

**Five Legacies of David Loye:  
GERG, Partnership, Chaos, Darwin,  
and Action Research**

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***Abstract***

My personal memories of David Loye, Riane Eisler, Ervin Laszlo, and the General Evolution Research Group (GERG) during our partnership of 36 years.

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## ***1. Introduction***

David Loye was hard at work on new book projects when he passed. What he had already achieved was enormous, and I will comment here on his work during the time I knew him, from mid 1985 up through mid 2021. These were years of friendship and collaboration of great value to me. He exerted crucial influence on my work. Here are some of the highlights, seen through my mathematical lens.

Dave produced many books. One of these, *The Evolutionary Outrider*, an edited collection of 1998, is the primary source for this memoir. Four chapters are especially relevant here, three by David, and one by Riane Eisler. I was also represented in this book with a chapter on the social significance of the World Wide Web.

## ***2. Before GERG, 1960-1980***

In the 1960s, I had decided that my mathematical work must be useful in regard to world problems. This was in the ambiance of the Cold War, ongoing since 1947. In the 1970s I began my focus on computational studies of chaotic dynamical systems. I embraced catastrophe theory because of its broad applicability in the sciences. In 1980, I tried to work with research groups in the biological sciences but suffered disappointments stemming from large grants. I temporarily gave up my focus on world problems.

## ***3. Meeting Riane, David, and Ervin, 1985***

Then, in 1985, I received a phone call out of the blue from Dave Loye, a stranger. He said he was a social scientist living nearby in Carmel, that Ervin Laszlo was visiting from Italy

and would like to meet me. I was teaching full time then, so we agreed that they would drive to Santa Cruz for a short meeting. He soon arrived with his partner, Riane Eisler, and Laszlo. We had lunch and talked for a long time.

It appeared that they had a major project in mind in connection with world problems, and I was intrigued. Maybe it was too early to give up on my desire to do useful math. I had not tried working with social scientists, so I signed on. Doing good was back on the table. I soon learned that Ervin had been involved in the Club of Rome (famous for the *Limits to Growth* book of 1971) in the 1970s, and this was part of the stimulus for the new project.

This new project involved the assembly of a group of scholars in many disciplines to generate ideas for the future of mankind. Cultural evolution was a central theme. First steps were already underway following a meeting in Budapest in 1984.<sup>1</sup>

#### **4. Beginning of GERG, 1986**

Our meeting in Santa Cruz resulted in my invitation to a further meeting of the new group at the Salk Institute in La Jolla, hosted by Jonas Salk himself, in March, 1986. Besides David, Riane, Ervin, and myself, John Corliss and several others attended. The main outcome of this event was the adoption by the group of the name *General Evolution Research Group*, or *GERG*, and the founding of our journal, *World Futures: The Journal of General Evolution*, with Ervin as editor.

The Salk meeting of 1986 was followed by a series of further meetings, in Florence, Bologna, Prague, and other European cities, during which the size of the group grew substantially. The journal also thrived, and I published several articles there, from 1990 through 2011.

The genesis of GERG was recounted by David in Chapter 3 of *The Evolutionary Outrider*.

## **5. Partnership Studies, 1987**

One of our ideas for GERG was a series of books, the first of which, was Riane's masterwork, *The Chalice and the Blade: Our History, Our Future*, which founded partnership studies as a field in 1987. This carried, on the copyright page, the inscription: *A Catalyst Book of the General Evolution Research Group and the Center for Partnership Studies*. A similar reference to GERG was inscribed in my book, *Chaos, Gaia, Eros*, written in 1988.

The two themes of *The Chalice and the Blade*, Partnership Studies and Cultural Transformation Theory, have been developed extensively by Riane, but David's creativity was manifest in both.

### **5.1. Partnership and dominator models**

Quoting from Riane's Introduction:

One result of re-examining human society from a gender-holistic perspective has been a new theory of cultural evolution. This theory, which I have called cultural transformation theory, proposed that underlying the great surface diversity of human culture are two basic models of society.

The first, which I call the *dominator* model, is what is popularly termed either patriarchy or matriarchy—the ranking of one half of humanity over the other. The second, in which social relations are primarily based on the principle of linking rather

than ranking, may best be described as the *partnership* model.<sup>2</sup>

## 5.2. Cultural transformation theory (CTT)

Quoting again from the Introduction:

Cultural transformation theory further proposes that the original direction in the mainstream of our cultural evolution was toward partnership but that, following a period of chaos and almost total cultural disruption, there occurred a fundamental social shift ... from a partnership to a dominator model ...<sup>3</sup>

These two themes remained central to David's thinking throughout his career.

## 6. *Chaos Theory, 1991*

Chaos theory studies mathematical objects called *chaotic attractors and bifurcations*. The latter have many important applications to the social sciences which now abound in the literature of this society. One of these applications is fundamental to CTT, as indicated above.

Another pillar in David's evolution followed from the chaos revolution of the 1960s and 1970s. News of this development in the mathematics of dynamical systems came indirectly from me, by way of my brother Fred.<sup>4</sup> Together, psychologists David, Fred, and Allan Combs founded the *Society for Chaos Theory in Psychology and Life Sciences (SCTPLS)* in 1991 to further the applications of chaos theory.

## **7. *The Darwin Project, 1994***

Sometime around 1994 David discovered the second half of Darwin's theory of evolution, and this became one of his main preoccupations. In a series of books he excavated Darwin's lost theory, which had been buried by Darwin's heirs.<sup>5</sup> The first half, based on the crucial idea of the *survival of the fittest*, became the dogma of evolution theory over the years. Meanwhile the lost second half, based on the crucial idea of *love*, championed the evolution of the *moral sense*. David felt that exhuming Darwin's theory of love could help save the world, and thus, fit the overall program of GERG. To further this project, he founded the *Darwin Project*, which I joined many years ago.

## **8. *Action Research, 1998***

Another central theme of David's work—related to GERG, partnership, chaos, and Darwin—was his expanded version of the action research idea of Kurt Lewin of 1951.<sup>6</sup>

### **8.1. Kurt Lewin**

Lewin was born Jewish in Poland, earned a PhD in Gestalt psychology in Berlin during World War I, and moved to the USA in 1933. He founded two major action research institutes, the Commission on Community Relations of the American Jewish Congress in 1968 and the Research Center for Group Psychology at MIT in 1945. He is remembered as one of the founding fathers of social psychology and social engineering.

Around 1970 I became interested in Lewin's seminal work on topographical psychology. Dynamical systems theory

was in a crisis, and I was searching for applications from which to find a new direction for my future research. Lewin had suggested that psychological dynamics was guided by a vectorfield on a behavior space, under which stable behaviors were represented by attractors of the vectorfield.

In addition to his field theory, Lewin introduced the concept of action research in 1944, after some 10 years of development. He presented it in an article in 1946, and in his book *Resolving Social Conflicts* of 1948.

Lewin reacted to his life experience of anti-Semitism—including the death of his mother in a Nazi gas chamber and his escape from Hitler in 1933—with a special interest in racism and minority relations. He participated in a 1946 workshop for the Connecticut Interracial Commission. It was in the context of his field work in Connecticut that he honed the action research idea into an effective method of social work, and remedy for racism.

Action research, like all scientific research, involves repetition of the hermeneutic cycle: modeling, testing, model revision, more testing, and so on. This aspect of Lewin's work had a great effect on my own work. In fact, in my book *Chaos, Gaia, Eros*, written in 1988, I wrote:

Lewin's contact with the hermeneutical tradition of Dilthey in Berlin led to his development of social psychology and action research, which branched from hermeneutics, courageously carrying out the hermeneutic program in the practical context of social psychology.<sup>7</sup>

## 8.2. David Loye

After our meeting, David gave me a signed copy of his



book, *The Healing of a Nation*. The inscription is dated November 21, 1985. The book was honored by the Anisfield-Wolfe Book Award for best scholarly book on race relations. It was dedicated to the memory of Kurt Lewin and W. E. B. Du Bois.

The book is divided into two parts—Part One: *The Years of Sickness and the Search for Therapies*, and Part Two: *Healing the Nation*. The latter comprises six chapters of remedies, two devoted to Kurt Lewin. These two amount to about ten percent of the entire book, and remain the best source I know for Lewin's life and ideas. They are the main resource for this section, along with David's chapter 12 in *The Evolutionary Outrider*, entitled *Evolutionary Action Theory: a Brief Outline*.

David was obviously aware of Lewin's action research and its applications early in his career. But by 1998 he had significantly extended the idea, and it played an important role in all his thinking. The terms *active human agent*, *evolutionary action theory*, *active moral agent*, and *moral action* appear throughout his work. His presentation of this extended theory comprises Chapter 12 of *The Evolutionary Outrider*. Therein he wrote:

In psychology, the action-research approach coupled with the field theory of Kurt Lewin remains the most advanced statement of the perspective of action-oriented theory. In evolutionary theory, general evolution theorist Ervin Laszlo is the pioneering exponent of this perspective.<sup>8</sup>

David's extension of action research involves the second half of Darwin's legacy: Moral sensitivity exerts an influence on evolution by determining which options to promote by human activity. Ervin Laszlo's book of 1987, *Evolution, the*

*Grand Synthesis*, is a brilliant development of this idea in the context of a complete history of evolutionary systems thinking from the Greeks forward.

## **9. After GERG, 2000**

Due to the proximity of Carmel to Santa Cruz, my personal relationship with Riane and David developed into a lasting and supportive friendship. As time went on, the vitality of GERG diminished. Riane was primarily occupied with her very successful Center for Partnership Studies, its journal, and many important lectures worldwide. Meanwhile, David settled into his major focus on Darwin's second half, the related Darwin Project, and his series of books on Darwin beginning in 2007.

And I continued my applications of chaos theory in various fields.

## **10. Conclusion**

Collecting the key events of this story into a chronological list, we have:

- 1984, Ervin's pre-GERG meeting in Budapest
- 1985, My meeting with David, Riane, and Ervin
- 1986, Group meeting with Jonas Salk, founding of GERG and *World Futures*
- 1987, Riane's *The Chalice and the Blade*,  
Ervin's *Evolution, the Grand Synthesis*
- 1988, Writing of my book, *Chaos, Gaia, Eros*
- 1991, Creation of the *Society for Chaos Theory and the Life Sciences*
- 1992, David's first publication on the moral sense

1994, Beginning of David's *Darwin Project*  
1998, David's *The Evolutionary Outrider*  
2007, David's first book on Darwin's lost theory

David's career spanned an enormous spectrum of the social sciences, systems thinking, and integrative studies. His creativity was spectacular, his influence enduring. He was the epitome of partnership, cooperation, action research, and human-action. He performed his teachings, walking the talk, leaping over boundaries.

### ***Notes***

1. For the full story by David Loye, see (Loye, 1998; ch. 3), and also the website, [thedarwinproject.com](http://thedarwinproject.com).
2. (Eisler, 1987; p. xvii)
3. (Eisler, 1987; p. xvii)
4. (F. D. Abraham, 1990)
5. See especially (Loye, 2007).
6. See (Loye, 1988; p. 8, and ch. 12).
7. (Abraham, 1994; pp. 16-17.)
8. (Loye, 1998; p. 170)

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