

Extrait du School forging new paths

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# **From despair to common hopes: community practices for troubled times**

- English - Develop a democratical and citizen spirit -

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## The Need

- *Why are we developing this project?*

This book brings to American and English-speaking audiences a body of work that has achieved international prominence but, with a few notable exceptions (e.g. Rojzman, 1999a, 1999b), has not appeared in English to date. This work, the theory and practice of transformational social therapy (TST), has been developed and practiced extensively over the past twenty years by the first author, Charles Rojzman, and more recently by his students. Drawing from the fields of depth and social psychology, group therapy, democratic theory, and action research, TST has developed a systematic, theory-based practice that is designed to bridge the social divisions that are becoming a part of life in Western democracies. As societies become multicultural and multiethnic, as people increasingly live their lives in segregated enclaves, and as complexity grows, we must look for practices that help us collaborate to address our common problems, whether at work, in schools, neighborhoods and civil society. It is not a matter of fixing poor or violent people and poor or violent communities: we live in an interdependent world in which we all mutually influence one another. Segregated communities are a problem whether their inhabitants are rich or poor.

TST brings to the table people who are divided by prejudices, hierarchies, silencing, hate and violence; the practice develops relationships, engenders self-reflection, and welcomes the expression of emotions and conflicting constructions of problems. Participants thus hear and share seldom-revealed information that supports collective understandings of problems and their possible solutions. Moving from other-blame and powerlessness to the assumption of shared responsibility, group members become democratic actors who are motivated to work together on problems that cause them distress, in organizations and communities. The practice has enabled cooperation among groups whose social bonds had been severed through the structural violence of segregation and social inequalities in a number of difficult settings, including war-torn and violent communities world-wide (Rojzman, 1999; Rojzman & Rojzman, 2006). TST projects have involved policemen, community groups, and young offenders; teachers, students, parents, and community workers; civil society groups; warring ethnic groups; labor unions, and others. Examples of results include the following. In St.Denis, a poor town at the outskirts of Paris, where TST groups had been formed involving policemen and community members, the riots that engulfed other similar districts in November 2005 didn't happen. Relationships established between police and community members were activated when the riots exploded, and both parties initiated protective actions together. In another community, where the TST process identified a lack of jobs for youth as a major need, some 5,000 jobs were created over a relatively short period following the intervention.

- *Why do people need help on this topic at this time?*

It is well documented that the instant communications, far-flung connections, increased exchanges and vast population movements that characterize our global age are accompanied by more violence as well as more interdependence (Morris and Gimpel, 2007). Renowned political scientist, Robert Putnam, remarked in a 2006 lecture that "one of the most important challenges facing modern societies, and at the same time one of our most significant opportunities, is the increase in ethnic and social heterogeneity in virtually all advanced countries" (Putnam, 2007, 137. Also see Giddens, 1998). Yet, as many have also reported (see Sandel, 1996; Hirst and Bader, 2001; Putnam and Feldstein, 2003; Pettigrew, 2008), social heterogeneity often erodes social trust, sense of community, and participation in civic life. We are urgently called to work together at the very time that our divisions

dampen our hope, constrict our will, and prevent us from sharing our knowledge and acting in consort. To promote and maintain healthy democracies, organizations and communities, in which citizens, workers, and neighbors respect and thrive on diversity, we need to tap into and turn to constructive use those emotional and political energies that now find outlets in apathy, incivility, destructive ideologies, isolation, and social selfishness.

- *How does our book meet this need?*

This book advances a theory and practice, TST, which develops and strengthens social bonds and participation in social action involving diverse and conflicted groups. Social capital theory is based on the understanding that social networks have value and that the social trust, reciprocity, cooperation, and information that flow through them have beneficial consequences for people, institutions, and communities. The TST process contributes to the field by accomplishing something that proponents of social capital agree is hard to do (see Putnam and Feldstein, 2003): create bonds of trust and strengthen social ties and problem-solving capacities by bridging the differences that divide diverse groups, including groups that have different social standing and orientations (Holzman, 2002). TST addresses the psychosocial dimensions that support toxic emotions and block collaboration among these groups. A major premise of TST is that surfacing participants' emotions and their shadow side removes common blocks to open dialogue and leads to the circulation of information that is usually kept secret or is heard only by trusted in-group members. The importance of this feature of TST is supported by research in organizational learning (Boud, Cressey & Docherty, 2006; Levy, 1995; Senge et al, 2004). Pierre Levy (1995) claims that in the new network and information society, it is essential to distinguish between the exchange of information and the co-construction of knowledge: the latter is by far less frequent and more difficult to achieve than the former. Collective intelligence, according to Levy, requires bringing together groups that include as much diversity as possible - of opinion, capacities, and knowledge base - so participants can engage in collective reflection, a "multilogue" that valorizes diversity and organizes it into a creative and productive synergy (in Zara, 2004). Our book offers TST group formation as a valuable tool enabling the co-construction of knowledge by and across diverse groups.

## Knowledge Base

The preceding sections show how TST aligns with existing scholarship and practice and what it stands to contribute to the field. Here we briefly note the main thinkers whose work has helped shape TST theory and practice.

Melanie Klein (*Collected Writings*) offers a process, rooted in the mother-child relationship, through which human beings can come to a genuine tolerance of difference. Kurt Lewin (*Resolving Social Conflicts*) is credited with being the first scholar to discover the importance of the group for changing individuals. TST draws from Lewin's work on leadership of such groups autocratic, democratic, and laissez-faire. Carl Rogers (*On Becoming a Person: A Therapist's View of Psychotherapy*) explains how unconditional acceptance of others can help one evolve toward more cooperation and tolerance. Melanie Klein, Carl Jung, and Sigmund Freud (*Civilization and its Discontents*) provide the tools of depth psychology and metaphors to guide practice, such as the shadow, wounded healer, transference. Peter Senge and Chris Argyris have much to offer through their models of organizational learning. Cornelius Castoriadis (*Une Société `a la Derive*) helps us think through the requirements for creating a genuinely democratic society. Finally, Drew Westen (*The Political Brain*) alerts us to the role of emotions in deciding the fate of the nation.

## Contribution

This book brings together case studies we have collected and developed expressly to illustrate the major conceptual and practical tools of the TST process. At the same time, we also discuss the larger societal and global contexts that speaks to the importance of this work. In so doing we address two important issues. The first is how to include and build connections among people who feel strong negative emotions toward one another and who thus do not generally volunteer to participate in groups that cross social divisions. The second issue pertains to emotions and the violence and conflicts they may engender in such non-volunteer groups. The dominant logic of our time creates binary oppositions such as reason versus emotions, mind versus body, good versus evil, and powerful oppressor versus powerless victim. The tools we provide disrupt these binary constructions and transform fears, hate, prejudices and the sense of being a powerless victim into the respect, trust, principled antagonisms and mutual acceptance of responsibility that are essential to the collective action our world desperately needs.

## Intended Audiences

The main intended audience are advanced undergraduates, graduate students and faculty in the social sciences (political psychology, psychology of peace, conflict resolution studies) organizational leadership and community and organizational development.

The book should also appeal to a general audience of thoughtful people concerned with the rise of ultra-right movements and of illiberal practices in public life and who are interested in exploring ways to support democratic dialogue and action in communities, organizations, and social institutions.

*Post-scriptum :*

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