

# CONSTELLATION

## A HORRIFYING INCIDENT

At a Family Constellation workshop recently, a woman in her late forties brought a complex issue for which, in the process of the constellation, an unexpectedly powerful and healing solution emerged. Initially, she stated that she wanted to look at the factors in her family of origin that might have led her to become involved in what she described as a 'horrific incident'. Since that time she had spent several years in individual therapy focusing on the event. She had been kidnapped and raped and had managed to escape. She believed she had worked through the fears and emotions associated with the incident and had achieved resolution. She was therefore only interested in what impact it might have on her current family and her children.

She told how she was the twenty-eighth of thirty-six women who had experienced the same fate, though most of these women had not escaped and had in fact been killed. She also told me that her father was an alcoholic and then she went into detail about her various siblings. I realised that I had an 'anxious talker' sitting next to me. Whenever I asked her a question, it would unleash a torrent of abusive incidents that had occurred throughout her childhood and all seemed to be of equal value. Most of these were not unusual to

childhoods that included siblings, but instead of saying that she and her brothers fought, she described it as her brothers 'torturing' her.

After listening to a litany of these incidents, I made a suggestion. I said to her that I would work with her on two conditions: one, that she remain silent and two, that I would pick the issue. She agreed and then began to speak. I put my index finger to my lips and she stopped talking. I wondered, for a moment, if I had just symbolically kidnapped her and was about to 'rape' her. However, I knew her therapist, who was at the workshop, and he had earlier assured me of her ego strength so I quelled my reservations and proceeded.

I chose the issue based on an internal sensation of quivering that I was experiencing. She added that she was experiencing the same sensation. Silence followed as I waited to feel the movements of the soul. She began to speak again and I motioned her to be silent. I waited until the silence deepened.

Fourteen women were present at the workshop that day and I asked them all to lie down on the floor. They slowly took their positions, some with pained expressions, some neutral. As the last woman lay down, the client looked at them, looked at me, then looked back at

the women on the floor. Suddenly, she burst out crying and it quickly escalated into gut-wrenching sobs. She began moving towards the women and I told her to follow the movement. She almost melted to the floor and reached out to touch the women saying, "I wanted to save you!" She repeated that phrase several times with such vehemence that it was clear that was all she had wanted. After a time, I told one of the 'dead' representatives to say, "It is not your time. Go back to life." Then, spontaneously, all the women said it, one at a time. I then offered additional healing sentences. I asked the women to say, "You will come when your time is up, and until then live a full life."

It was a powerful Constellation, which had a significant impact on everyone. It was clear that this Constellation touched on several of the other women's issues about rape and sexual abuse. We took a break because of the power of the Constellation. Everyone had been touched by the experience of witnessing and participating.

As we continued the workshop, I noticed that the client slept for the rest of the afternoon. At the end of the workshop the next day, I asked her how she felt and she responded by asking if I knew the phrase, "... a peace that passes all understanding."

# The use of figures for Constellations in individual sessions

In general, constellations open up the family system and provide us with a view of the hidden dynamics, systemic entanglements (Hellinger 2000) and invisible bonds, (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Spark 1973) beyond the narrative and biographical information offered by the client. The constellation seems to represent another dimension and tap into the unconscious level of the family system, with the individual feeling its influence. Participating in a group working with constellations, the client gains access to this level, through the experience and feedback of the representatives.

*So what are the benefits of this approach?*

- It is a simple way of familiarising the client with constellations and the art of thinking systemically and can be useful when there is no group available at the time, or when the client, for whatever reason, cannot participate in a group.
- It can act as a preparation for joining a workshop or a follow-on afterwards.
- Particularly with constellations using A4 sheets or figures, the client can look at his family from a different perspective and view the family structure from the outside, in privacy.
- In other cases, couples come together and have the opportunity of looking in depth at their relationship or witnessing a constellation of their partner's system and thus deepening their bond as a couple.

*Nowadays, enough experience has been gained from the use of constellations in individual sessions, either with figures or objects or by means of visualisations, that it can be considered a viable alternative to constellations in groups. In this article, I propose to describe how I work with individuals using figures.*

- For the therapist who has just begun working with constellations, individual sessions have the advantage of avoiding the complexity of interpersonal dynamics that representatives bring into a group, thus freeing him to concentrate on his own intuitive sense of what is emerging in front of him.
- This approach is also useful in supervision, where it can help the therapist clarify complex family structures, or face his own blind spots and see where he may be entangled with the family dynamics of his client. At the same time, he can gain insight into his own family system and use his awareness of it to examine the client's family.

*Is neutrality possible?*

In a group, the therapist follows the direction indicated by the representatives, who are unaware of the client's family story and therefore remain neutral. In individual settings this external source of information is not available.

So, the basic question for the therapist is whether it is possible, in an individual session, to achieve the phenomenological quality provided by the statements of neutral

representatives present in a workshop.

It would seem so, for the following reasons:

- The client's whole existence is embedded in the memory of the family field.
- The therapist is able to extract accurate information from the client's verbal and non-verbal messages.
- The client can become aware of sensations and movements in his body and any emerging emotions or images.
- With the same consideration and tactfulness needed when moving in the 'knowing field' of a group constellation, the therapist tunes into the person opposite him with sensitivity to the slightest change.
- Apart from the non-verbal messages coming from the client, the therapist pays attention to his own thoughts, emotions and body sensations, as they arise during the session. He becomes a sensitive receptacle and sometimes takes on the role of a representative in a system, especially if the client has difficulty discerning or confronting an entanglement.

It is therefore expedient to assume that whatever occurs in the session is relevant to what is happening and to check it out with the client to see if it has any significance.

Participating in a constellation in an individual session gives the client a chance to experience the dynamics of his family system within himself, and to face the truth of what emerges through his own perception and feelings and the understanding gained through dialogue with his therapist. In the same way as in a group constellation, the client trusts what he hears from the representatives, even when it is surprising or unfamiliar to him. He trusts the authenticity of his own images and feelings and often gains a new view on his family system.

It's as if a group constellation shines a torch on what is happening, while in an individual session we need to look through a good quality microscope.

### USE OF FIGURES

Little figures can be used as one of the techniques of constellation in individual sessions. Constellations with figures follow the same procedure as the constellation in a group, but in this case, the figures are used as representatives instead of the persons of the group. This technique allows all parts of the family system to simultaneously be present and to shed light on invisible aspects of the relationships.

The therapist begins by posing some clarifying questions to the client, like, "Since our discussion, which person comes to your mind now?" or, "What is the most important issue for you today?" or he simply addresses a question from the client. This brief dialogue will allow the therapist to clarify in his mind where to begin. When this is clear, he asks the client to close his eyes and concentrate on his breathing. The therapist does the same in order to concentrate and also to help the

client, who may be restless or anxious, to become more centred in himself. He then names the persons with whom the constellation will start and asks the client to choose the corresponding number of figures.

As with constellations in group therapy, the client can choose any figure and from the moment the figure takes its place in the space, it will fully represent the person it portrays. Since nothing can be considered as accidental during the session, any difficulty in choosing, and the manner in which the client touches and places the figures is never without real significance.

After the selection, the client sets up the constellation in the same manner as with a group. As soon as he chooses his representatives, he holds them for a while in his hands to establish a rapport and then places all the figures one by one in the given space, according to his intuition.

### METHOD

After the selection of the figures and the setting up of the constellation have taken place there are two different ways in which someone can work:

With the first method, the movement of the representative figures is completely undertaken by the therapist with the client observing his own feelings in response to these movements and when necessary, moving the figure that represents himself, after consultation with the therapist. The therapist is responsible for moving all other representatives, putting himself in their position and understanding the dynamics. The therapist observes any feelings or body symptoms that may occur to him or the client, during the time of the constellation. Based on the feelings that the therapist experiences from the different positions or the client from his own, the therapist names the dynamics and proposes phrases for the representatives,

testing their results on the client, in order to discover further moves.

With the second method, the representation is divided between the therapist and the client. As with the previous method, the client chooses the figures and places them in the given space according to his intuition. Then, he may take the place of the one of the figures in the constellation, acting as representative. The therapist is aware of the overall dynamic and may himself take up position as representative, staying in touch with physical or emotional reactions, both from himself and the client. The difference with this second method is that the client gains insight into how other family members may be feeling and his experience of his family is thus enriched. The client is also more readily able to accept the therapist's next step proposals as valid, since they are in accordance with his own experience.

When the constellation seems complete, the therapist invites the client to look at the image created by the figures in front of him, before removing them. This procedure may last from 10 seconds to 5 minutes. Some clients need to observe this new image for quite a while. Others may touch the figures with great attention, looking at them in the palm of their hand and caressing them, since they are still bearers of precious feelings or represent important family members.

The way in which the client puts away the figures can provide the therapist with additional information on how the constellation has affected him; who are the most important people; which is the most influential relationship; where the greatest difficulty lies and which image he most needs to take away. The clients usually feel satisfied, touched and able to absorb any truth that may emerge from the placement of the figures.

## CASE EXAMPLE

D has come to therapy in order to face her fear of her final oral exams in the Law School. She explains that she feels extremely threatened by the idea of the committee judging her and being physically so close to them. To the therapist's question, "If you left this office today with a solution in your hands, what would it be?" she replies, "I want to know what exactly am I afraid of."

So, she is invited to choose two figures, one for herself and one for the fear. She chooses rather easily a woman for the fear.

She holds both of them in her palm and places them opposite one another. She concentrates for several minutes and the expression on her face shows no sign of fear. The client comments that she feels rather attracted to the other person. The therapist affirms the same feeling as the representative for fear.

The client feels in her body the need to move forward, so she places her representative figure alongside fear and to the left.

The therapist begins to feel a change in her breathing, pains in her stomach and anxiety around the eyes and asks, "Who else could be afraid?" After thinking, the client says, "My mother."

The therapist chooses a figure and puts it, according to her intuition, beside the client, on the right. The

client turns and looks at the therapist, who asks, "Does something change, now that this person is added? How do you feel?" "I would like to look at her," she says and turns the figure, so that she can face her; she looks at her in the same way that, a minute ago, she was staring at the therapist.

The therapist asks, "If the representative for fear were a member of the family, in this or in a previous generation, who could that be?"

The client thinks and asks, "You mean there is a possibility of my fearing people in the family whom I don't know and who were killed in the war?" The therapist notices she has used the words: "people in the family" not "relatives" and asks her to comment on this. She mentions that her maternal grandmother was married twice. Her first husband was killed in the war and the second lost his first wife and two sons in a public execution in their village, during the civil war.

"These people are important members of your family system and their destiny might be connected to your fear," the therapist replies. "Take a moment to visualise them and see which one makes you afraid." She nods and says spontaneously, "the woman."

The moment the fear is given a face, the client takes a deep breath, straightens her back and sits more comfortably.

The therapist places beside the woman her two boys who were shot together. The client takes another deep breath. The therapist proposes a phrase: "Now, I see you all." She nods and repeats it, deeply touched.

The session draws to an end. The therapist invites the client to take a second look at the scene and then place the figures back in their box. The question: "What exactly am I afraid of?" has been answered.

There are of course many unfinished steps following on from this constellation: to express her respect for the destiny of those people; to feel their importance for the system; to see how these feelings affect her relationship with her mother, but she has made a significant first step and found a different image. This step has changed how she feels. She has embraced in her heart and mind, forgotten and excluded members of the family and she has discovered the origin of her fear. She needs time before any next step.

She puts the figures back into the box, but, for a moment, she holds in her palms the figures of herself and the representative for fear, caressing them with her fingers, silently, seriously, tearfully.

She smiles and looks at the therapist, "I'm ready, now." The session is over.

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# Constellations in Individual Sessions

REVIEW OF TWO BOOKS AND GENERAL DISCUSSION

## INTRODUCTION

Working with constellations in an individual context is rightfully becoming regarded as an extremely important part of the field of constellations and systemic thinking. It is not every professional's wish to work in groups, and indeed it is not always practical, or advisable for the client. Many therapists, counsellors and other workers want to incorporate this thinking and method into their individual work with clients, either in a one-off session or within the context of an on-going working relationship.

The common question that arises in thinking about applying this work in an individual context is whether what we see and experience in a constellations group setting, including the phenomenon of representative perception<sup>1</sup> can be transposed into an individual context, with just the facilitator<sup>2</sup> and the client. I will return to this question in the general discussion and look at the contribution these two books make to this topic.

The general thrust of attention in the world of constellations work has been towards working in groups. In fact, for many people this is the only context in which they have seen Hellinger's work. These two books start to fill a gap in the currently available literature in English, by specifically addressing the growing interest in applying this method in

*In My Mind's Eye, Family Constellations in Individual Therapy & Counselling* by Ursula Franke, translated by Colleen Beaumont, published by Carl-Auer-Systeme Verlag, 2003.

*Entering Inner Images, A Creative Use of Constellations in Individual Therapy, Counselling, Groups and Self-Help*, by Eva Madelung and Barbara Innecken, translated by Colleen Beaumont, published by Carl-Auer-Systeme Verlag, 2004.

an individual context.

Both books invite us into the working environment of their authors, giving us insights into their particular areas of interest. With many intimate case examples, they demonstrate how they integrate constellations and the orders of relationships into other aspects of their work with individuals.

Whilst assuming some prior experience and knowledge of constellation work on the part of the reader, the authors offer detailed instruction and insight into their thinking about some aspects of this work. However, both books encompass much more than constellations and systemic work.

## IN MY MIND'S EYE

The title *'In my Mind's Eye'* refers primarily to the imaginative, visualisation component of Ursula Franke's work, and many examples are given of how she moves between a physical constellation using

objects, to an internal visualisation of a needed encounter. The book specifically points in its title to working in 'individual therapy and counselling', thereby immediately making its intention clear.

The author does not address the application of this work in any other field, for example working individually within an organisational context. However, much of the content could, I imagine, be adequately transferred.

Ursula writes a very interesting chapter on feelings: primary, secondary and adopted, and their relationship to the movements of reaching out and turning away. She combines her work with constellations and her understanding of the Orders of Love with a highly skilled knowledge and understanding of the body as a diagnostic tool and trustworthy resource for both therapist and client. Quite a major part of her book is given over to examining the effects on the body (and thence the psyche) of different types of breathing, posture, movement and

experience, and she offers exercises and experiments for client and therapist, to increase awareness of these processes. This book shows a care and concern for those moments when we may find ourselves dealing with slightly more than we expected. She cautions us not to extend ourselves beyond our limits and at the same time offers good practical advice on how to deal with more extreme circumstances. Whether one might be able to access this advice in those circumstances is always questionable, but her suggestions alert us to possible situations, thus enhancing our level of preparedness.

I wonder if Ursula is perhaps a bit uncertain of her audience. The fact is that constellations work is proving to be of interest to people from a wide range of backgrounds and professional disciplines. While the title of the book is obviously aimed at therapists (not, however, just psychotherapists) and counsellors, her sense of caution and desire to teach us so we avoid mishap, makes me think that she probably realised that this book might be read by a variety of people. *In My Mind's Eye* is a book, which is accessible to many, not only those with a counselling or psychotherapeutic background. In fact, the experienced psychotherapist or counsellor will find much in it that is quite familiar.

### ENTERING INNER IMAGES

Eva Madelung and Barbara Innecken offer us Neuro-Imaginative Gestalting (NIG), an adaptation from Neuro-Linguistic Programming, with an emphasis on working with imagination rather than language, and on 'gestalting'

rather than 'programming'. By 'gestalting' I understand that they mean a more organismic unfolding of the client's own inner movement towards a life-enhancing position; in other words their emphasis here is on the client as their own authority rather than NLP's notion of the therapist as the 'programmer' of the client.

The book also gives us many interesting thoughts about systemic theories, including a chapter entitled 'The Existential Paradox' which discusses in detail two views of reality, the systemic-constructivist and systemic-phenomenological: either we construct our reality, in which case we can change it, or reality is as it is and therefore not changeable. This second reality is the view that Hellinger has highlighted to great effect, as the authors put it:

*"reality as it is manifested to us... the unchangeable givens in our lives."* [p.183]

These two views of reality are at the same time paradoxical and complementary, a case of holding two truths at the same time, and the authors go on to make a link between our belonging as related to the manifested reality (I belong to *this* particular family and no other) and our need for autonomy or individuality as related to constructed reality (I choose to see my life in *this* way).

With Neuro-Imaginative Gestalting they combine constructivist ideas and applications (from NLP and Brief Therapy) with constellations, adding in a creative component from art therapy. Their work

involves asking the client to create drawings of his representatives. These drawings are then used by the client as 'spatial anchors' in setting up constellations and can represent anything from family members to more abstract elements such as: 'the problem'; the 'past'; an unformed idea of a good solution; experiences such as 'solitude' or 'solidarity' and so on. They suggest that the client creates these drawings with the non-dominant hand in order to by-pass the more rational left-brain and connect with their more intuitive side. This also helps the client with any self-consciousness they may be feeling about their artistic ability. As any therapist who has ever invited a client to do a drawing in a session knows, this work can often result in profound insights on its own; for instance, just looking at how I might draw something to represent my mother can, in itself, be revealing. So, using these drawings to set up a constellation and inviting the client to stand on each one and report their experience, offers additional exciting possibilities. From the case accounts they give in the book, it is obvious that they are willing to set up any kind of constellation using this method, and the drawings become a major part of the process.

### GENERAL DISCUSSION

Now I would like to take a more general look at the initial question regarding the transposition of constellation work from a group to an individual context and more specifically at what these books may offer us in this respect. For those of us who have learnt about constellations primarily in groups, the central issue at stake when we



come to work in an individual context is: how do we take what we have learnt about this way of working into that other context? The simple practical issues are addressed to some extent in these two books, but what is perhaps not addressed so fully are the broader, less tangible considerations of what qualities a facilitator needs in order to confidently transfer their group learning into an individual context. So, I would like to take a look at what I believe these qualities to be and how this transfer might happen.

Firstly, by being exposed to the ideas and revelations of this deeper systemic level, we are permanently changed as clients, as human beings and as therapists. We can never 'un-see' or 'un-experience' what we have seen and experienced, and this exposure must influence the way we live our lives and work with our clients, whatever the context. The underlying principles that we encounter, naturally become part of the ground of our perspective in working with people: our way of seeing our clients and their problems becomes more inclusive and respectful of other members of the system, regardless of what they have done. We develop a less judgemental, more understanding attitude, in some ways finding ourselves both at a distance and yet also present to the system as a whole, with a motive towards finding possible resolution that is good for the *system* as much as for the client.

Secondly, the natural orders or principles that we encounter within constellations clarify the *nature*, or character of the particular system

before us, giving us insight into what is likely to be needed and what might constitute a good place for the client.

Thirdly, for most therapists the idea of 'setting up' something is not new. For the last 70 years therapists have been 'setting up' situations: with stones, toys, cushions, plants, building blocks, chairs, people, whatever came to hand, finding this a useful way of understanding how things are for the client, and of helping the client to move beyond their habitual view of things. What we gave *less* importance to formerly was the directional information and the deeper story that this might point to. Part of our education through our exposure to Hellinger's work is to look for the deeper, more archetypal story: a person looks out from the constellation... are they perhaps leaving? Does that imply death? Are they looking for someone else?

Fourthly, we learn in time to trust the process of each constellation. In a group this means trusting what the representatives report, even if it doesn't seem to make good sense at first. Albrecht Mahr talks about practising 'radical inclusion'; in Love's *Hidden Symmetry* (1998, p.187) Bert Hellinger says:

*"My experience is that it's almost always safe to trust the representatives...."*

We come to accept that everything that happens when a constellation is running, is to do with the constellation. And from this we come to have an expanded notion of the field, expanded in a way that we do not yet fully understand, but as Hellinger says:

*"I'm unable to explain this phenomenon, but I see that it's so, and I use it."* [ibid, p.xii]

Now, when we look at anything laid out in a pattern, we have as part of our ground that sense of expansion and the possibility that there is more here than we can as yet adequately understand and account for, and we can work with it.

The first three points come to influence our work in individual sessions probably quite naturally and without great effort. We think differently about our clients and the issues they bring. We make new interventions and suggestions. Perhaps, as Hellinger suggests, we are more inclined to align ourselves with the client's mother in the face of the client's persistent and stubborn resentment. We are less divisive in such a case, perhaps refusing to align with the client and bad-mouth her mother, but endeavouring to support the system as a whole.

The fourth point brings us to the issue of the client as self or representative in their own one-on-one constellation. This is the question that tends to make some people decide that they cannot give full justice to constellations work in an individual context: is the work limited or impaired by the absence of independent people to act as representatives?

#### **CLIENT AS REPRESENTATIVE IN THEIR OWN CONSTELLATION**

What about the ability of a client to be a useful and usable representative? Is it true to say that a client, who is bringing an issue that colours

their view of themselves and their lives, cannot be a useful representative in their own constellation? Bert Hellinger has said that they tend to be too attached to their ideas about things. It is true that another person, as a representative for the client, may come relatively clear of thoughts or ideas about the issue, but we often find that representatives are representing issues that are similar to their own. Nonetheless, it does become even more complex when we invite a client to become their father or mother, with all their emotional and systemic entanglements colouring their view of their family.

I currently think of this as a question of degrees. To what *degree* can this client at this time make this shift?

Both books offer the use of the meta-position as a way of moving the client out of their known story to find an overview, which helps them make a shift away from their established position. This doesn't necessarily take the work to the deeper systemic dynamics, but it does usually result in some kind of shift of awareness and expanded view. My thinking is, that if the client can make *this* shift, perhaps they can make more and bigger shifts. Eva and Barbara talk of: "*looking through the eyes of another,*" helping the client to experience what it might be like to see things as the other does. As we already know from the history of two-chair work and psychodrama, such a shift can often produce important insights.

Eva and Barbara seem to think it unlikely that work in an individual context will move far from the level

of the 'biographical' (the client's personal experiences and version of events, their construction of their life). They state that:

*"...we should consider a family constellation in an individual setting using spatial anchors, figures or imagination, to be primarily in the realm of a constructed reality"* [p.47] (my emphasis), and they therefore consider that most often the work will proceed at the 'biographical' level rather than the level of deeper systemic dynamics. With this in mind, their book is there to show us an inclusive view of what constellations work can be, incorporating systemic views, a sense of the natural order of things as well as the process of 'setting up' constellations. They are suggesting that, in spite of their opinion of these limitations of the work, there is still great value to be had. This is obvious from the many case examples they provide.

I find Ursula more hopeful, because her primary interest is in the body, which she regards as the most relevant and truthful source of information and her interventions flow from this instinctive commitment to our physicality. It is from the body that those mysterious movements 'the movements of the soul' emanate. She talks about how a client can stand in the position of his father for example and in doing so, he "*enters his father's field.*" [p. 34] This says more than "*looking through the eyes of.*" The notion of entering another's field has an effect on us; we have a mysterious sense of what that means, it invites a more spatial and inclusive experience. It is not just '*looking*', it is '*entering*', it invites '*being*'... it speaks of

energy, experiencing with all senses. It may sound small, but I think the shift in emphasis is considerable and that if we approach our work with this sense in ourselves, that is what we will find, and that is what we will then, even without words, invite our clients to find. This, in my opinion, has the potential to provide the necessary shift.

In my experience in groups, if I ask the question: "What is happening with you?" it takes the person (and indeed often the whole constellation) away from their physiological phenomenological experience. They *have* to go into their head to even understand what I am asking, and even though they may answer with an account of physical experience, it is often a remembered experience from a moment ago; the immediacy is lost. It is also a question that invites a 'thought-full' answer. We come from a cultural tradition that values thought and reason over all else and with a question like this we are left to our own devices as to what takes precedence in our experience, and most likely it will be to do with our thoughts *about* our experience. The old therapeutic adage holds good: any sentence that starts with: "I'm feeling that..." precedes a thought "about".

Ursula directs her client's attention to their physical experience. She may use questions such as: "How are you standing on the floor?" "How is your breathing?" "How is your weight distributed?" These all direct our attention at very specific physical experiences. It would be hard not to answer directly. And if there is something that she notices about their posture she will draw the



client's attention to it. Ursula is also not averse to using herself as a representative which, if done sensitively and modestly, offers a useful model to the client for attending to physiological information, thereby extending the possibilities of opening up the work to the deeper systemic levels. Surprising information can be gained in this way, perhaps even at times as surprising as happens in groups.

### VISUALISATIONS

My last words are about visualised constellations. This obviously is an important part of Ursula's work, so I would like to have had more of her thinking on the subject of visualisation. Even though the book is entitled '*In My Mind's Eye*', there are barely three pages on visualisation as a method, although it is obvious from her case study accounts that this is a fundamental part of what she does.

When we are visualising something we are less in our thoughts, we have our eyes closed, we enter a slightly hypnotic state, and it is often a physically relaxing process. It is astonishing how a visualisation can unfold, as if we are watching a movie, with its own momentum and character; frequently what a client would like to happen in the visualisation doesn't... but what does happen, if followed through,

seems to find its own truth and harmony; people in visualisations seem to move of their own accord, speak when not asked to, grow bigger or become smaller, change shape even, all happening quite spontaneously; the client can often hold great crowds of people in their imagination with ease; needed encounters can take place privately, profoundly and emotionally within one's mind's eye. The use of visualisation in the work of constellations, I am convinced, needs much more careful research and consideration.

### CONCLUSION

Making a brief differentiation between these two books, I would say that *In My Mind's Eye* looks towards the family system and the needed encounter on a deeper systemic level as the source of healing, whereas *Entering Inner Images* focuses on connecting the client with their inner creativity and life-resources as a means of helping them make different choices in the here and now. Both books make a useful contribution to systemic constellations as a whole by giving us the benefit of the thinking of three very experienced practitioners about this work, and in addition they contribute towards the ongoing debate about the possibility and appropriateness of transposing this work to an individual context.

Hellinger's systemic work is on the rising side of an evolving and emerging wave, nowhere near its peak, and tremendously exciting for that. There is space here for new thinking and creative working that we can all contribute to. We don't yet know the limits of this work, and all our ideas and thinking have novelty. Hellinger has offered us a unique opportunity to take what he has shown us, grow with it, think about it, experiment with it and give back our thinking and experiences. These two books are important signposts along the way, offering as they do, the authors' new thinking and creative experiences.

I thank the three authors for their books. It has been a profoundly challenging and exciting business immersing myself in them and finding a way of presenting them to you. There is much more in these books that I haven't even touched on. Read them both. Enjoy!

### Notes:

<sup>1</sup> I have used Albrecht Mahr's term 'representative perception' to refer to the phenomenon of a representative having distinct experiences that seem to replicate the reality of the person they are representing. There are other perfectly valid terms in use.

<sup>2</sup> I use the word 'facilitator' because I am aware that when discussing this work we are addressing a larger field of practitioners than just therapists, psychotherapists and counsellors.

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# Bowing

*A discussion took place recently between Hunter Beaumont (HB), Eva Madelung (EM), Wilfried de Philipp (WdP) and Jakob Schneider (JS) about aspects of the constellation work that have been criticised by the public. One of the topics discussed was 'Bowing'.*

*This article is an extract from this discussion*

JS: Recently a participant in a group mentioned her nephew who, in a constellation, should have bowed before his father, but couldn't do it. As a result, the facilitator broke off the constellation. Since then things haven't been going well for the nephew and he doesn't want to know anything more about family constellations. In the same group there was another participant from whom I got the impression that bowing before her parents could re-open the flow of affection to them. During her constellation I said to her, "*You must bow before your parents.*" She didn't do it, so I asked her to sit down and requested that her representative do it for her. This she did and afterwards felt very relieved. Following the bow, the parents lovingly opened their arms and the representative was able to go to them.

I briefly considered whether I should break off the constellation. However, the client had a very obvious need and the constellation hadn't brought to light anything decisive about the background of the parents' entanglement. I therefore decided not to break off, but to take the client out in order to give her time and distance and to enable her, as observer, to see and feel the effect of bowing.

A guest student asked me later in the break if it wouldn't have been better to break off. For some reason I resisted because I noticed that the woman was suffering and struggling to find a solution to the conflict with

her parents. I didn't feel she was being arrogant in any way, which is why my feeling was to give her time.

EM: I often do the same and have the feeling, just as an analogy, that enabling this experience through a representative is a similar intervention to Milton Erickson's story-telling. Something shows up and becomes evident and that's like the telling or the acting out of a story. The client is obviously not at the point where she can go through with it out of inner conviction, but she's seen what the effect would be if she could. That has an after-effect and helps them on their inner path. That's more or less how I imagine the effect.

HB: I find it very difficult, Jakob, when facilitators other than you say, "*I had the feeling, she must bow before her parents.*" My concern is that she could feel that she is being told what to do in a moralistic way. If it's not done, then the constellation is often broken off. If the bow is interrupted – which often happens – why not simply be interested in the interruption itself? Then our relationship to the interruption is very different. That's for me, for example a situation where Bert sometimes moves out of the phenomenological stance and actually proceeds in a moralistic way, which isn't so bad in itself, but many less experienced facilitators simply imitate him, not realising that they are pressurising their clients to conform. Just as your client reported, they in effect tell the client, "*You must do what I believe would be good for you or else you'll be punished with a breaking off.*" This '*you must*' is, in my opinion, very harsh but I understand that it's a different '*you must*' to the one you meant.

JS: My understanding of the '*you must*' is that it calls for the movement of bowing to come from the client himself, from his unconscious, which

makes the bowing easier for him. The bow is there to bring relief. It makes the flow of love to the parents and ancestors possible again. The beginning of bowing is often difficult. If the client manages to do it, then it offers relief. The '*you must*' represents, so to speak, an unconscious inclination of conscience in the client, which serves the re-connection to the parents.

HB: Yes, I also understand it as you do. But in spite of that, I'm still concerned that many clients don't understand it that way. I'm concerned about the speed with which some facilitators automatically think, "*You must.*" If I look closely at the effect of this thought, "*You must*" on my relationship to the client, I notice I tend to move into a different position. In the moment I see the interrupted bow and feel the desire of the client's soul to complete it and think, "*You must, you must complete it,*" then I'm no longer interested in what is. I begin to be interested in what should be. What's happening in the moment is an interruption. If the interruption really comes to light, then the movement will either flow or not flow, but to insist that a client complete the movement is, for me, an assumption about what's good that's not permissible. I don't really know if she must do it. I don't know if something else needs to happen first, or whether she actually has to live with the interruption for some reason. If I look closely at the effect the thought "*You must*" has on my being with her or my contact with her, I notice that I move out of contact with precisely what is happening and move into contact with what I think would be good for her.

JS: I don't experience it as a stepping out of contact. I don't think that was the case in the example I mentioned. However, it's naturally a strong impulse, an intervention, which takes

sides, a certain assumption that's necessary in order for the client to feel better. It's often, without doubt, a painful provocation.

EM: I remember how Bert originally, when the constellation work was beginning to develop, worked a lot more with provocation than nowadays. He drew people's attention to their 'hubris', which is how he at that time referred to unconsciously taking on the fate of an ancestor. It can be seen as arrogance. In doing so, he looked, so to speak, for that place where a person was rebelling against a hopeless situation, with the result that he took on too much and was destroying himself. That means, for example, I rebel against fate and burden myself with something much too great, by taking over the fate of a parent. In that way I harm myself and can't help anyone else. Of course, this happens unconsciously. At the time, Bert referred to this as 'interference'. Certainly, the issue of bowing which he, at that time often proposed, was something of a double-edged sword in my opinion. This "*You must bow*" was, in my perception of Bert, meant as a type of confrontation or provocation. Sometimes he also said, "*The solution would be: you must bow before your father or mother,*" although he knew precisely that they couldn't do it. Later he came to a crucial turning point: he realised this rebellion, this 'hubris' comes from love. The child *has* to do it, he does it unconsciously. That was, in my view, a very important development in him – that he looked at how the love flowed within this rebellion, and saw that it came out of bonding. Someone takes on something that is nothing to do with him out of a love which comes from a bonding, out of primary love. This is the connection with the double effect of the sentence "*You must bow.*" When something like this is said, it can, on the one hand, be meant as a challenge to the strength of the client. It is the challenge used as a means for finding the point where someone is rebelling against fate, because that's also the strength of a person, even if it happens unconsciously and has a bad

effect. On the other hand, the sentence, "*You must bow*" can also have the effect of an order into submission and the client does it out of obedience and not inner conviction. That can make things worse. This is what I see as the dangerous double effect of this sentence, if it is used as a therapeutic intervention with people who can't inwardly carry it out.

HB: This is a place where I've changed how I work. I'm getting more and more radical about trusting what actually is. I don't even believe that the solutions are better than the entanglements. I think that both the interruption and the entanglement need to be fully recognised. If we look for a solution too quickly, a kind of fundamentalism can come into the constellation. Like Bert said, "*Everything that is, has a right to be,*" even the entanglements and interruptions.

JS: The '*you must bow*' is for me not so much something that the therapist says or can say in connection with the client's superego. What's expressed in the sentence is basically a parameter of the archaic conscience, of the group conscience, that gives priority to the parents and their predecessors, whatever may have happened.

EM: What do you understand in this case by 'parameter'?

JS: I mean the way that the conscience is naturally structured. The conscience sets limits, even the unconscious group conscience sets limits. "*You must bow before your parents, your ancestors, to that which is greater,*" is often the sentence that offers solution but limits freedom, and releases something out of the group conscience into consciousness. If it succeeds then it enables the re-integration into a group or the flow of life. Increasingly in the work, the bowing is done before the fate of the parents, before that which is greater that's working through the parents, instead of the simple bow before the parents themselves.

HB: You describe a beautiful movement that is profoundly healing when it happens. My concern is the subtle communication in our offer to the clients actually causes the opposite to happen. This point that I'm trying to clarify is a point that I believe is threatening to damage the whole constellation work. It's unfortunate, that in this discussion we are trying to clarify it through your work, Jakob. You know that I value your work very highly. But even in your example, I have my concerns. Would it have been different if, in that situation, instead of thinking, "*The bowing movement is interrupted. She must complete it for there to be a solution,*" you had thought, "*The bowing movement is interrupted, I wonder why?*"

JS: For me it belongs to the core of the work with constellations, always to see and to think what the deep motive is, if someone refuses to make the loving movement to the parents: which entanglement, which incident in the system is at work and which deep, blind love is preventing the movement towards the parents that would offer a solution. It could be, for example, that someone has been beaten by the parents as a child and the bow would immediately trigger the feeling, "*Now I'm going to be hit again,*" or someone acts as a substitute for a sibling who has died through the fault or negligence of the parents, etc. In such cases, it would be difficult for the bow to be a solution process and is perhaps not suitable before some healing has taken place in the soul; that's clear. I can't remember now what exactly the situation was in the incident I mentioned and at what moment in the constellation process I said, "*You must bow.*" I only know that I had the feeling the bow could free something which would enable the movement into the parents' arms.

To that extent, I completely agree with your question. However, in this situation I had the feeling that a bow was appropriate and helpful. That's so. The woman's refusal then changed the situation.

HB: Can the child bow before the parents when they're still entangled? The movement of bowing can really only be carried out when the child's soul can differentiate between the parents in their original, true nature and the parents who are entangled. Many participants don't make a clear distinction between submission and bowing. To demand a bow before this distinction is clear in the child's soul can easily lead to the misunderstanding of it being a submission to the entanglement, which would be re-traumatising. Instead of helping the client to find a liberating movement, we would then invite him to submit to being the helpless victim of an entanglement again. That's often the reason why clients can't do it.

I've heard many stories about terrible things that have happened in constellations. A superficial, moral attitude on the part of some facilitators seems to have crept into the work, and I see it as the betrayal of a truly phenomenological view. It seems to be so deeply rooted in the work that many facilitators don't even notice it.

JS: I find your distinction very important. It's vital in the work that we can separate the parents in their entanglements, in their fate, in their need, in their responsibilities from the parents as parents. The purpose of bowing before the parents is to enable the parents to be seen and loved again as parents. The only use it has with the entangled parents is to perceive that our parents are caught up in their own fate, in something greater. They couldn't and can't react any other way than entangled.

HB: The entangled parents have done something to the child. The baby comes into the world almost without any entanglements; he only sees the true nature of the parents. His soul then withdraws because the parents don't act from this true nature but from an entanglement. This victim element shouldn't be made light of and must be recognised for the sake of completeness. Then the distinction between entanglement and the true nature of a being, and

between bowing and submission is made easier.

JS: This recognition of the child being a victim and suffering because of the parents' entanglement would naturally be taken to the extreme by some critics in the public where the practice of bowing in constellations is concerned.

HB: Because we are also interested in bowing as a body movement, Gila Rogers and I made it into the theme of an intensive course. We wanted to research the reciprocal action of the body and soul movements. A few years ago Gila ran a workshop on the same theme, where she presented important observations. For example: that the bow is only complete after the straightening up; that bowing and submission are often mistaken for each other. I know from the supervision that only a few facilitators have grasped that the completed bow must also be well carried out in the body. Some haven't even given any thought to the fundamental idea of: *"What is a bow? When is it called for?"* In Islam, for example, it's forbidden to bow before a person. That's a recognition of something true, that's a very profound insight. Bowing belongs only before Essence. Some Jews also don't do it either. It's also forbidden, one bows only before God – and then often.

EM: This bowing is really complex, and for me there's another aspect: it's about a movement and this movement is a living metaphor. It's different recommending that someone says something, to recommending a movement. And you, Hunter, said before that if someone can't bow, then the question is why he can't. Unfortunately the question *"Why?"* usually leads to incredibly complex aspects. What is really known about the *"Why?"* You referred to childhood traumatisation, but what is behind childhood traumatisation is yet another question, which is open to much conjecture and often can't be clarified, be that for karmic reasons, or be it in connection with the parents' ancestors, or whatever.

I often tell the story of these two friends who say they want to get rid of everything that burdens them. They clear out their flats and throw everything they don't need into sacks. They then take a boat out to sea and want to sink the sacks. One of them takes his sack, has one last close look at everything in the sack, remembering what the contents were associated with, then throws it in the water and watches it slowly sinking. When he's finished, the other one stands up, takes his sack, leans over the edge of the boat and shakes the contents into the water without a second glance.

So this metaphoric gesture of bowing can move people to a place where they can let go of accusations and reproach at the same time. Perhaps what you previously mentioned happens: that in the bowing suddenly something like an archetype of parents appears and the gesture becomes right. In my observation that's one possibility, but it's very risky to offer it, so to speak, indiscriminately.

HB: I also agree that, as you describe, the possibility is given through the movement. The movements of the soul and of the body aren't two different things. The movements have something archetypal: bowing, straightening up. These are ancient movements that have existed for a long time. However, I'm extremely cautious of the strategic, therapeutic application in the described sense. I've got a question about your story: could, or should the first friend have behaved in the same way as the second? Is his way of behaving worse for him? I doubt whether a teacher or even a spiritual master can really know what we should do. Sometimes they act as though they could, but if you look closely at what the effect is, you see again and again how easily bowing, conformity and submission can be confused with each other.

EM: And the effect is probably worse for the teacher or therapist than it is for the person who carries out the bow, even though he's not ready for it.

JS: The 'you must' is often used in other contexts in the constellation work. I sometimes say, "You must look for your half brother," or "You must inquire," or "You must separate." However, in the course of the workshop I make it quite clear that these only serve to re-inforce what has been seen in a constellation, in the sense of, "Face up to it. From what has shown up, there's no easy way of getting to a solution." It's clear for me that the 'you must' is a movement which doesn't start from me, but has to be carried by an inner movement and readiness. Or, the 'you must' expresses, "Imagine that you do it, what sort of an effect does it have?" For me, the 'you must' often means that someone is guided to a boundary within his family, naturally without me saying, "As a therapist, I know what is best for you," in the way a father orders his son to do something, possibly under the threat of punishment.

No-one will look for an unknown half brother as long as nothing inwardly has happened; like a force triggering a natural movement that is right and correct. That's equally so with bowing. Some people can only bow in a moving way in the role of a representative or they suddenly do it inwardly at home. Some who bow in response to the instructions of a therapist, do it without strength and inner conviction.

This 'you must' is sometimes simply an intervention thought, where one can ask oneself what it will bring about. Therefore I often get representatives to carry out the bow. Then you can see what effect it has on all concerned. I wouldn't want to remove it from the repertoire of therapeutic interventions or rather, movements of the soul.

HB: I don't want to ban the bowing movement either, but the problem is that the 'you must' can transform the bow into a submission, without anyone noticing. I have different experiences to you because I have a lot to do with people, who don't move primarily in the constellation circles.

When you speak to people about their bad experiences in constellations and really hear what was bad, it becomes clear that exactly this point is often misunderstood by clients. The 'you must' isn't interpreted in your sense, as a request, but the superego is directly addressed and with that the client goes into submission. It doesn't help at all; it just makes the situation worse. I think many facilitators, even sometimes Bert himself, underestimate the effect of the superego. So I try as hard as I can to leave out this language, because it's so easily misunderstood. Of course, I say it too if I don't pay attention, but I try to find alternatives.

EM: On the other hand, I believe it depends on who says it. If I imagine that you, Hunter, say it to me, or Jakob says it to me, then the effect is very different.

HB: Perhaps that's why I try to be so careful. I know that I've often been misunderstood in this way. However, I've also been with people who've misunderstood it with you, Jakob. I think it's important that we speak to people and honestly make note of how they've experienced the constellation. I've spoken to hundreds of people who've misunderstood it, even those whose constellations I've facilitated. The participant's nephew whom you mentioned at the beginning, Jakob, is a good example of it. I wonder if, from his perspective, he refused to learn an authentic bow or to submit.

WdP: If I look at the picture of how I would like to work with people, then I see someone who calmly and sympathetically comes through all crises and confrontations. But it's not like that.

If something amounts to a struggle, to a conflict, then often a childlike calling-into-question of the boundaries is at the root of it. Isn't the client also entitled to that? The question remains: how do I deal with such situations so that they become productive processes?

When I was fifteen or sixteen years old I had an incredible resistance to teachers and school. I was determined to drop school. In a break my class teacher at that time took me aside and said to me, "Here you must comply with what we find to be correct, then you get an entrance ticket for the next stage in life. Nevertheless, don't let anyone take away your wilfulness, do something else with it."

In this moment, he stopped me in my tracks. It was clear to me: now it was serious. I sulked for a while and then I followed his advice.

My first meeting with Bert in the eighties was similar. Naturally, I was often irritated and also indignant when he was so extremely abrupt with people. I also had a totally different idea of 'correct' psychotherapy, with much more attention on sensitivity to the individual.

HB: That's not necessarily the alternative for me, sensitivity to the individual. When your teacher says that to you, he's describing to you the conditions under which you get this entrance ticket. If you accept it, then it's another situation with other pre-requisites. However, in the therapeutic context, if you say to a client, "You must bow" and at the same time think of breaking off the work if he doesn't do it, then that's a totally different thought. The observation that Bert's clarity sometimes works well is indisputable, that's clear. However, it's important to understand when it would work well, with whom and when not.

EM: I see it as a big problem too, that constellation facilitators who don't have Bert Hellinger's experience and intuition, simply copy him, probably unconsciously, and that it then has a very different effect.

JS: It also makes a big difference to me if I'm offering an evening or one day of constellations, or several days, because then I can say many things in the course of the workshop

that I can also correct and put into context. A classic example is the sentence, "*You must separate.*" I have to make it very clear in every course, that this is neither a prognosis, nor should you go home and tell your partner, "*The therapist said...*" That would be terrible. This sentence doesn't refer to the future, but to that which shows up in the constellation and in the process, "*Face up to it.*" I see the bow as similar, "*Try it and see how deep it goes and what effect it has on you and your parents or family or partner.*" Then one can see what the next step is. That's how I see it.

HB: Yes, in that sense I agree. Only there still remains the question of the language formulation: whether you invite unnecessary misunderstanding. For instance, in the first example with the bow: said in a different way, it would probably have also been possible for you to show her where it could proceed, but in a different manner. It's not a question of foregoing showing the solution, but of ensuring that the superego can't use the intervention for self-manipulation.

JS: Your concerns have made it clearer to me that I must always look closely at the effect on the client of what I propose he does; can I proceed in a different way with him if it turns out that bowing isn't possible or suitable, do I stay in contact with the client? Does the client know, even if the constellation is broken off he can come again for a new process? That would then be looking accurately. How does my intervention work? If I notice that it has a disconnecting or even harmful effect, have I the opportunity and ability to try new steps?

HB: If he understands your request as an order into submission, then the bow and the '*you must*' will get mixed up for him. If we watch what effect the intervention has over a longer period of time, then we also get an insight into how it's been understood by the client. I usually work together with the course participants over a long time, sometimes 12 or more years. I've often seen that the initial good effect

of constellations doesn't last. It's similar to when you take antibiotics, but only use half of the tablets, the pathogenic agents become immune and the effect of the antibiotics is lost.

WdP: I certainly think that what's published about family constellations, and what Bert and we other constellation facilitators give out, is constantly used as material for new ideals. I also believe, quite honestly, that in more or less all of us lurks the constant childhood wish for the right, the perfect parents: simply the deep wish to be led by something greater to a guaranteed better, or at least more suitable land of promise. To let go of this fool's paradise and to face the unavoidable end and one's own personal fate as an ordinary person is a great achievement. Who can say what entanglement or solution there may be? Without our entanglements we certainly wouldn't be here.

JS: Fundamentally, Bert moved away from looking at solutions as pre-conceived therapeutic knowledge of what is good or bad for someone a long time ago. On the one hand I agree, but on the other hand, I always think of Milton Erickson, and ultimately that remains for me the bread and butter in our work: that usually a client comes to us because things aren't going well for him. Usually he feels better when the relationship is somewhat improved again than if it remains bad; when his child feels better at school rather than continuing to feel bad; when he can deal with his pain better; when he suddenly understands something in a more relaxed way and so can behave more appropriately. That's what I mean in the sense of a solution, that a step is possible to stop the suffering or at least to reduce the suffering. To that extent, as far as I'm concerned, one of the objectives of therapy or consultation is to find a solution, which, if it's right, is always liberating. This doesn't mean that the consequences in the solution are always easy: for example, separating from a partner. The experiencing of a solution is already significant. When I feel in a group that a client

and also other participants feel a sense of relief after a constellation, then I think something good has happened, even if he phones me after 4 weeks and says there's still something missing.

WdP: I'd like to add something: a long time after a workshop, a man phoned me up and said: "*I felt it was time to contact you and let you know how I am. Nothing has really changed, but I feel better.*" That became such a guiding principle for me, to be better able to take what is present and to make better use of areas where there's more freedom.

EM: That reminds me of a meeting I had with a woman, who was having a very difficult time. We worked together and it came out that she had had a very difficult childhood. She said she had never admitted it to herself. "*At last I understand what a difficult life I have,*" she said, and that was all. We didn't do any more. There was no reason to do any more. She also didn't go away feeling happy and relieved, but more serious and with more weight, more accepting. There was no solution in the usual sense, or a concrete next step in that moment. However, something came into being like a greater space, more possibilities.

JS: There are many in groups, for whom the next growth step is that they go away more serious than they came. Then there are others for whom the next growth step is that they go away lighter than when they came.

EM: I think that this is partly the attraction of groups: when they go well, people experience the weight and impact of all these families' fates accumulated together. It's like being saturated with life, just as it is.

*Editor's Note: Thanks to the Editors of the German publication 'Praxis der Systemaufstellung' for their permission to re-produce this article.*



# Greying, in Black and White

I want to tell you about an experience that was at once harrowing and inspiring. It occurred in a non-descript conference room in the Brisbane Hilton, at a one-day gabfest<sup>2</sup> organised by the Queensland Government's Department of Families. The participants were mainly bureaucrats dealing with the problems of ageing.

The minister wanted to encourage community debate on the ageing of the population and the interconnected needs of all generations so as to stimulate government policies and response. It was my job to deliver a keynote address and be the 'facilitator'.

I attend a lot of conferences like this and, normally, there are few surprises. Such affairs are ritualistic and rarely revelatory. The proceedings tend to be soothing, allowing appropriate pieties to be expressed, and everyone goes home tired but happy.

On this occasion, things were different. First of all the papers weren't half bad, emphasising the social dynamic that would result from having a population of oldies who would become an increasing burden on the public purse. We were told that perhaps one in three young Australian women will live to 100 and get the congratulatory telegram from Buck Palace. I was impressed by the policy of improving intergenerational relationships, with bridges of understanding being built between young and old.

As is customary, the proceedings began with a 'Welcome to Country' conducted by an Aboriginal elder.

*This newspaper article appeared on May 24 2003 in The Australian<sup>1</sup>, and is reprinted by kind permission of the author. The article was submitted by Bubula Lardi.*

This came from Maureen Watson, a 75-year-old woman whose dark skin was dramatised by her prodigious mane of bright white hair. Although she spoke just a few well-chosen words, you could see she was one wise old woman.

She was followed by a professional futurist – futurists are 21st century soothsayers – who gave us a glimpse into the years ahead that I, for one, found decidedly unattractive – full of references to 'virtual immortality' made available either by downloading or uploading our intellects so that we could dwell in eternal cyberspace, as opposed to Heaven. He was followed by a bloke who works with troubled youth at the coalface, who contrasted the needs, aspirations and anxieties of the young with those of us tottering towards the sunset.

I then asked Mundanara Bayles to take her turn at the lectern. She was far and away the youngest person at the conference and had been asked to contribute from 'an indigenous perspective'. Prior to the session she'd been bubbling and enthusiastic. She'd been working on her contribution for weeks and was looking forward to delivering it. But, standing at the lectern, she fell absolutely and utterly silent. She couldn't find the words at all. As chair, this presented me with an urgent problem. Should I make encouraging noises? Cross the small stage and lead her back to the long

table where the panellists sat? The atmosphere was tense, and getting tenser. The child just stood there – and it became clear that her silence wasn't stage fright so much as emotional intensity. She really, desperately, wanted to tell us something. She wanted it so much that she could barely breathe. She managed a few words, then fell silent again. Every second seemed like a minute and, yes, the minutes seemed like hours. Somehow I knew it would be wrong to intercede – that any paternalism on my part would be entirely inappropriate. More than that, it would be symbolic of the relationship between black and white in this nation for centuries.

Once again, a few sentences, then silence. Her hands clenched at the lectern, she stood with closed eyes. Then something extraordinary happened. Maureen Watson, the Aboriginal elder who'd performed the opening ceremony, rose from her chair and walked very slowly, with great dignity, to the stage. She climbed the three stairs and stood just behind the young woman. Understand that she didn't speak to the child, not a word. And I don't think she touched her. She just stood there, motionless, sculptural. She was, literally, just there for her. And it was enough. For soon the words were flowing – and those who'd wanted so much to hear them, who'd willed her to speak out, mightn't have been so happy with what she had to say.

I can think of no better

ARTICLE CONTRIBUTOR: PHILLIP ADAMS

dramatisation of the benefits of 'intergenerational relationships'. For Maureen is not only a tribal elder from Mundanara's people but, indeed, her grandmother. We learned from Mundanara that her mother had died very recently, in her mid-forties. So it wasn't surprising that the first thing she wanted to tell this roomful of white professionals concerned with an ageing demographic was that her people rarely get to be old. Her grandmother was, in effect, an anomaly. The young woman talked of the death toll of Aboriginal kids in their teens and early twenties, from sniffing glue, petrol, paint, anything that dulls the pain. Where the white experts talked about great leaps in longevity, she spoke of a people so ravaged by despair and disadvantage and diabetes and kidney failure that they were lucky to make it to 30. "You're talking about super-

annuation policy for your people," Mundanara said. "Superannuation is irrelevant to indigenous people. We don't live that long." Then she talked about the cards that pensioners get that save them money on public transport. With a little irony she reminded us that such benefactions are irrelevant to Aboriginal people for the same reason: "We're dead by then."

When she'd finished her overwhelmingly powerful presentation, I thanked her in a voice somewhat croaky with emotion. And I told her not to worry about her silences – they'd been more eloquent than her words. Pretty soon she'll be talking loud and clear on behalf of her people. And you don't have to be a futurist to predict that she'll make an enormous contribution as a new Lowitja O'Donoghue<sup>3</sup> or Marcia Langton<sup>4</sup>.

#### NOTES:

- 1 *As in the U.S., Australian newspapers are state-based. However, in the 60s, Rupert Murdoch launched a national newspaper 'The Australian'. It remains the only national newspaper.*
- 2 *Originally a U.S. slang coinage, 'gabfest' joins Scandinavian/Old English 'gab' meaning 'twaddle' with German 'fest' (festival). Used in this context, 'gabfest' is a self-deprecatory description of Adams' participation in the colloquium.*
- 3 *Dr Lowitja O'Donoghue, AC CBE is a Yankunytjatjara woman from South Australia's far north. Her contribution to the advancement of Aboriginal people is great and widely recognised.*
- 4 *Professor Marcia Langton holds the Foundation Chair in Australian Indigenous Studies at the University of Melbourne. She is a specialist in Aboriginal land tenure and resource issues.*

#### COMMENTS FROM BUBULA LARDI:

On reading this article I was reminded of the deep consciousness of ancestral bonds in Aboriginal culture which can sustain individuals even when the immediate families are badly fragmented. The grandmother knew without a doubt that she was a support to her granddaughter, and the young woman could accept her wordless support in a completely natural way.

For me, the article demonstrates that the tension that commonly exists between the white community and the indigenous community is eased if there is respect on both sides. It also describes beautifully the power that flows

when the ancestors of the indigenous are aligned with the current generation. As the dominant white culture, we have so much to learn from them. The way in which the writer describes the events shows a real Movement of the Soul in a most unlikely venue!

Germaine Greer suggests in her recent essay 'Whitefella Jump Up' ([www.quarterlyessay.com](http://www.quarterlyessay.com)), that embracing Aboriginality is the only way Australia can fully imagine itself as a nation, and that the sense of being aboriginal and in tune with the land might save the soul of Australia.

# Integrating the Excluded Persons and Events

## FURTHER THOUGHTS ON ILLNESS

I want to say something more about illnesses; how they may be connected to events of the past and to certain people. Our soul knows what is necessary for us to get better. Sometimes when we feel pain or are ill we want help, so we go to a doctor or someone else, who can help us to get better.

If you close your eyes now and you look at your own illnesses and your own pain and you look at them with the eyes of your soul and you entrust the healing and the changes to your own soul, you say to your soul, "Please," and then you wait with trust. What happens in your soul now?

When you look at your illnesses and your maladies; while you look at them you keep in mind that there is some famous healer or famous doctor and you decide with your head that you should see him as soon as possible. What happens here in your soul? What happens with your illnesses? Do they feel respected? Will your soul support that movement?

O.K. When I work here I am trying to get into tune with the soul, with the soul of the client. If a client says that they must work with me and that they have even written a letter so they are obliged to work with me, can I work under these conditions? No, I must be in tune with them first and they must be in tune with me.

Here is an exercise:

*Now, close your eyes. Go into your body and feel if there is something which wants your attention, something which might feel excluded and something which might feel that it is not integrated with the soul. It may be an illness, or a pain or a handicap – whatever. Then you go to each one and look at it as if it were a person. You observe the direction in which this person is looking and you turn in*

*the same direction. You simply wait and look; you look curiously, saying to yourself, "Now I want to know you, now I want to respect you, now I want to show my love." Then your illness or your handicap or your pain may walk over to that person, and lead that person to you. You must remain small, this is very important. In front of that other person, you remain small. When you look at it or at that other person, you say, "Please."*

*Then you can look at certain events in your life, perhaps events which hurt, or events where you got angry with someone or something. You must also look at events where you were guilty and things that you don't want to look at or admit. You should look at them as you would look at a person; you open your heart for each of these events, and you say, "Yes. Now I consent to it as it was and I consent to the consequences. I consent to the gift, to the strength, which has come from this event. Now I will be with you in peace."*

## IN TUNE WITH DEATH

Now the exercise we have done has far-reaching consequences for those who help other people. In the same way as you are now trying to get in tune with everything in yourself, even if it seems to be very dangerous, or painful, you do the same with the client.

You get in tune with their illnesses and with what is behind, in order to have a wide view, all the time. You allow yourself to be exposed to it and you say, "Yes." Ultimately you are also saying, "Yes" to death; the death of yourself and the death of your client. You are in tune with it.

There is a very strange experience connected with this; it turns out very often that death is the guardian of life. If you are in tune with death then life has a chance.

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