

# The fifth province: *Imagining a space of dialogical co-creations!*



Imelda McCarthy

“A vivid imagination compels the whole body to obey it”

Aristotle

## Introduction – A space beyond dualisms

This paper will re-present some ideas which were shared at the *Training in a Woman's Voice* conference organised by KCC in June 2009. Here, I will refocus on key aspects of my working in and from the 'space of the fifth province' (the fifth province will be described later) particularly around the ideas of dialogue, sacred space, presence and love. Today, I see what I call a fifth province co-creative therapy as facilitating conversations and contexts of transformation which bring us beyond the enthrallment and/or dilemmas of a dualistic world view. This is not to say that we deny the constraints and affordances of our physical and social worlds. We cannot, because they constantly make themselves felt as they tickle us through ongoing challenges and invitations. However, more and more I have come to see that these challenges and invitations also beckon us to *occupy*, as it were, a *space* beyond the confines of the dualisms, to live with them but not be captured by them.

## A dilemmatic tale

In our helping roles, we are presented daily with the dualisms of ordinary living, not to mention its problems. In each request for help, there is nearly always a dilemma, a not-knowing which way to turn (Byrne & McCarthy, 2007; Partridge, 2007). We want to change but do not know how to bring it about. We do not want to continue with a relationship or behaviour which pains us, but we do not know what to do about the suffering it brings. Sometimes, we even want to change but 'the devil we know is better than the devil we don't know'. There is an old Hasidic tale that I love to cite, of the many people in a village who come to a Rabbi complaining about their lives while yearning for the lives and perceived 'better' problems of their neighbours. In an attempt to solve the problem, the Rabbi invites the townspeople to hang out their problems in a public manner and then for everyone to come, view them all and finally to choose those problems of their neighbours they would prefer to have themselves. When all had seen the array of problems laid before them, they experienced a dilemma in terms of their choice and they ended up choosing to have their own problems back rather than those of their neighbours! It is sometimes difficult for us to give up the familiar. Change is indeed perturbing!

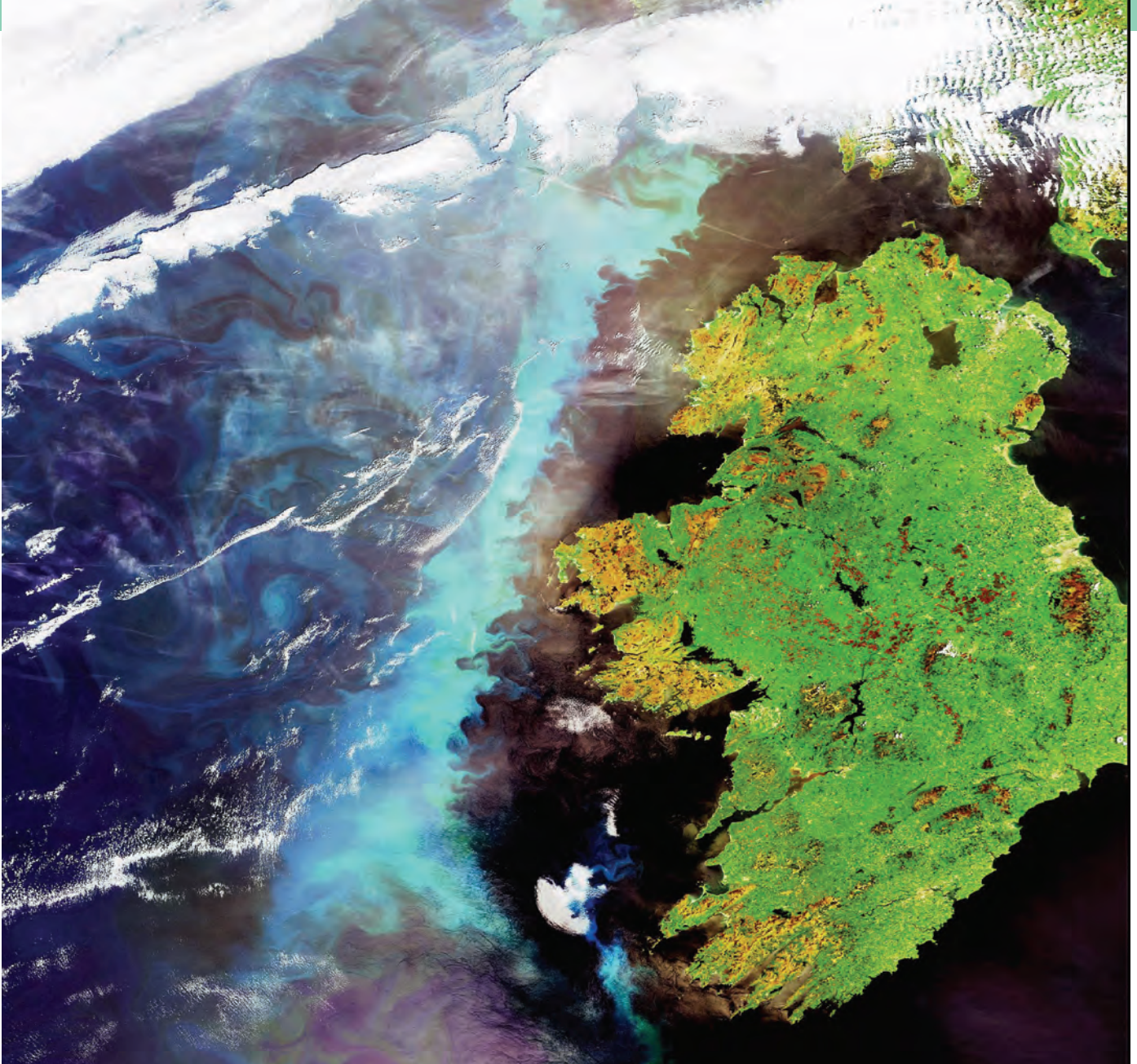
## Imagining something more – dreams!

On the other hand, our dreams of a better life spur us on towards transformation and beyond the constraints of our dilemmas. One beautiful reframing of the concept of 'problem' is to see each one as a "frustrated dream" (McAdam & Lang, 2009). The 'problem/dream' dilemmatic can be held together where the problem points us towards a dream yet to be realised. As we acknowledge the problem while simultaneously placing an emphasis on the dream

that has been or is being frustrated, we can begin to light up the path we want to follow once again. This process of holding the dualities, where both sides of the dilemmas can be viewed, has been previously referred to as 'juxtaposing' or 'juxtapositioning' in fifth province work. It has been my experience that such juxtapositioning of the dilemmatic issues can be central in 'pulling taut the nerves of insight', as it were, in catalysing transformations in consciousness, emotions, behaviour and relationships as it brings us through the dualities to a 'space' beyond them.

## Betty's story

Betty, a 65 year old woman, had been suffering from what her doctor told her was 'agoraphobia'. She could not go out without a family member. In our first session together, her husband, Joe, also participated, as she was afraid to come alone. This meant that, while other family members went outside the home to work, she was home alone and felt unable to venture out. She came to seek help when her daughter became engaged. We began with the question, "What brought you at this time to seek help?" She replied, "My daughter is getting married and I want to be able to help her. But, if I cannot get out, I will not be able to do that". Here, encapsulated in her story was a frustrated dream, her desire to go do something that her problem prevented her from doing. As she dreamed of all that she would like to do with and for her daughter in her new home, she would break into tears of great sadness. Her husband told how it was even a source of anxiety for her to speak with their neighbours. He too had a dream that she would be able to return to a more independent life. We wondered what might be the wisdom in this challenge for her. Maybe her home was some kind of retreat or safe haven for her, also? "Yes", she said, telling of a time when a male neighbour had been very aggressive to her. After this episode, she was afraid to go out unaccompanied. It felt safer to stay in. After asking more about this, she became somewhat hesitant as if remembering something that maybe could not be put into words at that time. This seemed to be so because, at the end of the session, she requested that the next time she came to see me she would like her husband to wait for her in the waiting room. It turned out that the questions in relation to her neighbour's behaviour had triggered an earlier memory she had never spoken about. She had, in fact, always wondered why she had reacted so intensely to his behaviour at the time. It did not make sense to her and yet it seemed to provoke a great fear in her. In the previous session, it suddenly came to her why this might have been so and she wanted to protect her husband from what she had to say. She thought that if he heard about it, he would be greatly upset. She then told for the first time of her endurance of sexual abuse from the age of nine until the age of twenty-four at the hands of her maternal



Ireland from space

uncle who had lived with her family. When she was seven, her father had died and her mother had suggested to her brother that he come and live with them. He brought a pension with him which helped the family financially. Knowing how important the financial support was for the family's survival, Betty did not tell her mother about the abuse as she knew she would ask him to leave. Even after his death, she could not bring herself to tell anyone and it was not until the story was told of her neighbour's "explosive aggression and threat" that she realised the possible relationship to her abuse as a child. Seeing that there may be a connection to her fear of going out alone, she had chosen to tell her story in a bid to release her and in the hope of realising her dream of helping her daughter. After some time, she began telling her husband about her childhood experiences of abuse. As she shared her story, she also began to take steps in moving outside of her home on her own once more. When she decided that her dream was in sight, she also began to feel that she no longer needed to come for therapy. She was able to visit her daughter's home on her own and so had realised her dream.

Here we see the focus on Betty's frustrated dream released in her the recognition of how the convergence of two traumatic processes, her neighbour's aggression and her uncle's abuse of her, triggered in her a fear of going out alone. She had transcended the dilemma

presented by a problem and a dream by the telling of a story of abuse and realising the wisdom of protecting herself in the safety of her own home. This retreat to safety (agoraphobia) was, in this instance, the 'wisdom' often found at the heart of what seems on the surface to be a problem.

So, while our conversations searched for the dreamed-of solutions, they also considered those wisdoms contained in the presented challenges and the ensuing strengths they had triggered (Wade, 1997, 2007). It has been my constant experience, both professionally and personally (McCarthy, 2010) that, when our older ways are honoured and often even thanked, we can be freed to move on with grace. How much more powerful can this be when we reconnect to our dreams. The philosophical orientation or aesthetic which guided the holding of dualisms in this way comes from an old Irish metaphor, *the fifth province* (Byrne & McCarthy, 2007).

### The fifth province

In Ireland today, there are only four geographical provinces. It is not known whether or not such a fifth province actually ever existed as a geographical place. However, its trace has come down through time in the Irish language where the word for province is 'coiced' or 'cuige', which mean 'fifth'. In the writings of two Irish



philosophers, Hederman and Kearney (1977 – 1985), it has become a province of imagination – a sacred space that transcends the dualities of life where the ordinary becomes extraordinary (Byrne & McCarthy, 1988).

*“The notion of a ‘fifth province’ is an aesthetic analogy which describes a space which is neither physical, geographical, nor political. It is a place which is beyond or behind the reach of our normal scientific consciousness. It therefore requires a method and a language which are sui generis both to reach it and to describe it”* (Hederman, 1985, p. 11).

The metaphor of the fifth province was first re-awakened by Richard Kearney and Benedictine Abbot, Mark Hederman. From 1977 to 1985, they provided a literary forum for the expression of diverse views across political, religious and cultural divides in the Irish context. Their invocation of the fifth province, through their bi-annual journal, *The Crane Bag* (Hederman & Kearney, 1977 – 1985), attempted to transcend these ambivalent divides in the Irish cultural landscape. It was a forum that moved towards a different kind of ‘community’ on the island of Ireland. It was envisaged to be a forum where people of difference, whatever this was (religious, ethnic, cultural, etc), might peacefully co-exist, inter-act and co-create. It was a forum for viewing oneself and the ‘other’ (one-and-other/one another) differently – of ‘inter-viewing’ as it were! It was a forum where one might ‘be’ differently in a more peaceful harmony – a space of inter-being.

Kearney and Hederman borrowed the notion of the fifth province from ancient Irish legend and imagined it at Tara in County Meath, acting as a “second centre of gravity” to the administrative centre of the country. The balance between the two centres “was a guarantor of peace and harmony in the country as a whole” (1977, p 10). The purpose of their journal was to mirror such a place in (post-) modern Ireland.

### **Towards a space of dialogue: Some histories and mysteries!**

There has been much debate as to the whereabouts or identity of this hidden fifth province, with popular myth recording two stories. One claims that the four provinces met at a mythical hill, Uishneach, while the other claims a geographical location in County Meath. The Irish for Meath is *Midhe*, meaning middle or centre. The ancient *Annals of Westmeath* sites the fifth province as an actual historical location in the centre of Ireland. The Hill of the Kings (Uishneach) is stated to be the spot, in Westmeath, where the four provinces met. It is a slightly elevated vantage point with extensive vistas in all directions. It is also said that the High King of Ireland, Tuathal Teachtmair, in the first century (AD), erected a palace on the Hill of Uishneach and cut off tracts of land from each of the surrounding four provinces, thus creating an actual geographical fifth province. This new province, which has since long ceased to exist, incorporated the other provinces whilst simultaneously transcending them. It was a place that was both a part of the four provinces and apart from them, simultaneously. It was also said that it was a pagan Druidic site where kings and leaders from the other provinces came to settle their conflicts and reconcile their disputes through conversation and talks. Arms were left aside as people came together to speak and receive counsel. It was a place of dialogue where all opposing and contrasting views could be held together, heard and voiced in a collaborative, non-violent way.

Thus, whilst both traditions, the mythical and the historical, disagree as to whether the place was real or imaginary, both agree on the importance of the notion of a fifth province in Ireland.

The fifth province is thus more akin to a dis-position<sup>2</sup> (Hederman & Kearney, 1977, p. 10). It was an imagined place where different interests came together and discoursed. Relationships between one-and-other became possible. Realities were deconstructed and constructed. Fact and image were sundered and reunited. It was a province of imagination, a province of possibilities.

### **Dialogue in the fifth province**

Re-inventing this space in therapy, it was imagined that a *conversation of the possible* facilitates both clients and therapists to move with one-and-other co-creatively. Here, a sense of inconclusiveness in our lives is embraced, a province wherein there are no experts only co-travellers; no certainty or righteousness, only various and unknown possibilities. Jack, who was struggling with relationship difficulties, referred to this inconclusiveness in his therapy in the following way:

*“I like the whole idea of the ‘expert’ being open and, if I may use the word, unfinished.”*

To come to a place where there is no rigidity or safe adherence to a historical frame, no particular philosophical or theoretical set, is a humbling and exciting proposition. As has been said previously, certainty crumbles as we constantly place ourselves at risk, as it were, in the face of the marvelous and as yet unknown possibilities. Perhaps, as Hederman states:

*“The space created by ... arrival in the transcendent dimension of the fifth province is enough to allow the fresh air from this no-man’s land or non-place to blow through the province ... just left ... Breaking through creates a draught which blows the cobwebs from the ordinary and traditional”* (1985, p. 115).

The Irish artist, Le Brocquy (1981), articulates the process whereby his artistic images configure themselves on canvas, facilitated by him as a watcher of an ‘accident’. Here, the word ‘accident’ can stand as a metaphor for the surprising emergences as we are co-creating. While his world is that of art, this artistic vocabulary specifies also for us the reflexivity of the therapeutic encounter. In this other world, the landscape of the artist is analogous to the conversational domain of co-creative therapy. Within this conversational domain, the therapist or counsellor, like Le Brocquy’s artist, is not seen to *impose* a professional discipline but to facilitate the emergence of possibilities (McCarthy & Byrne, 1988, 2008; McCarthy, 2004). It is in the interweave of dialogue that the ordinary lines of communication between the participants are ruptured and re-conjugated (Le Brocquy, 1986). In this interweave, participants become, as it were, co-authors in the elaboration and invention of new transformative experiences and stories. As a result, these emergences could not be said to stem from a universalised, professional (disciplinary) practice. Echoing the words of Le Brocquy, one client has outlined the therapeutic process as one of “being in hands”. This being in hands implies an expansive cradle in which the therapeutic relationship rests. The metaphor of the fifth province can serve as a reminder of a space that is always there beyond the dualistic play of our physical, social, mental and emotional lives. It is simultaneously a part of them and apart from them. This space has been described in the following ways by some of my conversational co-creators from the domains of coaching, mentoring, consultation, supervision and teaching:

*“The way we talk we can hold emotion & intuition without division - there is a wholeness about it”* (Therese Hegarty).

*"When conflict or confusion arises - giving the conflict or confusion its dues but knowing and paying attention to the space that exists beyond the conflict/confusion." (Julie Uma Brown)*

*"The meeting of hearts and minds in a space that's beyond both of us as individuals has been exciting.*

*Underneath the words is an almost tangible larger force that's bigger than two of us and I feel a certain sense of humility to what emerges from THAT." (Chan Madhavi Jadoonath)*

### Therapy as a sacred space

Connecting, therefore, with experiences that are more expansive and which lead to the experience of unity and oneness with whoever we are relating with or in whichever situation we are involved with, would also suggest a spiritual orientation. In this 'oneness' or 'communion', the counsellor or therapist could not really be seen as the primary 'doer'. In this inter-connective space, it is not they who *do* something to the client. Rather, they do things together *with* the client. This is the process of co-creation where we inter-act, inter-view and inter-are! (McCarthy, 2004).

This co-creative process was echoed in the following dialogue about therapy with a client, Mary:

**Interviewer (I):** *What did it bring about in you, this process of being in this kind of therapy?*

**Mary (M):** *Confidence is a word that isn't really strong enough to use; the process of the therapy brought around to me the confidence to make decisions in my life. I called it, "weeding the garden", getting rid of stuff that really was just baggage ... so it ...*

**I:** *When did you begin to call it "weeding the garden", during the therapy?*

**M:** *During therapy, Yeh.*

**I:** *Are you a gardener?*

**M:** *No.*

**I:** *Where did the metaphor come from?*

**M:** *I haven't an idea.*

**I:** *It didn't come from the therapist?*

**M:** *No, no it didn't. No definitely.*

### Not knowing and non-doing!

This understanding of a non-predetermined, co-evolving and surprising co-creation has resonances with Anderson's (1997) concept of *not knowing* and the Daoist concept of 'Wu Wei' or *non-doing*. Therapists and clients are involved in a co-evolving process that includes all participants and life itself. What is often surprising is that, during such processes, an answer, an image, a metaphor, a gut feeling or an intuition will suddenly appear as if from nowhere or the 'now here', as Mary highlighted. In this process, there is no pre-set goal or norm of the therapist or the therapeutic system (agency or professional community) to be reached. Instead, therapists and counsellors become servants and participants in the co-constructing of the relationship, the goals, the therapeutic process and the emergent outcome. In this regard, my Irish colleague, Bernadette O'Sullivan (2010), invites us to become "willing apprentices" in our journeys with clients. Each opportunity for conversation is a commitment to, and a surrendering to, the wisdom of the situation co-created. Each session invites us to be in service to our clients and to life itself. It invites us to occupy a space, a *sacred space*, where stories of pain can be accepted in an environment of appreciation and love and so can be transformed (Waldegrave *et al.*, 2003). A client, Debbie, stated, she was: "*gaining insight*" and "*able to own up to my weaknesses and still feel worthwhile and totally accepted*".

### Communing in a field!

In this process, it is as if the participants merge together in what we might term a larger field. When we are interconnected in the way that Mary was implying in her interview above, we feel ourselves to be part of this larger field. Clients have referred to the process as a feeling of strong 'presence' in the room, that pervades the whole context including individuals and environments. During this process, the participants feel deeply connected and guided whilst also simultaneously aware of their individuality and pro-activity. Talking about this process of guiding and simultaneous pro-activity, one young woman, Deirdre, put it like this during the following dialogue:

**I:** *Were you leading [in the therapy conversation]?*

**D:** *Yeh, I'd be leading but sometimes the questions were leading, because they hinted at or suggested, maybe a problem, maybe an unresolved situation, and I'd given a hint of that. And the questions were giving me the idea that the power was in me to answer. And I suppose in that way you were asking a question, and your question was leading as well, you know what I mean. But, I probably, obviously I'd have to give you some idea how to ask that question.*

**I:** *So you were helping us!*

**D:** *Yes, and your questions were helping me as well. I suppose it's a two-way thing, like between a counsellor and a client.*

### 'Presence' and the therapeutic relationship: factors in emergence of change and transformation

Because 'presence' has emerged as important in this work, *who* the therapist/counsellor is therefore becomes a key element in the service of the client and the services we offer. *Who* and *how* we are together becomes more important than the *what* and *where* of therapeutic encounters. Hubble *et al.* (2004) have dramatically shown us that it is the resources the clients bring to therapy which are the greatest indicator for successful outcome. To imagine that this factor is not also applicable to therapists makes no sense. All therapeutic modalities call for therapist presence. For this to manifest, we are called to be sitting in a comfortable, non-attached yet compassionate space. If we are not sitting in such a space within, then we can be vulnerable to being caught up in the issues of our clients. We also need to be care-full in relation to the fine line between, *transmission* and *projection* (Vasudeva & McCarthy, 2004). In processes of transmission, we are in tune and resonating in awareness with our clients on gross, subtle and spiritual levels. However, when there are processes of projection, we are vulnerable to harbouring non-conscious personal, theoretical and professional judgments and prejudices in relation to the lives of our clients. We become isolated monads as communion fades. There is a poetic and poignant reminder of the power of projection in the writings of James Stephens, the Irish writer and mystic. He asks and then proffers:

*"Is there actually a wolf in our neighbour? We see that which we are and our eyes project on every side an image of ourselves. If we look with fear, that which we behold is frightful; if we look with love, then the colours of heaven are repeated to us from the ditch and the dungeon. We invent eternally upon one another; we scatter our sins broadcast and call them our neighbours; let us scatter our virtues abroad and build us a city to live in" (Stephens, 1978, p. 50).*

In not projecting our own 'sins' on to another, we return ourselves to an open, accepting and appreciative dis-position. We sit in coherence (co-here-ence!) with another without attachment or over-involvement but always with love and compassion. In this space, we are present as presence in the present.

## Love as a state of being in therapy (empathic detachment)

*"Life is love"* (my father, 2008)<sup>3</sup>.

This notion of the fifth province as a 'space' of acceptance within and between all of us calls to mind the Chilean biologist, Humberto Maturana's definition of 'Love' (1985):

*"Love consists in opening a space of existence for another in co-existence with oneself in a particular domain of interactions".*

These words of Maturana on love were heard during a week long intensive workshop with him in Oxford in July, 1985, which was organised by KCC. Since that time, they have been a wonderful reminder of the importance of 'love' in therapy and counselling. Love, for Maturana, is a fundament for all social and indeed biological and ecological relationships. For living beings to survive, love is needed. We do not stay alive, as it were, without love. This is such a beautiful notion. For him and for many others in the cognitive, biological, social and ecological sciences, co-operation and co-existence are the delicate threads that form the web of life – the patterns which connect.

So, how do we maintain this disposition of love in therapy and supervision without becoming over-involved and thus part of a problem we have been asked to help with? If we become over-involved, it means we have become attached to the premises of those seeking our help. Their issues take on a personalised or concretised reality for us. This is an interesting challenge for all therapy and counselling!

In order to scatter our virtues rather than 'broadcast' our sins, then compassion, empathy and love need to hold sway in our hearts. To be present to those who are before us in a state of reverence is also to honour the mystery of their 'beingness'.

### A still point

To be centred and present, then we need to be able to go to a 'space' inside where we will not be influenced by those fluctuations of the mind, emotions or constructs which can distract us from full engagement. We are simultaneously engaged and detached! It is as if we rest and attend from this 'still point'. At the level of 'spirit' we are in 'oneness' while simultaneously being aware of the potential for fluctuations at the level of cognition, emotion and behaviour in ourselves and in our clients. In this space of connection, peacefulness and reverence for all manner of things find it possible to emerge. It is in this space that all becomes, and is, possible when we listen from silence and from the heart. Here are the reflections from another professional dialogical co-creation in relation to stillness, dialogue and presence. The reflections became part of Ruth's personal and professional development (PPD) component in the final stages of her supervisory training in systemic therapy:

*"My overwhelming experience was of a space that was invitational, supportive, gentle, and with a sense of deep quietness. Even though I feel challenged and have struggled with ideas and issues and with my own sense of being limited, I experienced a sense of warmth, genuine interest and stillness.*

*Stillness is perhaps how I would characterise the most striking aspect of ... presence and it evokes for me the remarkable reliability of the process. It reminds me that, when I attend to safety, when I am fully present in good faith... when I listen to and respond to the other, then the space that we can create together can have elements of the 'spiritual'- a feeling of bringing forth more than who each can be of our own human potential"* (Eustace, 2010).

So, you might ask, how do you view a situation without being swayed by mental fluctuations, emotional storms, prejudices and

judgments? How do we develop the ability to see issues clearly without making judgments and not define them based solely on our own experiences? Another question would be, how is it possible to generate love and compassion and yet remain in a state of non-attachment and awareness? The word, 'generate', is used because what we do, we do together. It is another co-creation. Let us say we see someone and we don't feel a sort of chemistry with them, how do we generate a feeling of love and compassion (McCarty *et al.*, 2004)?

### Coherence

A simple answer may be the one given above, to develop a sense of reverential curiosity before all of life's facades. As James Stephens (1978) has reminded us, how we look will, to a large extent, determine what we see. So, the development of reverence in our work is not only for the benefit of our clients, it is also for our own benefit. There is now ample evidence that, if we can generate love, appreciation and compassion in relating to another, then we actually become more stable ourselves and more physiologically and mentally coherent (McCarty, Bradley & Tomasino, 2004). This state of coherence not only protects the health and wellbeing of the therapist but also invites the client into a similar state of coherence and stability. Using an analogy from music, apparently, when two harps are tuned to the same frequency in a room where one harp is larger than the other and where a chord is struck in the bigger harp, the little harp is infused with resonance, which brings it into a tuneful harmony. What is then magical is that the little harp begins to sound its own tune on its own (O'Donoghue, 2004, p. 68).

### Sensings

Like the resonating harps, human beings also transmit 'something' in the way we interact, something that is subtle and not definable by physical standards. We generate this in a conversation and in our relationships with each other. We can feel whether we are being welcomed to speak or not. Love and appreciation are felt. We can feel positive emotions surrounding us when we are in appreciative company. So, when we can remain in a state of physical, mental and emotional coherence and a client reflects something that we don't like in our own life, we are still able to remain in a space of love and show compassion and appreciation. This, in turn, facilitates the emergence of greater coherence in the client. As Deirdre has said, *"It is a two-way thing"*.

If we can stay in the 'now here', as it were, then awareness, energy and being become the essential components in our being together or our "inter-being", as the Vietnamese Buddhist teacher, Thich Nhat Hahn, refers to it (McCarthy, 2004). Interestingly, from a therapy point of view, the language philosopher, Ludwig Wittgenstein, refers to the eternal nature of living and being in the following way. He said, if we take eternity to mean not infinite temporal duration but timelessness, then eternal life belongs to those who live in the present. Referring to the spiritual potential in our dialogical encounters, Meg, a woman facing the challenge of separation from her partner, used the following words:

*"I loved the way we worked together. There was the experience of opening things up and seeing them more clearly and then shifting them along. There was a sense of the spiritual underlying the process. At times, this was very clear. I have a profound sense through my work with you of the spiritual in all of this change. Our interaction was like a mirror in which I could see the deep core of my spirit. I feel so happy within myself I could sing. This is a spiritual therapy."*



Perhaps, we could even say that, in life as well as work, we cannot *not* be spiritual. We also cannot *not* be present! It is in this presencing with each other there are possibilities for communion.

In fact, Meg constantly referred to the importance of co-creating with her. Mary also stated that she would expect the therapist to “*become part of her problems*”. In this way, she felt she would have the confidence to know that she was understood and not judged. When we dare to imagine and dream, even ‘from the ditch and the dungeon’, we are at once opening ourselves to an infinity of possibilities. That great American dreamer and writer, Henry Thoreau, has described this process so vividly in his concluding chapter of his famous work, *Walden* (2004).

*“If one advances confidently in the direction of one’s dreams, and endeavors to live the life which one has imagined, one will meet with a success unexpected in common hours.”*

### **Appreciation and acknowledgement**

Thanks to my dialogical partners brought forth here (Therese Hegarty, Julie Uma Brown, Chan Madhavi Jadoonath and Ruth Eustace) for all our co-creative conversations together and for permitting me to use their reflections and their names in this writing. Mary, Meg, Deirdre, Jack and Debbie each chose their own *nom de plume*. Without these conversations, the space of the fifth province would remain in the domain of the mythical rather than the realm of direct experience. Without the reflections from the other chair, as it were, my own descriptions and reflections would remain one-sided – a half ‘truth’. I also acknowledge those who have been and are my inspirational ‘team mates’, Nollaig Byrne, Philip Kearney, Bernadette O’Sullivan, Ernst Salamon and Sri Vasudeva. There are many more in my virtual community who are not explicitly referenced here, they are nevertheless a continuous presence in my work and writing. Some have also left us (\*) but their traces are ever present\*.

### **Notes**

- 1 ‘*Sui generis*’ is a term which means particular to, original to a particular situation.
- 2 ‘Dis-position’ has been taken to mean in the writings of the Fifth Province Associates (Nollaig Byrne, Imelda McCarthy & Philip Kearney) an ability to be multi-sided in accepting all positions while not attaching to any one position. It has also been referred to as an ‘ambivalent dis-position’, meaning that all positions were juxta-posed and held in dialogue. More recently, it has been used in the context of a ‘dis-position of love’ wherein all positions were viewed compassionately. The word is hyphenated to introduce movement into the word and to deconstruct the concept of an internal or static ‘trait’ in the therapist. Rather, ‘dis-position’ and ‘dis-positioning’ refer to a dynamic openness to a co-creative process that is ever evolving.
- 3 In early 2008, my father, Kevin Colgan (1920 – 2009), had just come to live with my husband and me after a stroke had taken away his physical independence. One night at tea, he took my husband, Michael’s hand and said, “*Michael, I love you*” to which Michael replied, “*and I love you too Kevin*”. My father, silent for a few moments, then uttered these unforgettable words, “*sure, life is love*”.
- 4 (Ireland) Nollaig Byrne, Philip Kearney, Gabriel Kiely, Richard Kearney, Mark Patrick Hederman, Marie Keenan, Valerie O’Brien, Helen Burke, Arlene Healy, Therese Hegarty, Marie Kenny, Bernadette O’Sullivan, Jane Williams, Jim Sheehan, Alan Carr, Ed McHale, Gina Whelan, Julie Uma Brown, Helen Moylan, Carmel O’Hara, Aileen Tierney (Italy) Gianfranco Cecchin\*, Luigi Boscolo, Umberta Telfner, Laura Fruggeri, (Sweden) Ernst Salamon, Mia Andersson, Klas Grevelius\* (UK) Peter & Susan Lang, Elspeth McAdam, Elsa Jones, Gill Gorell Barnes, Alan Cooklin, Karen Partridge, Gail Simon, Gwyn Whitfield, John Shotter, (USA) Monica McGoldrick, Lynn Hoffman, Sal Minuchin, Braulio Montalvo, Marcelo Pakman, Sheila McNamee, Harlene Anderson, Harry Goolishian\*, Peggy Penn, Ken & Mary Gergen, Sallyann Roth, Norma Van Dyke, Judith Landau, Steve de Shazer\*, Insoo Kim Berg\*, Rich Simon, Don Bloch, (Canada) Karl Tomm, Stephen Madigan, Allan Wade, Vikki Reynolds, Chris Kinman, Chan Madhavi Jadoonath, (Norway) Tom Andersen\*, (Germany) Kurt Ludwig, (Czech Republic) Zdenek Macik, (Australia) Carmel Flaskas, Michael

White\*, Cheryl White, David Denborough, (New Zealand) Taimalieutu Kiwi Tamasese, Flora Tuhaca\*, Charles Waldegrave, (Trinidad & Tobago) Sri Vasudeva, Reena Rampersadsingh, Diana Mahabir Wyatt.

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Imelda McCarthy can be emailed at [imeldamccarthy@iol.ie](mailto:imeldamccarthy@iol.ie)



An exercise around co-creating space from a workshop