mutual survival.

While there are many different ways of interpreting human conflict, we can possibly all agree on one point: as conflict escalates we experience physiological and emotional reactions –

or embodied knowing. The evolutionary asset of rational-analytic knowing enables us to know these experiences by analysis and speculate on what is going on 'inside'. But because our rational-analytic knowing is compulsive the deficit remains. We are not evolving beyond compulsive analysis towards collaborative analysis.

While there are many different ways of interpreting human conflict, we can possibly all agree on one point: as conflict escalates we experience physiological and emotional reactions – or embodied knowing.

A key assumption throughout the remainder of this article is that conflict is primarily an intrapersonal experience. (Of course, we may try to transfer it by identifying the cause in another person or in a group or system). A second key assumption is that the nature of this intrapersonal experience may be understood as resistance to collaboration; compulsive or addictive rational-analytic knowing resists collaborating with embodied knowing.

### Mediation: intrapersonal tactics and interpersonal vision

Assuming our relationship with rational-analytic knowing and verbalising is addictive, it would seem unwise to prescribe 'more of the same' as a beginning to recovery. Perhaps Wittgenstein had an awareness of this compulsivity when he said: 'Sometimes, in doing philosophy one just wants to utter an inarticulate sound. But that will not prevent someone writing a thesis on whatever sound one makes.'<sup>27</sup> His motto became: don't think; just look.<sup>28</sup> Perhaps Aquinas had a similar awareness 600 years earlier when he commented just before his death that 'all I have written seems to me so much straw'.<sup>29</sup>



Jung expressed the view that conflict may eventually lead to the destruction of the human species but not if 'enough people do their inner work.'<sup>30</sup> 'Inner work' is being understood here as developing greater appreciation of analysis which operates collaboratively with embodied knowing.

Given that our rational-analytic knowing is compulsive, letting go of relentlessly joining-the-dots (that is, endless intrapersonal and interpersonal

compulsive rational-analytic knowing. Dream work usually consists of selecting the striking elements of the dream for some kind of analysis, often incorporating free association or some other technique in attempting to join-the-dots and so extract the meaning. An alternative approach is, upon waking, to acknowledge the dream and wait for embodied knowing to make the first move. Then, rational-analytic knowing works collaboratively with embodied knowing. The 'waiting' is the waiting of surrender. The dots need time to emerge; then we can start joining.

If we can relax with the connection between our embodied knowing and our physical surroundings the experience may become enjoyable. We may need to persevere. Giving ourselves permission to enjoy these experiences without analysing why? or what if? may be experienced as threat. Recovery certainly does not mean somehow trying to avoid analysing or talking or reading or writing. Initially it involves becoming aware of our 'frantic efforts'<sup>32</sup> to

change every experience into words. The recovery being outlined is understood as mediation which enables us to 'get into' conflict creatively, primarily the reality of intrapersonal conflict. The assumption is that the mysteriousness of reality does not oppose knowing but resists until knowing (tactics) is collaborative; until vision is shared vision.

Living through periods of unresolved intrapersonal conflict may involve a degree of painful confusion. Situations may arise where I seem to hit a brick wall: I really need to know – but it's not my decision to try to find out; I'm damned if I do and I'm damned if I don't; I'm too depressed to care; I'm starting to feel what Baudelaire calls 'the wind of the wing of madness'.<sup>33</sup> Shared vision emerges as we become in touch with confidence; a knowing that there is creativity beyond rational-analytical knowing; that there is something good beyond an apparent

There are many other possibilities for engaging with reality that do not involve focusing on joining-the-dots. Our focus could be a cool breeze on a summer night; music to which our embodied knowing responds; the drone of distant traffic; the song of a bird; the eye of a horse; the silvery moon; the movement of leaves on a tree in a gentle (or not so gentle) breeze. In accepting a focus offered, it may be helpful to acknowledge that, potentially, 'everything belongs'.

questions, comments, observations and speculations) may be understood as a kind of surrender to our physicality. We may try this when we are jogging, swimming, skipping, cycling, dancing, climbing, soaking in the tub, standing under the shower, walking in the rain. Recovery may include surrendering to our breathing during meditation. There are many other possibilities for engaging with reality that do not involve focusing on joining-the-dots. Our focus could be a cool breeze on a summer night; music to which our embodied knowing responds; the drone of distant traffic; the song of a bird; the eye of a horse; the silvery moon; the movement of leaves on a tree in a gentle (or not so gentle) breeze. In accepting a focus offered, it may be helpful to acknowledge that, potentially, 'everything belongs'.<sup>31</sup>

Dreams may be important during recovery. Of course, dreams have long been rationalised and subsumed within

'collision of opposites'.<sup>34</sup>

Collaborative analysis – that is, analysis where embodied knowing is playing a crucial role – enables us to accept with 'enough' confidence that it will be good if x happens and it will be good if x doesn't happen. Time is more than the time of x and place is more than the place of x. Compulsive analysis, on the other hand, keeps up the questioning: who? what? why? when? how? as if persistence is enough; as if creativity can be somehow forced. Compulsive analysis seeks control; control of the car moving along the road under repair *and* the stop/go sign.

The individual, intrapersonal mediation outlined above is suggested as a process important in itself and also as a way to enhance traditional mediation competencies. It is based on the assumption that the foundation of creative change in relationships between two or more people, up to a whole system, is individual, intrapersonal change. The most formidable barrier (not by any means the only one) to resolving deeply embedded systemic conflict is the primal hunger of individuals for system authority and approval; for univocal vision rather than evolving, collaborative vision which is listening for the echo.

Perhaps the core assumption of this article is that almost overwhelming authority is currently exercised by compulsive rational-analytic knowing which continues to dominate the broader and deeper system of knowing. Basically unchanged for millennia (in its fundamentals), it has become crushingly repetitive. In his critique of social movements, Touraine<sup>35</sup> speaks of the Subject which he defines as an individual's will to act and to be recognised as an actor. The suggestion here is that this actor may be fed up with performing solely on the interpersonal stage and would enjoy performing also on the intrapersonal stage.

### Summing up

We can continue grossly disrespecting place by blowing up people (including ourselves, sometimes) in terrorist attacks. We can continue grossly disrespecting time by

consuming vast quantities of resources with little thought of future generations of humans and other species. However, the survival of many species, including us humans, is thus increasingly in doubt. Perhaps many of us are already in-doubt; that is, we have all but shut down our desire for a different reality. We then operate with a learned helplessness. We may see ourselves as hardheaded, pragmatic realists but perhaps we are more hard-core cowards; system people yet fearful of our own intrapersonal system of embodied knowing.

Because place cannot hear time in much of Western culture, many Westerners have drifted into the visionless tactics of hyper-competition, which delivers for some the world of hyper-consumption and for the rest the promise of such a world. Hyper-consumers (actual and would-be) may be likened to people who sit down to read a novel but keep flicking the pages. No one actually reads the story. Time is collapsed into place. All we then have is the time of turning the page. Time as the creative partner with place to know reality is lost.

Place/time could be called foundational vision. So vision is foundationally shared vision. Once the forward slash or solidus converts to a dash as in space-time, the opportunity for shared vision is lost. Only the individuality of place or of time is achievable. Totalitarianism emerges, perhaps without much resistance.

The dynamic or tactics of shared vision is collaboration. This enables, for example, contemporary Westerners to resist being in-competition, yet remain in competition. We can also resist being in-religion yet remain in religion. Resistance to shared vision – that is, to collaboration – may be referred to as conflict. Shared vision may at times be painful since we all have a primal hunger for univocal vision; that is, to be in-reality as distinct from being in reality.

While reality is mysterious it is not opposed to knowing. However it is immeasurably greater than our will to dominate it by non-collaborative knowing. There is always more to know provided there is shared vision. A possible application of shared vision



is intrapersonal collaborative analysis (involving embodied knowing and rational-analytic knowing) which may involve interpersonal, collaborative communication. Such collaborative work may begin with a recovery program focusing primarily on individual, intrapersonal mediation.

While mediation traditionally involves 'getting out of' conflict creatively, equally important is the kind of mediation which enables us to 'get into' conflict creatively, primarily, our individual intrapersonal conflict by means of inner work. This will enable mediators to be more sensitive to the echoes of collaboration during traditional mediation and so enable more effective interventions including more effective use of silence. During such moments, our motto could be: don't think; just breathe. The implications may be world shattering but also world transforming. ●

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