

The Gift of Bereavement - A Dramatherapist's View

A Philosophical and Clinical Reflection on Bereavement which explores the role and uses of Eroticism, Synchronicity and the Philosophy of Martin Heidegger in formulating a new approach to Therapeutic Bereavement Work. The work draws from long-term dramatherapy work with bereaved teenagers in the UK.

Andrew Royle,

Rickmansworth, UK.

2016

For Amanda Rabin & Nancy Hill

Introduction

Death is still a taboo area in many families and schools. Well-being and health are lauded and venerated to the degree that we have become not only pro-life but anti-death. This means that we and our children are far from prepared to cope with death, when it arrives with the bereavement of a loved one. Bereavement work often necessitates a stark and sudden crossing into the death taboo, it initiates us, often brutally, into the previously unmentionable truth: that we will all die.

Not only are we all going to die, but we could die at any time. This uncomfortable truth is difficult for many adults to discuss, plan or even consider, let alone children. But do children not do this anyway in schoolyard games of War and as Superheroes that kill their nemesis? Are children not already including death in ways which we may forget to do as adults? If we take our lead from children, we may find that they are much more willing than we are, to engage in this shadowy area. Is it because we cannot test for it or grade it that it cannot be tied down into a syllabus - that death is excluded from many classrooms?

Keeping our children busy and ignorant of human mortality only conspires to stoke fear and anxiety. In conspiring to silence we communicate to children the merits of an un-checked and unreflective fear of death: ignore it until you have to face it, ignore it until it knocks you off your feet. How much better would it be to make a space for the inevitable arrival of death in discussion, play and reflection, through which it may be possible to create a deep capacity within ourselves and our children to cope with this old visitor, long before the knock at the door.

This writing is based on 10 years of dramatherapy work with the bereaved. I first started working with the bereaved whilst training to be a dramatherapist in 2006 and have continued working with bereaved teenagers since then. However, my real education in bereavement started way before then, in 1983, when my own father died, I was 13 years old.

For me, bereavement, as well as the pain and sorrow, the closed curtains, the weeks off school, the well-meaning neighbours and relatives, was a deeply arresting and anxiety provoking experience. It ushered in a relationship with 'forever' – it was clear in my mind that I would never see my father again, ever. It was this thought that plagued me. I later found solace in philosophy, it was comforting to read pages of Continental Philosophy (that I barely understood) in which others had also wrestled with subjects such as death, the eternal, anxiety and fear. It was much later, in my 30s that I was to find, in my own psychotherapy that my teenage bereavement was still very much there, as if waiting for me, to do something. This work and my dramatherapy work with the bereaved is my attempt to do something with my bereavement, to take care of it.

Chapter 1 is a reflection on Irish poet Seamus Heaney's poem *Clearances*, which Heaney wrote following the death of his mother. The poem describes the experience of bereavement as an erotic union with the deceased - a penetrating connection which brings a 'pure change'. Eroticism, together with Heaney's use of time and space in the poem provides a base on which to develop these ideas further in later chapters. Chapter 2 considers bereavement, in the context of the early ontological philosophy of Martin Heidegger, as an initiation into the 'clearing' (*lichtung*). It is from the clearing, Heidegger argues, that we are able to authentically claim our *being-in-the-world*.

Chapter 3 refers to dramatherapy work with a group of bereaved teenagers. It introduces the notion of *deadly eroticism*, which relates to a connection between erotic content and bereavement process. The chapter explores the group bereavement process in tandem with developments in my own dramatherapy work, augmented through supervisory reflections and insights. I use Jungian theory too to consider bereavement as an experience that ushers in a radical opposites of life and death, from a Jungian perspective this leads to creative and transformational possibilities. Chapter 4 explores synchronistic phenomena in dramatherapy bereavement group, using Roderick Main's definition of synchronicity as 'paralleled content'. It follows the recurring image of 'blood' in sessions and reflects upon it as an incubation of process that leads to the formation of a 'continuing bond' with the deceased. On a broader scale, I examine the occurrence of other motifs and images in the group which parallel with the ancient stories, in particular necrophilia and cannibalism are considered from the perspective of bereavement. I also reflect on my own experience of

synchronicity, both in and out of sessions, drawing upon two experiences which occurred outside of session, but relate to my own bereavement.

Chapter 5 articulates an approach to Therapeutic Bereavement Work, which covers five realms: The Cleared Space, Animation, Vitalisation, Incubation and Continuity. Congruence and attunement are held to be the two hallmarks of this approach. Therapeutic interventions are considered within a number of spectrums, which chart a gradual synthesising of the *over-there*, with the *here*. The story of *Theseus and The Minotaur* is used analogous to processes in bereavement. Finally I consider the ontological impact of bereavement on the bereaved, in relation to being and becoming.

I use the term 'Bereavement work' throughout, which is meant to allow a wide application of the ideas discussed, they are not merely intended to be confined to therapy. I have also changed the names and details of clients to protect confidentiality. Writing and eventually finishing *The Gift of Bereavement* has been an end-point or limit to my own bereavement process, for that reason it has been a very personal journey, and as I say in Chapter 5, one that in some ways inevitably continues. I would like to thank all the clients and their families that I have worked with over the last 10 years in this difficult area, I have been touched by the love, care and strength that has been so apparent. Also I would like to thank the many friends, colleagues and professionals that have engaged in discussions with me over the years, I particularly wanted to pay tribute to the late Kathy Duggan (Educational Psychologist, confidant and friend, whom I miss very much) whom was always generous with her time and friendship in discussing some of the ideas I have written about. I would also like to thank my children and my partner Michelle for your patience and love. Finally I would like to thank Nancy Hill and Amanda Rabin without whom this writing would not have been possible and to whom this work is dedicated.

Chapter 1

Clearances – Seamus Heaney

'There's no better way to forget something that to commemorate it'

The History Boys, Alan Bennett

Bereavement has a home in poetry. The poetic forms of Elegy, Epitaph, Dirge, Ode, Lament and Ballad, have long associations with death and bereavement. Can poetry help to inform therapeutic processes in working with the bereaved? What is meant by 'process'?

- i) a series of actions or steps towards achieving a particular end
- ii) a natural series of changes

Oxford English Dictionary

Process is a word often used in therapy, 'the therapeutic process' is often cited as what is needed to run its course, to be completed, for the therapy to be efficacious. The first definition of 'process' above suggests that the end (or aim) of the therapeutic process is identified prior to the commencement of therapy. Therefore, the efficacy of the therapy is deemed successful or not subject to whether a particular end is reached (such as fewer nightmares, cessation of self-harm...etc). This is the case in contemporary Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), in which the aim of therapy is established clearly at the beginning of the therapy i.e. to lessen anxiety, to stop self-harming....etc. However, in bereavement work clients (especially children) rarely seem to want (or be able) to articulate a particular aim or end point to the therapy. Process, in therapeutic bereavement work then relates more to the second meaning of the term: 'a natural series of changes'.

The word 'natural' suggests the process or journey is one which is organic, which has some familiarity to us in our natural state, whatever that may be. Could there then be certain aspects, markers or images that we can expect to find or negotiate upon the bereaved's journey? We will begin our journey with *Clearances*.

Clearances was written by Seamus Heaney *in memoriam* following the death of his mother. Surprisingly, for a poem about bereavement, Heaney uses the sonnet form (eight in total) - a poetic form usually associated with love than death. The theme of love, intimacy and eroticism feature strongly in the poem. Heaney recalls sharing everyday domestic chores with his mother, such as peeling potatoes and folding line, with a touching and intimate tone. Folding the washing together is likened to a dance and the peeling of potatoes are recalled with an intimacy that seems more evocative of lovers than a mother and son:

....

I remembered her head bent towards my head,
Her breath in mine, our fluent dipping
Knives-
Never closer the whole rest of our
Lives.

Heaney reflects in the poem, that this closeness was denied or avoided whilst his mother was alive; rather they were 'allied and at bay', they came together, only 'by holding back'. They kneel next to each other at church, viewing their '*Sons and Lovers* phase' from a distance, sublimated through the symbols and rituals of mass. Connections between mother and son are thwarted or else occupy a shifting and awkward dynamic that Heaney describes as 'touch and go'. They are separated in binary and chromosomal ways in which 'I was x and she was o'. It is in the context of this ambivalence that his mother's death brings a fundamental change:

Then she was dead,
The searching for a pulsebeat was abandoned
And we all knew one thing by being there.
The space we stood around had been emptied
Into us to keep, it penetrated
Clearances that suddenly stood open.
High cries were felled and a pure change happened

The distance between Heaney and his mother is then strangely reversed at the moment of her death, which is given as a moment of intense and ecstatic connection – a *penetration* - no less, which is suggestive of an oedipal and erotic connection. What penetrates, strangely, is not something tangible, but the very *space* once occupied by his mother, it is this space that Heaney describes as 'clearances'.

What is meant by 'erotic'? The OED definition of erotic refers to the sexual meaning of the word: 'excitation of genitalia'. However, etymologically, the word erotic derives from *Eros*, the Greek god of love. The emphasis of love in Eros is somewhat covered over by the

contemporary sexualized meaning of the word. In *Erotic Transference and Countertransference: Clinical Practice in Psychotherapy*, (Mann, 1999) Eros is given as a 'connecting principle' i.e. not merely or primarily associated with sex. Mann refers to the erotic in clinical practice, as that which comes together or joins up. Of course in therapy there is a coming together of the client and therapist, but also between different aspects of the client i.e. a joining up of unconscious and conscious aspects of the self. In *Clearances* then we can read both meanings of 'erotic': the sexual and the connective which converge (or penetrate) into the bereaved at the moment of the mother's death.

Let's consider further, that which Heaney gives as penetrating through to him: the enigmatic and titular 'clearances'. It is enigmatic as it carries a number of possible meanings. Firstly, clearances can be used in a spacial context i.e. a cleared space, such as a clearing in the forest. Secondly, 'clearances' also refers to something becoming clearer i.e. an idea, image or feeling and, in the process, more delineated, defined and understood. Finally, clearances also suggests authorization as in, clearance being given for a particular action i.e. clearance to proceed, or for access.

The meaning of clearances in the third aspect, as authorization, suggests that Heaney, the bereaved, is granted access or privilege into what was previously closed (or taboo) whilst his mother was alive - an erotic union with his mother; Heaney is effectively 'cleared for access' (as is the case in bereavement generally) there is literally *no-body* to prevent it. His mother, the arch-thwarter of such a union whilst alive, is no longer there to keep him 'at bay'; in her death, she therefore comes penetratingly through. Heaney describes the effect of such penetration as a 'pure change', for him. In doing so, Heaney communicates that it is the bereaved whom are irrevocably changed by death and left the make sense of it, whilst the dead simply die. Fittingly, in Heaney's poem, the deceased mother, in contrast to Heaney's 'pure change' merely and somewhat mundanely occupies a new postal address: 'Number 5, New Row, Land of the Dead'.

The meaning of the word clearances in the first aspect, described above as 'cleared space', comes through in the final sonnet of Heaney's poem, particularly in the image of the chestnut tree 'which has lost its place'. The space, once inhabited, becomes 'utterly empty,

utterly a source'. Exactly what the space is a source for or of, remains undefined in the poem, except to say that the space points towards *what was once there* – the chestnut tree. In this way, far from being a neutral space of nothingness, the cleared space, serves to announce what is missing or absent. The circularity in moving between the chestnut tree that was once there and that is now absent serves as a metaphor for bereavement itself. The deceased are there and not there, the deceased remain there in there *once was there-ness*, like an indelible mark, vouchsafed by the circular cleared space. In this way, the cleared space becomes a continual and circular source that testifies for the life of the deceased.

Bereavement then for Heaney, is a purifying and initiating process that radically alters our way of being in the world. The 'bright nowhere' of bereavement discloses a lit up and ubiquitous utopia, marked in contrast to the familiar and domestic world that Heaney once shared with his mother. This radically altered space that Heaney, the bereaved, occupies is described as 'ramifying and forever', transgressing both local and sensory limits towards a silence beyond 'silence listened for'. The image of Heaney listening, displays a circularity in the poem that pre-figures the poem's opening stanza, in which Heaney recalls his mother lesson to *listen* carefully. The poem then charts Heaney's bereavement process from a corporeal didacticism of being-with his mother in a domestic and localized setting to an didactic initiation in metaphysical being-with that alters what listening is. Just as the coal splits when Heaney listens carefully to the hammer on the coal-block, so too in bereavement does the bereaved's world collapse into the everyday domestic and the metaphysical eternal.

An eternal continuity is suggested by Heaney's use of a historical, family heirloom, inherited from the maternal side of his family:

...

A cobble thrown a hundred years ago
Keeps coming at me...

The 'first stone', as Heaney describes it, thrown in sectarian protest at his maternal great-grandmother (the transgressing 'exogamous bride') on her wedding day, comes to Heaney via 'inheritance' upon his mother's death. Like his great-grandmother, Heaney in his bereavement has transgressed localized boundaries. Whilst his grandmother transgresses sectarian religious boundaries, Heaney, by virtue of his bereavement transgresses temporal and spatial boundaries. The stone is not only a family heirloom, his inheritance, but provides a concrete and existential problem of what to do, how to act. Heaney has been given the potential to act, to throw the stone to do now, the invocation and problem of action is now his. Heaney asks of himself, how should I 'dispose of [the stone] now she's gone'. Heaney is duly *cleared* for action in bereavement too, he is cleared to receive the stone and to use it.

Chapter 2

Being-towards-death – Martin Heidegger

"If I take death into my life, acknowledge it, and face it squarely, I will free myself from the anxiety of death and the pettiness of life - and only then will I be free to become myself."

Martin Heidegger

This chapter considers aspects of Martin Heidegger's (1889 – 1976) writings and philosophy in the context of bereavement. As Heidegger's writings are filled with many highly technical neologisms, I will provide some background to his work, drawing from two texts: *The Zollikon Seminars: Protocols, Conversations, Letters* (date) and Heidegger's magnum opus *Being and Time* (1927).

The formidable quest that Heidegger sets himself in *Being and Time* is to respond to the question - what is being? This 'question of being' has a long heritage in the western philosophical tradition, but for Heidegger, to merely ask *what* is being, is problematic, as the question works to objectify being as a 'thing' – it separates off 'being' (whatever it is) from the questioner of being. This makes unhelpful assumptions of the nature of being, before

interrogating what being actually is. Therefore, rather than asking 'what is being', Heidegger begins with the question 'whom is asking the question of being'. This question (the whom of being) includes the possibility that the questioner themselves are somehow involved in the questioning and may actually contribute in some way to the being under question.

Heidegger's starting point then asks *whom* is this being 'that in its being is concerned about its very being' (p.11).

To mark this starting point and perhaps recognizing that referring to a 'being that in its being is concerned about its very being' is a bit of a mouthful, Heidegger creates the first of many neologisms: *dasein*. This is a German word which translates into English as 'there is'. There is.....a question, there is.....a questioner, there is.....in the question, a concern about being; there is, it seems, something, but what is 'there is'. He reserves judgement for now, but gives the 'there is' the name of *dasein*. Heidegger's creative approach is intended to avoid unhelpful psychological and philosophical associations of using such terms as 'subject' or 'ego' - as they will become the very concepts that Heidegger will later subvert.

Heidegger gives two characteristics of *dasein*:

- i) *Dasein* exists: 'the essence of *Dasein* lies in its existence' (p.42).
- ii) *Dasein* is mine: 'the being, whose analysis our task is, is always mine' (p.42).

The first, seemingly obvious point, is that *dasein* (the being that is concerned about its being) can only *be* if it first of all exists i.e. that it *is*. By referring to 'essence' Heidegger articulates what he means by *is-ness*; for example, take a table - the essence of a table *is* the very thing that makes a table, a table and not something else. We may say that a table *is* a table if something can be placed upon it. If it doesn't fulfill this criteria (that something can be placed upon it) then it is not a table. In the same way, the essence of *dasein* - what *dasein* is - is that it exists. If it doesn't exist then it is not *dasein*. Without existence, *dasein* wouldn't have any ground (or being) to ask the question of being at all. Later philosophers, such as Jean-Paul Sartre have referred to this primacy of existence as the 'first principle of Existentialism' - 'existence precedes essence' (quote) - the essential quality of being is found in its very existence.

The second characteristic of dasein: 'mineness', refers to the whom of existence. Things do not simply float around in the world, in detached ways. It is 'me' that is writing this paper, 'I' am thinking about Heidegger, it is 'my' fingers that type the keyboard. If the 'is' of 'there is' (of dasein) concerns a general ground of existence, that all things must have in order to *be*, then the 'there' of dasein's 'there is' concerns a particular view and perspective of being i.e. my view, his thoughts, their being. In the German, 'mine-ness' is *Jemeimigkeit* which translates as 'always my own or in each case mine' (p450).

Dasein then always has the status of mine-ness. I do not hear questions in a universal or abstract way, but rather I hear questions in a particular language. I also hear them at a particular place and time, which gives contextual meaning to questions. For example, I hear somebody speak on 'a train' or in a 'tepee' or in a 'lecture hall'; each carries contextual associations that forms the meaning of what I hear and how it is heard. I may also hear something in the middle of the night differently to the middle of the day. That I have an existence that is 'mine' are Heidegger's hallmarks of being, it is what he calls our *being-in-the-world*.

Let us be clear, Heidegger's *being-in-the-world* does not mean that dasein is 'in' the world in the same way that say water is *in* a glass or a dress is *in* a closet. He is not arguing that 'dasein' exists in one place and 'the world' in another place, next to it. Heidegger argues that this erroneous 'relationship of location' is the mistake that has been made in Western Philosophy and one that he seeks to put right. Such an error has meant that we tend to think of people as being (inner) 'subjects' separated from (outer) 'objects'. Philosophy has tended to focus on the discrepancy between these inner and outer worlds. Heidegger's radical philosophy argues against this separation of dasein and world and instead argues for an 'entangled' (*verfallen*) being. Dasein is then entangled in the world it is with.

To explain this entanglement further, Heidegger refers to a workman using a hammer. A workman reaches out for a hammer, instinctively weighs it in his hand and begins to work. Each blow is hammered out with tiny, imperceptible adjustments of velocity and trajectory, adjustments that the workman does automatically and is barely aware of making. In fact, the more competent the workman, the less aware he is of the hammer at all, he simply hammers away. The movements in his hand are realized in movements of the hammer, so that the hammer serves as an extension of the workman's hand. In this way the hammer

and the workman are together, entangled. The moment the workman begins to contemplate the hammer as a separate object or 'thing' something gets in the way. Something doesn't work and the very being of the hammer itself gets lost. In this way, the being of the hammer is disclosed in utility; to simply stare at the hammer, to think about it as a separate 'thing' does not reveal anything more of the *being* of the hammer. It is *with* the workman, in hammering, that the being of the hammer is revealed.

By analogy, Heidegger argues that it is with what *dasein* *does* that *dasein* comes to understand itself and its being. In this way, there is no escape, we cannot think our way out of *being-in-the-world* - we are committed to it. Our being comes to us in what we do. I understand myself as a 'workman' through my actions as a workman, through actions such as hammering. Heidegger explains that *dasein's* has 'relevance' (*Verweisung*) by virtue of its being-in-the-world. 'Relevance' means 'to let something be together with something else' (p82). The workman is a workman not only due to hammering, but also due to what he is together-with (i.e. what is relevant to him). This includes such things as wood, saws, nails, chisels, carpentry, artistry, commerce, craftsmanship and so on. The being of the workman is entangled 'with' such objects, states and entities even though he may be some distance from them and even though they may not exist in a material sense¹. A specific act of hammering discloses *dasein's* *being-with* (*Mitsein*) status, it discloses not only that 'there is' workmanship, aesthetics, trade and so on, but also that *dasein* has relevance to i.e. is with such aspects in its *being-in-the-world*. Such wider 'things' as craft, skill, trade associations and commerce are *there*, in what Heidegger calls 'circumspection' i.e. they are *there* relationally, in the surrounding world. In a similar way that the workshop is *there* (surrounding) the workman, so too is the world there and with *dasein*. In Heidegger, the part not only relates to the whole, but works to disclose the whole and vice versa.

Let us remain with our workman in his workshop and now imagine that the workman reaches out for a hammer and finds instead an empty space. The workman, in looking for his hammer, starts to notice his workshop (that has been *there*, surrounding him all the time). He casts an eye over the shelves, seeing dust, he spies a cracked window and becomes aware of a spider moving across the ceiling; he notices the detritus of uncompleted tasks

¹ This refers to Heidegger's phenomenological philosophical position which is contrary to a materialist-scientific paradigm.

and worries about time deadlines. Heidegger says, in this 'looking around' the referential context of being is 'lit up' (p.74). By virtue of the space of the missing hammer it is as if a light switches on and dasein 'sees' the world that has been *there* all along.

The important point is that the light is not switched on 'out there' in the world, but rather, dasein switches on a light switches for him/herself, in the doing, with the world. The world is categorized and created, for the workman, in the context of his particular concern. He 'sees' a missed deadline in a half-finished barrel or he 'hears' his boss's rebuke coming through the space of the missing hammer. The empty space becomes a disclosing ground for dasein to conjure and create the world. In doing this, Heidegger describes dasein as a '*Lumen Naturale*' (a natural light), which lights up its *being-in-the-world* 'in such a way as to be its [own] there' (p.129).

In a similar way to dasein's entangled relationship with world, so too is dasein entangled with other people. For Heidegger, we do not exist as isolates; just as we are committed to *being-in-the-world*, so too are we committed to *being-with-others*. For Heidegger, it is impossible for an 'isolated I without other to be given' (p115), this is because, whatever I am - a son, father, husband, or bereaved, necessarily refers to and inculcates the existence of others too i.e. a parent, child, wife or deceased. At the same time that I claim my existence, my 'mineness', I also necessarily declare the indefatigable existence of others. Let us not underestimate the profound significance of Heidegger's move here, which is in direct refutation of the influential method and philosophy of Rene Descartes's solitary introspection some three hundred years earlier. Heidegger's position reverses Descartes skeptical starting point: how can I be sure, Descartes begins, that the world and other people actually exist, Descartes replies that whilst I may doubt the world and others, whilst doubting, I am, at the least thinking – I cannot doubt that. I think therefore I am, says Descartes famously. Yet, from a Heideggerian perspective, it is oxymoronic to say that 'I doubt the existence of others' as the very positing of 'I' necessarily refers to (i.e. has relevance to) a 'you'. Just as Heidegger's workman claims his own existence as a workman in relevance with the world of the workshop, so too does each dasein claim its I-hood from the world of others that it is necessarily with. The 'I' posits the not-I. This is because, dasein comes to understand itself, from the world – the world of things and of other people. Dasein encounters others and in so doing is able to return to the ground of its own being. In

this way 'other' is intimately predicated by and entangled with dasein. Heidegger states that 'Dasein is essentially a being-with [*Mitsein*]' (p.170).

Whilst Heidegger's argument works to abate the solipsism of Descartes, at the same time it opens up a new problem. Whilst the 'I' (or 'ego') was indubitably alone in Descartes, it was secure, untouched by others; whereas in Heidegger the with-ness of others becomes a problem to be negotiated. What is the sphere of influence of 'other' – could the other undermine my own agency or even 'mine-ness' per se. In Heidegger, there is a danger to dasein of the power of the ubiquitous 'they'. In Heidegger's terminology 'the-they' (*Das-man*) 'articulates the referential context of significance' (p125). This means that the-they are *there*, like the unseen background to the workman's specific act of hammering. It is the-they which informs us (implicitly or explicitly) what is to be done and how it is to be done. The-they comes through (or are disclosed) when dasein does what *one* does, such as when a workman hammers the way *one* hammers; or when a person drinks tea the way one drinks tea; or when somebody is shocked, delighted or appalled by what *one* is shocked, delighted, appalled by. To act merely by virtue of the-they runs the risk of what Heidegger calls 'inauthenticity' (*Uneigentlich*). Dasein becomes 'inauthentic' in its denial of mine-ness. In inauthenticity, dasein stands at the risk of being levelled down, neutered and appropriated by the 'they-self', so that 'everyone is other and no one himself' (p124).

This is not to say that Heidegger regards inauthenticity as a 'lesser' state of being to authenticity (p.42) The workman may hammer the way *one* hammers for expediency, to get the job done; it may be prudent and civil to go along with social customs - the way one does - say in a job interview or meeting prospective in-laws for the first time. Authenticity is not an imperative, but rather authenticity and inauthenticity denote two modes of being with differing emphasis on 'mine-ness'. Heidegger describes these two modes of being in terms of seeing and light. Authenticity relates to the *Lumen Naturale*, a lighting up of being, whereas, inauthenticity conceals or covers the light of being, in its acquiescence to the 'fore-sight' of the-they. Inauthentic dasein may dwell in the 'tranquillized assurance' that one is doing what one does, however, only from the second-hand view of the-they.

However, there is an aspect of dasein's being that remains definitely *mine*, that refuses to acquiesce to the-they. It is what what Heidegger calls dasein's 'ownmost, non-relational potentiality of being' (quote): *dasein's own death*. Death, provides a corner-stone to mine-

ness, as it is a non-relational aspect of dasein, that remains out of reach of the-they. Death, for Heidegger, is not merely an event that occurs at the end of dasein's life; death, is not like a distant railway station is to a train - it is not merely a future point or place that becomes arrived at; rather, Heidegger describes death as ripeness is to a fruit - the fruit ripens as it exists, ripening is what the fruit is 'doing' in its very being. In this way, death is liberated from being an end-point or final event, but rather, is always *there* for dasein. Heidegger describes death as an 'eminent imminence' (p240) - as soon as we are born, we are old enough to die. Dasein 'always already is its end' (p236). Heidegger calls this dasein's *being-towards-death*, a state of being in which dasein exists. It is *being-towards-death* that constantly provides the possibility for dasein to authentically claim mine-ness. Accordingly, being authentic, for Heidegger, is to *resolutely anticipate* death, to claim it and use it as a resource against the crushing influence of the-they.

Claiming one's *being-towards-death* (which is no easy task, says Heidegger, '*being-towards-death* is essentially anxiety' (p.255)) involves 'taking care' (*Besorgen*), that is: 'carrying something out, settling something [and] getting it for oneself' (quote). Yet, 'taking care' is not about willful and dogged determination, on the contrary, dasein, is 'called' to take 'care' (*Sorge*). Much like Seamus Heaney's invocation to listening in *Clearances* (Chapter 1), Heidegger exhorts us to listen. Heidegger describes the call of care as being like *nothing* else in the world, there is silence and stillness in care's call. Care does not stimulate enquiry but arrives, says Heidegger, with no 'relevance' to the world. In this way, care brings space from the networks of connections (and relevance) to other things and other people in the world. Consequently, Heidegger can only describe care in the negative: 'nothing is called to the self which is summoned' (p263).

In its nothingness, care affords space for dasein, space from the 'clammer and chatter' of the-they, this enables dasein a freedom from habit and practices. It is akin to the workman losing his hammer and not looking for it. This is not to say that the call of care is an alien or even spiritual, Heidegger is not arguing for a transcendent or divine 'awakening' in the call of care, rather, says Heidegger, the call comes 'from me and yet over me' (quote), arriving from 'neither source nor speaker'. It doing so, the call of care reaches or discloses previously untapped areas or resources of dasein's being; it is 'mine', in a way that has not been mine before, but it is also formative of 'mine-ness' itself.

Heidegger uses the term 'clearing' (*Lichtung*) to describe the space that is disclosed in the nothingness of the call of care. Like a clearing in the forest, space is rendered possible, as Dasein's own (authentic) being is thrown into relief, against (inauthentic) being of the-they. The clearing is 'authentic' as the possibility for it was *there* all along – in this way, Dasein is disclosed in (its own) light of the clearing.

In correspondence with Swiss Psychiatrist Medard Boss, Heidegger writes:

'A clearing in the forest is still there, even when it's dark. Light presupposes clearing. There can only be brightness where something has been cleared or where something is free for the light' (p12, Zollikon).

In the marginalia of later translations of *Being and Time* Heidegger was to refer to 'the clearing' by the Greek word *phanos*, which translates as 'openness – clearing, light, shining' (p.129). Similar to the lit up space of the workshop, in the clearing, Dasein has the space to light up its own being and is therefore 'disclosed' *with* the world. Being duly 'cleared', for Heidegger, is a freeing process, in which Dasein becomes 'unlocked' (p.74) – able to claim its *being-in-the-world-with-others*.

Within the context of bereavement, the Heideggerian invocation to 'take care' of the *being-towards-death* that is 'mine' comes vividly prescient. This is because, our own death, says Heidegger, is never something that we shall 'experience' – there is simply no more 'mine' at the point of death in order to experience it. Therefore, it is only with the death of others that we come close to experiencing death. It is because of this, says Heidegger that the death of others is all the more 'penetrating' (pp).

Let us take a moment to consider the use of the word 'penetrating'² – it seems important to our study as it is also a word that Heaney uses in *Clearances* (Chapter 1). The English word

² Translators of Friedrich Hölderlin's (a poet of importance to Heidegger) poem 'Patmos' also used the English 'penetrating' for the German 'Eintreiben'. The words of Hölderlin's poem relate to bereavement too, in particular, the receiving of spirit following the death of Christ:

It penetrated them like fire into hot iron,
And the one they love walked beside them
Like a shadow

‘penetrating’ derives from the Latin *penetrare*: to go into, which suggests that that something outside, enters *into* the bereaved – this chimes with Heaney’s erotic approach to bereavement. The problem is that this begins to take the form of a subject/object split (with the bereaved as occupying a subjective state that is penetrated into) which Heidegger has strongly argued against. If we look to the original German of Heidegger, the sentence is: ‘Um so eindringlicher ist doch der Tod Anderer’. The German word ‘eindringlich’ is not always translated as ‘penetrating’ (though it is in the Stambaugh translation of *Being and Time*); ‘eindringlich’ is more often translated as ‘urgent, powerful, forceful or forcible’³.

From a Heideggerian perspective then, bereavement reaches us with an urgent force, a force not only of the death of a loved one, but of our own *being-towards-death* too. In this way, bereavement initiates us into authenticity, we are cleared by it and we are forced into ‘taking care’. Bereavement, (for both Heidegger and Heaney) clears the ground for a radical shift in being. In Heaney, this is given as a relationship towards nonlocal space; in Heidegger, it is given temporally. In bereavement, what was felt to be merely ‘future’ i.e. death, comes crashing into the ‘present’. In doing so, the bereaved are catapulted out of what Heidegger calls inauthentic ‘vulgar time’: time as a series of discrete and separated ‘nows’ i.e. clock time. Instead, Instead, the future, past and present are all rendered *there*, disclosed through the *ecstatic moment* of temporal unity that unites and discloses time as an entangled past, present and future.

This is the strange inheritance of the bereaved – an altered, yet authentic liberty, in which the bereaved are duly *cleared*. In Heideggerian philosophy, bereavement comes with the consolation of the possibility for *dasein*’s authentic disclosure - to hand ‘itself down to itself’ (p.366). It is an unenviable but deeply liberating task which knocks at the door of the bereaved.

Chapter 3

‘Eintreiben’ has a meaning associated with hammering or driving a nail into something, which provides an interesting parallel with Heidegger’s use of the ‘workman hammering’ in *Being and Time*. This suggests a related image of the bereaved as that of Hephaestus, at his forge, smelting elemental materials into a new form.

³ With thanks to Professor M. Jefferies, Manchester University.

Eroticism in bereavement work

In this chapter I will draw from dramatherapy work with a group of bereaved teenagers and use insights from Heaney and Heidegger's writings to explore processes in the group. The group met for one hour each week, over a two year period, comprised of six female secondary school pupils. The group was facilitated by two dramatherapists - myself and a female colleague (Nancy). Each pupil had been referred due to a family bereavement, the group were bereaved as follows: two fathers, one step-brother, one (male) cousin, an aunty and a grandmother - both the cousin and the step-brother had been violently killed. We were supervised by a Child & Adolescent Psychoanalytic Psychotherapist. Sessions loosely followed the Sesame dramatherapy structure:

Check-in: pupils were invited to share how they felt - using words, movements or sounds.

Bridge-in: a theme, from the check-In, was used as a motivation for a movement or drama exercise.

Main-Event: an improvised play, drama or movement activity

Bridge-out: the group would be asked to come together and share reflections on the session.

Grounding: a facilitated ending of the group, involving a ritual movement/vocal exercise.

I will focus on two pupils in particular, a year 8 pupil whom I shall call Mary, her father (a lawyer) had died, following an illness when Mary was 4 years old. Mary lived at home with her brother and mother and talked (somewhat dispassionately) about becoming a lawyer herself. Mary was ambivalent regarding the group, it was Mary's mother whom has been keen for her to attend, as she felt it may help Mary express her feelings in relation to her bereavement, there being little talk at home of the bereavement. Mary was quiet, but also cynical about the group, regarding the drama and movement activities as 'pointless'.

The second pupil, I will call Liz, was a friend of Mary's. Her step-brother had been stabbed and killed in a violent attack. Liz lived at home with her sisters and mother and was estranged from her father. Liz was keen to come to the group and was excited by the prospect of engaging in activities.

The group had met weekly for approximately one school term. A regular theme of discussion in the group was whether there was any point in doing drama activities -an uncertainty and ennui had descended into sessions:

After a 'check-in' in which we sat in a circle, slowly the group lay on the floor, face-down, with chins on hands, avoiding eye-contact. This time Nancy and I did likewise, until we all lay, face-down, with heads pointing towards the centre of the circle. The silence was broken by one of the pupils drumming her bright red, acrylic fingernails on the wooden floor of the room. The sight and sound of the rapping nails seized the group's attention, others slowly joined in to create a collective drumming of fingernails on the wooden floor. Nancy and I joined in too. There was no discussion regarding what we were doing and no direction given. I felt the group energy rise in the activity.

In subsequent weeks, other members of the group arrived sporting similarly coloured acrylic fingernails and the random fingernail drumming continued, interspersed with discussion. In these 'fingernail' sessions the subjects discussed, took a darker and eroticized turn. The subject of rape was discussed (in reference to a TV programme), a group member asked: 'Would you need to pass it on if I said I was going to slit my wrists?' Silence. 'Fizzy blood...' replied another absurdly, provoking much hysterical laughter from the group.

The energy continued to 'fizz', the group shifted from their sprawled positions on the floor, particularly when Liz played a song from her phone, through the sound-system in the room. The group became animated and began to physically move, dancing to the music. After it finished, Liz explained the song:

'A stripper or prostitute is killed in Camden Town, after which a man has sex with her dead body, chops off her arms and legs and throws her into the canal'

As Liz told of the song's grisly content, another pupil showed her bleeding thumb, a false nail had ripped off, whilst she was dancing. At the end of this 'dancing session' another member of the group produced a painting from her bag. She had drawn it a

week following her father's death; she had found it under her bed, earlier this week and decided to bring it to the session.

Reflections on the group process

In clinical supervision, we (the two therapists and the supervisor) revisited the fingernail activity. What I was 'left with' to bring to supervision, felt conflicted and difficult to discuss. The finger-nail activity had felt exposing for me personally - the male-ness of my fingers seemed at odds with the rest of this (otherwise) female and young group. I felt marked out and different, that I didn't belong here, that it wasn't my place. It had felt shaming for me to be in this group of females, as it felt shaming to bring it up at supervision too. The fingernail exercise felt intimate and vaguely erotic. In the exercise, I felt vulnerable of being branded an interloper or, worse, a predator. I saw my own male fingers naked and exposed in their shape and size, guilty and culpable in some way. The body exposes, in stark ways which thoughts do not, my fingers were there, 'pinned' and waiting to be claimed and interpreted by others and delivered back to my guilty-self.

In sharing this at supervision, I felt relief. My anxiety was considered within an analytical frame of 'castration anxiety'. This refers to Freud's psycho-sexual stages of development, in which the child feels the awakening of unconscious sexual desires and fears castrating punishment for such feelings. Did I fear such 'castration' too— born of an opening to intimacy within the group? Or could the anxiety that I felt actually be 'transferred' to me from the group? Also, it felt important to reflection upon my anxiety in the context of bereavement (the reason the group was formed). The group had been bereaved of mostly male relatives; therefore, here, in this group of females, I was not just the last, but the *only* man standing. Would this group then 'kill me off' too i.e. *dis-member* me? I felt it to be my role and task in the group to survive this *deadly eroticism*.

The notion of 'deadly eroticism' reached an apotheosis with the necrophilia content of the song. This was significant to myself as an Arts-Therapist, as the art-form was being utilised as a container for difficult content. Again in supervision, an analytical reading of the necrophilia content was considered - as a symbolic manifestation of unconscious psycho-

sexual fantasies in the group, in which the female in the song is duly 'punished' for illicit and taboo sexual desires. The dismemberment of the female in the song served to continue the castrating/punishing theme as before, but this time reversed the gender dynamic, the deadly eroticism shifted its location from castrating fingernails to the perpetrating phallus. In this regard, it seems that my anxiety had foreshadowed similar processes which then emerged in the group's content and images.

Yet, aside from analytical interpretations, the necrophilia image can also be seen as indicative of the task that the group were engaged in: forming a connection with the deceased. This felt particularly relevant for Liz (whom had brought and played the song in the first place), as it was Liz's step-brother than had been stabbed and killed. It felt to me that playing the song provided a way for Liz to communicate the violence of her step-brother's death, as well as her own feelings of violation, in being so brutally bereaved. In this way, the necrophilia image allowed for a *re-membering* – a shadowy return of the male member (rather than an excluding castration). Interestingly, in the same session, what was removed (or 'castrated') was in fact, a false- fingernail, which seemed prophetic of the group's shift towards a less a superficial engagement in process.

The erotic theme continued in later sessions too but focusing on the group members' relational dynamics: Liz announced that she had become 'bisexual' and that she loved Mary, to which Mary replied with protestations and told her to stop being a 'paedophile'.

'It's not a joke, it's serious' Liz replied.

Liz also announced that Mary was pregnant, which was laughed off by Mary herself.

There was also considerable interest regarding the status of the relationship between myself and Nancy (the other dramatherapist)

'...we're we married, or going out together, did we have a child, a little girl?'

The group started to refer to itself as a 'family', casting roles which included Nancy and I as 'Mum and Dad'.

Later in the work, I announced that a new member would be joining us, (a male), to which Liz remarked that she preferred an all-female group. When attention was drawn to my maleness, Liz remarked, 'I see you as a woman'.

Towards the end of the group Mary shares that she, her mother and brother went out for a family dinner to acknowledge her Dad's anniversary. This represented something new for Mary and her family, something that even her mother found 'strange'. Mary also announced that she had decided against becoming a lawyer (like her father). Just before Mary leaves the group she shares that she is to travel to her father's country of origin, to visit a dying relative.

Liz shared that she had re-connected with her biological father and was seeing him regularly.

In her final session Mary departed with the words: 'I liked the love'

Following the 'necrophilia session' the group's way of using drama and play in sessions changed. The real-pretend dynamic, which I had been at pains to establish (i.e. we are now going to do a group improvisation, or I will tell a story and then we're going to act it out) dissipated; rather we tended to amble in and out of play, more spontaneously and freely. This meant that the group could switch suddenly from joking and teasing each other to reflecting in earnest. It became unclear, at times, whether individuals were 'playing' or not, perhaps even to the person 'playing' themselves. This evoked a feeling of letting go, Nancy and I didn't 'direct' or set-up activities in the group, but rather displayed a tolerance and acceptance for what the group 'brought'. This wasn't also easy, things were less defined and clear. For example, Mary's 'paedophile' comment left me thinking whether such comments would be levelled towards me?

In supervision Mary's 'paedophile' comment was taken as an erotic shift of trajectory, into the relational dynamic, between Liz and Mary. A chronological trajectory of the group's erotic process can therefore be charted: initially, the erotic appeared at a distance - in the song - which later moved into a relational dynamic between group members. It was a trajectory in which the erotic also became increasingly less *deadly* and more associated with new life - particularly in respect to the love and 'pregnancy' projected towards Mary. In naming/creating Mary's 'pregnancy' Liz took the 'inseminator' role, which continued her re-

claim of the lost (deceased) male-member. It was perhaps with a degree of frustration towards me as the 'castrated' male that Liz regarded me as 'a woman' and that Liz territorially 'protected' the group from any new males joining.

The pairing of Liz and Mary as 'lovers' in the group can be considered in relation to the writings of Psychoanalyst Wilfred Bion. In *Experience in Groups* (1948), Bion writes of two levels of a group. The first level, 'The Work Group', concerns the conscious, primary task of the group, the reason the group has formed (in our group's case this was in relation to bereavement support). The second level, Bion names, 'The Basic Assumption Group', which is concerned with tacit, underlying (and unconscious) assumptions of the group that interfere with the group's primary task. It is the therapist interpretations, states Bion, that allows for the group to continue working on its primary task. Bion gives three types of Basic Assumption Groups: Dependency, Flight-Fight and Pairing. The latter, which I shall focus upon, involves the underlying assumption that the group has met for the purpose of reproduction and usually looks towards two people in the group, regardless of their gender, to carry this out. Taking Bion's perspective, the pairing (of Liz and Mary) acts as an obstacle to the real task of the group – that of bereavement-work; For Bion, it is an obstacle that needs to be understood or overcome in order for the group to fulfil their primary task.

However, Bion's approach misses the importance of Liz and Mary 'pairing' in relation to the group's bereavement process. Liz's 'insemination' of Mary, allows her to potentially claim the 'missing male member', by becoming it, by acting it out. Mary's 'unborn child' becomes symbolic for the group process. In Jungian theory this is a *coinunctio* – a synthesis of opposites into a 'transcendent third'. What is synthesized is multi-faceted, it is the opposites of Liz and Mary as two different people, yet it is also the gender opposites, which are collapsed in Liz's claim and imagistic use of the missing male-member. Yet, this belies a more fundamental opposite too, which Bion may regard as the group's primary task, that of *deceased-bereaved*. The 'new life' that is held in the meaning of Mary's pregnancy is opposite to the death of family members, experienced by all of the group.

To take Bion's approach and interpret Mary's pregnancy as a 'pairing' that gets in the way of the group's primary task would be to lose the emerging narrative and animated energy that coalesced around Mary's 'pregnancy'. The fertility and growth experienced in our pseudo-family in session, paralleled in group members own families too. Liz shared that she had re-

connected with her father (the estranged male in her family); Mary shared that she, her mother and brother went out for a family meal to acknowledge her father's anniversary. It seems that connections formed and nurtured in the group, were able to eventually be transferred outside it.

Following Liz and Mary's departure, the group was joined by new members - Claire and Adam. Claire was referred to the group as she had experienced the traumatic death of her grandmother in a car-crash, in which she too had been present. Adam's mother and sister had both recently died from illness. Nancy (dramatherapist) announced that she would be leaving the group at the end of this term.

Adam enthusiastically threw himself into the movement and play of the sessions. He was a passionate music fan and would play the 'funeral songs' played at the funeral of his family members – also songs that he would like for his own funeral too. He played his electric guitar in sessions, donning a heavy metal T-shirt and striking rock-star poses.

With Nancy's imminent departure the group devised and directed a short play for the two therapists to act out. I am cast in the role of 'the abandoned' and beseech Nancy to stay, telling her that I love her, I am directed to fall to the floor and to become a 'shallow old man'. We then board a time-machine, which takes us back to the time of Sweeney Todd. Nancy is cast as Sweeney Todd and is directed to kill me, dismember my body and then to eat it. Finally, we return to the present and the play ends with Nancy weeping at the sight of my dead body.

The erotic trajectory continues as I am told to 'grow some balls' and 'ask her (Nancy) out'. I'm also referred to as having a 'mangina'. Adam plays his guitar at the last session of the term which he has taken to calling his 'mistress'.

Reflections

Adam's sharing of songs that he would like to be played at his own funeral, chimes with Heidegger's notion of bereavement as an initiation into one's own *being-towards-death*. Further parity with Heidegger can be found in Adam's feeling of 'authenticity' in playing his guitar in sessions, which was: 'the 'only place I can be myself'. Heidegger argues that

authenticity is not so much a revelation of the self that is there, that remains hidden, but rather is the creative task of becoming the person one wants to be. To this extent, the sessions provided Adam with the space to make this choice, to express it and to become it. In Adam's case, 'playing' the rock-star worked well in the liminal space between real-pretend as Adam was not distanced from himself as a 'guitar player' by any theatrical protocol or convention of 'role'. Rather, Adam would sit on a chair and play his guitar whilst other things were going on; some would talk in the session, some would dance, Adam would play his guitar. In this way Adam found the space in sessions to be the person that he wanted to be in life. Eventually, this transferred to life outside sessions as Adam learnt to play actual notes on his guitar (previously he would riff in a chaotic way), he practiced regularly, he went to gigs, he got a girlfriend.

Adam's relationship with his guitar, often took an erotic dimension. Adam would strap his guitar, phallic-like, around his waist, gaze in the mirror and refer to his guitar as his 'mistress'. In this way Adam formed an erotic pairing with his guitar, which became a prelude to creative and change. Adam eventually composed a guitar piece, based on his bereavement journey, which he performed to the group. He also joined a band and eventually decided to take up an apprenticeship, working in a guitar-shop.

Another 'pairing' that became of great interest to the group was that of Nancy and I – essentially the group were very inquisitive as to whether we were in a relationship. However, rather than to tell the group 'the truth' (that we were not in a relationship) we tended to 'wonder with' the group, what was their fantasy and projections were about? In this way, we surrendered to the group's ideas about us; eventually we asked the group, using drama, to devise a piece about what they thought of our relationship? Again, the play seemed to occupy the liminal space between real & pretend – it was a drama piece, yet drawn from the group's (real) thoughts about us. Nancy (whom had announced her departure from the group) was cast in the role of the 'departer' and myself as 'departee'. My role, it seemed, was to declare my love for Nancy - to make her stay. However, the group directed Nancy to depart anyway, which resulted in my 'lonely death'. Our separation was short-lived as the group directed a grim unification of sorts, through the act of cannibalism in the next 'Sweeny Todd' scene.

In supervision we considered Nancy's cannibal role in the drama: were the group angry with Nancy for leaving, or perhaps the group didn't want to be left alone with me and desired Nancy to take me too, or perhaps Nancy's ingestion of what she was leaving behind was a way to ensure that Nancy wouldn't forget the group. It is likely that there is not just one meaning; yet for me, I felt a strong similarity between the cannibalism and the necrophilia image, in that both dramatized a bodily *connection* between the living and the dead.

In this way, the cannibalism in the drama, can be thought of as erotic too, in Mann's wider 'connective'⁴ sense of the term. It seems that the bereaved and deceased dyad constitutes an opposite, so strong, that as Jung articulated, they synthesize a 'transcendent third' i.e. a future continuity. The 'mangina' image, a hermaphroditic fusion of 'man' and 'vagina' is an interesting case of this. Initially, I regarded the 'mangina' comment as pejorative, born of the group's frustration at my inability to 'save' Nancy from leaving the group; yet, it is also an image which crystalizes the group's erotic process, as it utilising the opposites of gender to create a unifying hermaphroditic 'third'. In this way, the 'mangina' seems a protective image against not only further attempts at dismemberment but also that ensures continued procreativity in the absence of the (deceased) male or female member.

Carl Jung writes of the hermaphrodite image:

"The hermaphrodite means nothing less than a union of the strongest and most striking opposites... The primordial idea has become a symbol of the creative union of opposites, "uniting symbol" in the literal sense." (CW 9i, para. 292-4)

Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious.

It seems what the group needed from me, was not to decode, interpret or explain such images, but rather for me to receive them. In this way, I used these images as communicating the group's bereavement process.

Chapter 4

Synchronicity in bereavement work

⁴ David Mann

If earlier sessions were marked by eroticism, then latter sessions were marked by synchronicity. Carl Jung defined synchronicity as:

‘the simultaneous occurrence of a certain psychic state with one or more external events which appear as meaningful parallels to the momentary subjective state’⁵

By ‘psychic state’, Jung is referring to inner, subjective phenomena such as thoughts, images, memories, dreams...etc occurring simultaneously with objective, external events. For example, a person may be telling another of a dream of a spider, only to notice a spider, at that moment, in the corner of the room. However, synchronicity is wrested from being mere ‘simultaneity’ of internal states and external events, by Roderick Main⁶ whom characterises synchronicity, more widely, as ‘paralleled events’. Main’s working definition of synchronicity is:

1. Two or more events parallel one another through having identical, similar or comparable content.
2. There is no discernible or plausible way in which this paralleling could be the result of normal causes
3. The paralleling must be sufficiently unlikely and detailed as to be notable
4. The experience must be meaningful beyond being notable.

(p.14 Main, *Synchronicity and Spirit*, 2007)

Main’s synchronicity therefore does not require the ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ of Jung’s synchronicity, nor does it require Jung’s simultaneity too. Rather, Main’s synchronicity is concerned with content, whether that be images, words, sounds or events, which reoccur. Using Main’s synchronicity, let us look at a number of synchronistic occurrences within the bereavement group:

- *Just before the session in which the ‘necrophilia’ song was played, Nancy and I had played music also. Music had never been played in the session before, Nancy and I just played it on a whim. It then seemed more than notable that when Liz entered the room she went straight to the music system, plugged in her phone and played the song.*

⁵ *Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle* (1952)

⁶ Lecturer in Psychoanalytical Studies, Colchester University

- *In the session after Nancy departed no one appeared. The group reconvened the following week. One person said that she had not come to the previous week's sessions as she had been unwell due to her period, I noticed another group member was carrying a book titled 'Blood'. It was one of the books in The Mercian Trilogy, the two other books were titled: 'Alchemy' and 'Death'. Blood would later feature significantly in an important memory of another group member.*
- *Adam shares that he has split up with his girlfriend and feels depressed and suicidal. The following week, driving to the session, I am stuck at the front of a long traffic jam on the motorway - a man has committed suicide by throwing himself off a bridge onto the motorway. I watch as a helicopter-ambulance lands on the other side of the motorway.*
- *Before another session, I call into a garage, a brand of E-cigarette catches my eye – 'Vype'. In the session later on, Adam talks of an inner voice that he refers to as The Viper.*
- *I am asked to give a presentation to a group of counsellors and therapists, based on my bereavement work. I call the presentation: 'Riding the Luck Dragon to Never Ending Story' - it is an earlier quote from a group member when describing her experience in the group. In a subsequent session, only this particular group member comes to the group. I notice she is wearing a silver necklace with a pendant that I haven't seen before; I ask her about it, she says: 'it's my Luck Dragon'.*
- *The group agrees on the 22nd May as an ending date. It later comes to mind that my father died on the 22nd March, which feels faintly synchronistic. The evening before the last session, with the synchronicity of the dates in my mind, I go to a pub (that I am not familiar with) for a drink with a friend. I say that I have an important session the next day so I can only stay for one drink. He asks what beer I would like and I look at the hand-pumps - there is a beer called 'Synchronicity', with a label showing Carl Jung's face.*
- *At the last session, Claire leaves early. As the rest of the group leaves the therapy room David is aggressively challenged by his ex-girlfriend, she slaps him across his*

face. Shortly afterwards, in another part of the school, I see Claire, she enters an altercation with another girl, which descends into a fight.

In each of the above examples, the same or similar content is paralleled across at least two different events. I will consider synchronicity firstly, in regards to Claire's bereavement process; then in regards to the group as a whole; and, finally, in relation to myself.

Nobody came to the session following Nancy's departure. This was to be expected - analytically speaking, I had failed to save Nancy! Perhaps the group didn't feel safe enough, or they may have been angry with me. Whatever the reason, for that session I was alone in the room. Fortunately, all of the group came to the next session, one group member clutching a book titled Blood⁷. Claire explained that she had missed the previous week's session due to period pains. Though I noticed and noted the paralleling of blood-content (the blood-red 'castrating' fingernails; the 'fizzy blood' comment; and, a nose-bleed that Claire experienced at the horse-stables) the group remained largely disinterested in such matters.

Claire tended to spend time in sessions brushing her hair and doing her make-up in front of a large mirror. It was only after several months of doing this that Claire shared a memory that felt important – she remembered seeing blood ooze from her grandfather's ear, as he lay unconscious in the car-crash, shortly before she herself fell into an extended coma. Claire went on to say, whilst still brushing her hair, that moments after the car-crash she remembered being cradled by a woman, in the car, stroking her hair, telling her 'it'll be ok'. Claire felt that this was strange as she later learned that her grandmother had died instantly in the crash. However, Claire concluded that the woman stroking her hair was 'probably grandma'.

There is synchronicity in the Jungian 'simultaneity' of Claire stroking her own hair in the session at the same time that she recalled her grandmother doing likewise in the crashed car. However, Claire's memory of blood oozing from her grandfather's ear 'paralleled' the blood-content from previous sessions – which was synchronistic in Main's sense. It seemed

⁷ This was a book in The Mercian Trilogy, the other books in the series are titled *Alchemy* and *Death*

to me that there was a pattern (or connection) between the emergence of blood-content in sessions and developments in group process: the bloodied finger appeared in the important 'necrophilia session' and the book titled *Blood* appeared in the first session after Nancy's departure. Now, blood was significant again, as not only did it locate Claire's back at the scene of the fatal car-crash, but also allowed Claire to posit her deceased grandmother, at the scene of her death, as a touching and reassuring presence. It seemed more than notable that this memory, which became vital to her bereavement process, was foreshadowed by Claire's extended hair-brushing in sessions, as if the hair-brushing served as a prelude or incubation for the memory itself. Claire's 'movement' between the car-crash and her actions in the therapy room (hair-brushing) can be regarded as a 'displacement' - she is both *here* (in the room) and *over-there* (with the deceased), something which is common to all the bereaved. It is this displacement which seems to provide the potential for increased synchronicity in bereavement.

This session proved to be a turning- point, literally, in terms of Claire's actual turning around from facing the mirror, to the others in the group; but also, shortly afterwards, Claire brought into a session some childhood photos of herself with her grandparents. Claire shared that her grandmother was present the first time she had ridden a pony – an activity that Claire continued to be dedicated to. Claire described feeling most *with* her grandmother when horse-riding. Towards the end of the therapy, Claire applied for and then attended an interview for Equestrian College. It seemed to me that Claire felt able and committed to do so due to the bond that she felt with her grandmother.

Group synchronicity

Claire's memory of the car crash yielded a very personal experience for her, yet she reached this through a 'paralleled' recurring image in the group: *blood*. In this way, each member of the group plays a part in the group's whole - much like a character plays a part in the whole story or play - a group 'play out' a story together. If we take a broader view of the 'group's story' particularly in relation to the images and recurring tropes we find certain parallels

with the ancient story of *The Sun, the Moon and Talia*⁸(an early version of *The Sleeping Beauty*)

A king is here's that his daughter, the princess Talia, is in fatal danger of receiving a splinter, therefore, he orders a decree banning flax and hemp s from his kingdom. Many years later Talia sees an old woman sat at a spinning-wheel. Curious, never having seen such a thing before, Talia touches the distaff and 'a splinter of hemp got under her fingernail' (p227), upon which, the princess 'immediately fell dead' (ibid.) The distraught king leaves his kingdom in despair, his lifeless daughter's body remains in the castle. Sometime later, another king finds Talia 'as if asleep', and gazing on her beauty, falls in love with her. Duly enchanted the king 'cohabited with her' (ibid). Nine months later, still in her deathly state, Talia gives birth to two babies. One of the babies, unable to locate the breast, sucks on Talia's finger, drawing out the splinter and rousing Talia back to life. Princess Talia seeks out the king, the father of the babies, and finds him already married to the queen. The queen enters into a jealous rage and orders that Talia's infants be cooked and served to her husband the king. The cook hides the children and cooks goat-kids instead. The king discovers the queen's plans and has her thrown into a fire. With the queen gone, the king then marries Talia and is reunited with his children. The story ends with the verses:

'Lucky people, so tis' said,
Are blessed by Fortune whilst in bed'

(p 228 , Bettelheim, 1975)

There are several parallels of content between the story and occurrences in the group: the wound to Talia's finger and the bleeding finger in the group; the king's cohabitation of the lifeless Talia and the song's necrophilia image in the session; in the cannibalism both in the queen's plan of feeding the children to the king and the Sweeny Todd cannibalism in the

⁸This version is from Basile's Pentamerone as given in Bruno Bettelheim's *The Uses of Enchantment* (1977)

drama; and finally with the 'lucky people' of the story's closing couplet and the 'luck dragon' necklace/presentation title⁹.

Let us consider the significance of such paralleling of content, can it be anything other than strange coincidence? Psychoanalyst, Bruno Bettelheim, argues that ancient stories and fairy-tales contain important information concerning our psychological development. Bettelheim relates the story of *The Sleeping Beauty* to the 'female curse' of menstruation. It is the princesses' sight of blood, on her pricked finger, which serves as a motif of 'fatal bleeding' (p.232) and initiates a 'fall into a deathly sleep' (ibid.). For Bettelheim, this descent into the unconscious allows oedipal conflicts to be dramatized in the story between Talia and the 'lover-king', thinly veiled as her father. Bettelheim states that Talia's babies represent new and resourceful aspects of herself which help her to transition into the consciousness and sexual maturity of woman-hood.

However, it seems that Bettelheim maintains a fairly narrow interpretation of the image of blood in the story – relating merely to menstruation; blood, arguably is about other things too. *The Penguin Dictionary of Symbols* describes blood as '....universally held to be the medium of life and is sometimes taken as the principle of procreation'. In *The Sleeping Beauty*, blood signifies the princesses' passage (or process) to life - her new life as a mother and the life of her infants. Similarly, Claire's memory of blood takes her back to the scene of the car-crash, where she decides, chooses or, to use a Heideggerian term, 'takes care' of her deceased grandmother as an alive and touching presence. What the paralleling between ancient story and the contemporary dramatherapy sessions reveals is a certain power of images to activate and communicate processes, which can help to negotiate the age-old predicament of bereavement. Such images are not merely static or inert entities, but rather are states of being that we live through, that we assimilate and negotiate with, they can not only help to show us the way, but to make sense of the unfathomable experience of bereavement.

⁹ Also, I might add, the paralleled content in the later version of *The Sleeping Beauty*, of the princesses falls into a deep sleep upon seeing the blood of her pricked finger and Claire's fall into a coma after seeing the blood from her grandfather's ear.

Bettleheim explains the 'cannibalistic inclinations' (p161) of the queen as being about weaning. For Bettleheim, weaning can be a monstrous and threatening experience for the infant, in which the gap, brought about by the loss of the breast, interrupts the infant's sense of unity with the previously all life-affirming and nourishing mother. In the gap that opens, the infant is left literally open-mouthed, exposed to the world, wanting and vulnerable. The infant experiences, perhaps for the first time, that it has a limit, which the breast, as source of its nourishment and comfort, has just retracted beyond. In this 'dawn of self' the infant becomes slowly aware of not only itself, but of *other*. In this state of uneasy separation the infant is no longer merely a feeder but becomes aware of itself as potentially being fed upon.

However, it seems that Bettleheim again places an equally narrow analytical interpretation on cannibalism in the story. In the context of bereavement, the brute separation from a loved one can leave us similarly flailing, exposed and vulnerable. In their absence, the deceased can leave us feeling threatened - will their death also be the death of me, will I survive it or be consumed by it? Bereavement forces an existential crisis for the bereaved to negotiate. Bereavement radically alters *with-ness*, not only with the deceased, but *with* the world - the challenge is how to continue, how to act, in the face of ontological insecurity¹⁰ In weaning, the infant's survives the potentially cannibalistic threat from the world within the 'secure attachment' it has formed. Similarly, an important task in bereavement is to become 'securely bonded' with the deceased. Bereavement work can therefore be a process of ironically (and erotically) forming a 'bond' with the deceased - with a person that is no longer there, that is *over there*. This is not to pathologically deny the death of the deceased, but to better able the bereaved to move forward, to continue. This can be complicated with the death of an abuser or perpetrator; nevertheless, ever the deceased abuser remains '*over there*' too – especially if they are a family member. In such cases, the space of 'bereavement' may well be a liberty, but within the space there still remains a bond that the bereaved may be called to 'take care' of.

¹⁰ See RD Laing for more on Ontological Insecurity

What such paralleled content from ancient stories tells us, is that there is *repetition*. Images, motifs, narratives, meaning and processes *repeat*. It seems that we are such repetitions in the very business of existing, of living, relating and creating. The source of such repetitions is none other, than ourselves. Synchronicity merely discloses (and reminds us) of this. The space of a therapy session is able to notice and stay-with such repetitions which otherwise remain concealed, covered-up and *over-there*. Synchronicity manifests or synthesizes the *here* and the *over-there* and is so doing allows a *being-with* the deceased to form.

Such repetitions challenge the notion of the past as gone, removed or 'dead'. In synchronistic experiences we occupy a peculiar totality of time in which the past, present and future are dissolved - disclosing a glimpse or ecstasy of timelessness. This timelessness, a stepping out of time, can bring a 'vantage-point' on which to reflect, to see the contingency of our living lives and eventual death. This is the strange gift of bereavement, a call to creativity and difference, whilst we can, to write and direct how the story of our lives may transpire and end - before death begins its eternal repetition.

The experience of synchronicity

Roderick Main talks of the profound impact of synchronicity on the 'experiencer', which in this case was myself; the group were not always aware, nor seemingly interested, in synchronicities with ancient stories. In this way, the group did not 'experience' synchronistic phenomena in the same way that I did. I first read of synchronicity in my training as a dramatherapist, which made forays into Jungian Analytical Psychology. I was deeply sceptical. However, it was with the *experience* of synchronicity, both in and out of sessions, which changed my mind. Synchronistic phenomena has occurred consistently in and around my bereavement work, which may be augmented by the fact that I was often working with teenagers, similar to the age I was, when my father died. Perhaps this establishes a ground for 'parallels', but I feel there is also something of the nature of bereavement itself which promotes synchronicity to occur. I will mention two examples of synchronicity, both which occurred after I ended my bereavement work at the school (though I continued for a short while with the child bereavement charity). The first involved a Christmas pantomime with a

local drama group, which my children and I had been involved with for several years. As usual, we anticipated the email which arrived at the end of the summer announcing the Christmas show. This year, it was to be *The Sleeping Beauty*. We auditioned for parts and my eldest daughter got the role of Sleeping Beauty.

The second synchronistic occurrence involved a 'run' on the numbers 11:11. These numbers would often stare back at me, from the digital time reading on my phone or computer, for example when receiving sending text messages or emails. This happened over a number of years and had a special significance for me as my father's birthday was the 11th November. The fact that my father was born on a day that became a national day of bereavement in the UK seems peculiarly synchronistic too.

One night, before Christmas 2015 I'd got out of bed to use the bathroom (which is at the end of my kitchen). As I walked past the kitchen shelf I felt something fall, a pepper pot or something, it was dark, so I resolved to pick it up in the morning. The following morning, I saw the pepper pot on the floor, but on the work unit above it was my silver watch, with the watch-face smashed. It seems that the night before, the pepper pot had fallen onto the watch-face and smashed it. The watch had been given to me by a friend, some years earlier, it was engraved on the back with the words: 'Andrew's Silver Time', which was to commemorate the 25th anniversary of my father's death.

Later that day, I thought about the smashed watch and remembered (when I had glanced at it that morning) that the hands of the watch had stopped underneath the smashed face and I felt sure that it had stopped at 11-something. I thought how strange it would be if it had stopped at 11:11. I went back home to check, it was 11.07.

Near enough to be synchronistic or far enough to warrant a change?

Roderick Main writes of the experience of synchronicity as a 'revelation of spirit'. For Main, 'spirit' relates to '...an overall continuum of consciousness and reality' (p.27). What we consciously experience, for Main, is therefore not merely contained to consciousness per se, but rather is connected *with* the physical world. In this way the physical overlaps with the psychological, as does the psychological with the spiritual, in what Main refers to as 'ambivalent zones of transition' (p28). This means that, at times we can only understand physical occurrences in their overlap with the psychological – for example, with psychosomatic phenomena, in which physical ailments arise from psychological worries. Main's 'zones of transition' provides a way of understanding synchronicity, particularly in relation to bereavement - for what is the space that opens for the bereaved, other than an 'area of transition' – between life and death itself. Occupying such a transitional state then becomes the ground upon which synchronicity can be disclosed or revealed as 'spirit'.

Whether synchronicity reveals a spiritual realm is another matter, beyond the scale of this work; suffice to say, my experience of synchronicity has been that of a providential guide, leading to a place of creativity and difference. With such difference, I come to challenge my 'bereaved' status, I feel I've grown out of this name, this 'container', which repeats the mere death of my father's death. By no longer defining myself in terms of my bereavement means that my father is no longer defined by his death.

At Christmas 2015, I travelled to Manchester with my children and placed a stone in the soil of my father's grave. I had received the stone at the final session I facilitated for the child bereavement charity. I had worked with them for eight years. In placing the stone at my father's grave, I felt some kind of completion. Since then, I haven't been aware of synchronistic occurrences so much, though they do appear from time to time. It's not something I need to keep much of an eye on now.

Chapter 5

An approach to Therapeutic Bereavement Work

there is a place in the heart that
will never be filled

we will wait
and wait

in that space

No Help for That, Charles Bukowski

The cleared Space

The 'cleared space' allows for the disclosure of *being-with*. In dramatherapy, the space is 'cleared' by the therapist not planning activities or content for sessions; rather, activities, organisation and structure well up from the session itself. The cleared space has a three-fold meaning:

- *Free-from*: in the negative sense – i.e. free from pre-planned activities, objectives or plans.
- *Free-to*: in the positive sense – i.e. free to act, speak and create.
- *Free for process*: as in, enabling passage, authorisation or movement through a process.

Initially the *free-from* space is held by the therapist, which enables the client to be *free-to* do. Any initial structure and organisation introduced by the therapist, such as 'check-in's' 'reflections' and 'improvised play structures' stand in potential of being 'cleared' too.

The cleared space optimises the possibility for the therapist to notice and respond to the expressions, words, movements, images, sounds....etc of the client. The therapist uses *congruence* and *attunement* as a way of responding to what is happening in sessions. Congruence, stems from the latin *congruere*: *con* – 'together' and *ruere* 'fall or rush', it therefore refers to a *coming together in movement*. To be congruent then is for the therapist to be in step with the client. Carl Rogers wrote extensively on the uses of 'congruence' in psychotherapy. For Rogers, congruence referred to the connection between the therapist's inner thoughts/feelings and outer expressions; the therapist is more 'congruent' the more they express what they are really feeling. However, I use the term congruence to mean a connection and fidelity to *what happens* in the session. This includes the therapist's thoughts and feelings in relation to the client, but also the client's bodily movements, words, images, sounds, energy, position in the room, eye-contact, fidgeting, sighs....etc. *Congruence with what happens*, wrests congruence away from Rogers' emphasis on the outer expression of the therapist's internal feelings so rather than focusing on the integrity of the therapist, the therapist responds 'in the service' of the client, ensuring that the therapist's interventions are highly mitigated by *being-with* the client.

An image of *Ariadne's thread*¹¹ metaphorically illustrates congruence in this approach. Just as Ariadne's thread marks Theseus steps through the labyrinth, so too does the therapist function as a thread marking the client's way. The thread therefore tracing the mutual journey, undertaken by the client and therapist – expressions, movement, feelings, energy, words spoken (and not spoken), silences – the whole range of mutuality of the client-therapist dyad is metaphorically represented through this thread, I shall therefore refer to it as the *client-therapist-thread*. The *client-therapist-thread* marks the way in and the way out of the process, it locates the *here-ness* of the client-therapist in relation to the journey undertaken so far (it stretches back to the way-in/way out) plus it points the way forward – in this way, the client-therapist thread enables passage and orients the client. Congruence with the *client-therapist thread* points to what has happened, it provides evidence for the shared experience of therapy, for example:

Client: I feel lost, I'm not sure why I'm here at all.

Therapist: you were talking about your morning and feeling stressed about being late, then you looked out of the window and were silent.

Congruence to the *client-therapist thread* is closely aligned with mirroring techniques in drama and movement, in which the therapist mirrors the bodily movements of the client, reflecting back where the client is. Being congruent with the *client-therapist thread* emphasises that therapeutic interventions are offered when called for, when the way is blocked, when the client is struggling to continue.

Therapeutic interventions that occur in the cleared space (i.e. not pre-thought out) and occur congruently to the *client-therapist thread* are 'localized': the therapist is *here with* the client. However, working with bereavement demands for the inclusion of what is non-local too, bereavement cannot be understood or experienced merely in a local capacity – it relates to what is *over-there*. In this regard, the bereavement therapist's interventions occur on a spectrum between:

Local interventions - Non-local interventions

Local interventions use the spatial and temporal here-ness of the *client-therapist-thread*, often used to foster feelings of safety and trust; whereas non-local interventions concern a

¹¹ From the Greek Myth of *Theseus and The Minotaur*

displacement from mere *here-ness*, in which the imagination, desire, fantasy, play includes what is *over-there, here*. However, the distinction is not so clear cut as being over-there may chime more with where the client really emotionally feels they are. The cleared space become the ground for the *client-therapist thread* to venture into the reverie of being *over-there*, through drama improvisations, play or just imaginative exercises:

Therapist: Where are you?

Client: I feel like I'm by the sea (lying on the floor, eyes closed)

(pause)

Therapist: Beside the sea?

Client: With the feeling of warm-sand and the sound of waves

(pause)

Therapist: How does it feel, there on the sand?

Client: Relaxing

(pause)

Therapist: is there anything you would like to do there?

Client: Buy an ice-cream

Therapist: Ah.....Here's the ice-cream van

Non-local interventions allows the *client-therapist thread* to be maintained through the various realities of the cleared space. It is a space that is synonymous with bereavement; both Robert Romanyshyan¹² and Julian Barnes¹³ have written of the peculiar, drifting space of bereavement. For Romanyshyan grief is a *reverie* that brings:

'a kind of consciousness which has slipped from its usual moorings of everyday worries and concerns; it drifts in a mood of detachment among the things of the world'

(p.33, *The Soul in Grief*, 1999)

Julian Barnes uses the metaphor of the early hot-air balloon flights to communicate his feeling of detachment from the world following the death of his wife. In bereavement, he was no longer merely 'here', but existed in a 'kind of listless attending' (p.81, Barnes, 2013).

¹² Phenomenologist and author of *The Soul in Grief* (1999)

¹³ Author of *Levels of Life*

In working in the cleared space, the therapist provides 'clearance' for the bereaved's sojourns into the *over-there*.

Whether local or non-local, therapeutic interventions in the cleared space remain congruent to the *client-therapist thread*. In doing so, the therapist remains *with* the client, rather than with any possible outcomes that may come out of the work – in this way the therapist let's go of determining direction. As the work proceeds the therapist may develop certain understandings of where the *client-therapist thread* is leading or through analytical reflections regarding what the sessions are 'about'. The degree to which the therapist responds to an emerging 'aboutness' of sessions concerns the next spectrum of therapeutic interventions:

Epochic Interventions – Hermeneutic interventions

Epochic intervention stems from the phenomenological work of Edmund Husserl (1859 – 1938). Husserl argues that true being with someone or something requires freedom from suppositions. Suppositions, for Husserl, mitigate perceptions, they get in the way. We suppose habitually and from experience, for example, we suppose that coffee will have a certain range of taste before we actually taste it. This supposition draws together certain boundaries and expectations of bitterness, viscosity and temperature. However, a Husserlian approach argues that to truly taste a cup of coffee – this cup of coffee - requires a 'bracketing' of such suppositions. Husserl calls his method of suspending suppositions, the *epoché*, which means 'to stay away or abstain'.

Epochic interventions in therapy then are predicated on lowering suppositions that the therapist may have, in order to not only let what is there simply *be*, but to *be-with what is there*. This can be seen in the 'fingernail sessions' (see Chapter 3), in which the therapists joined in with the spontaneous fingernail drumming. The meaning of fingernail drumming was not explicit, rather the interventions is to embody a similar movement and sound to that which is presented by the client and join in, without necessarily 'knowing' where the activity, movement or play is going. The therapist abstains from 'fore-sight', but rather is 'taken' by the *client-therapist thread*, by what happens. Epochic interventions can be a therapeutic device that is used to *notice* and to *be-with* phenomena that happens in sessions: bodily movements, words, images that the client shares, or a thought, impulse or feeling of the therapist.

By contrast, the 'hermeneutic' side of the epochic-hermeneutic intervention spectrum is predicated on meaning, it concerns what the session is about and where the thread may be leading to and the overall journey taken marked by the *client-therapist thread*. The word 'hermeneutic' derives from the Latin *hermeneuein*: to interpret. A hermeneutic intervention involves referring a phenomena or experience in the session to other things: other images, words, movements, feelings, theories, processes – all that can be held in the name of *understanding*. In this way, the phenomena that arises in the session, does not continue to merely stand by its own light (as in epochic interventions) but is cast, by the therapist, in relation to the wider light of meaning.

For example, hermeneutically, the fingernails in sessions were reflected upon analytically, as 'castrating' and Adam's use of the term 'mistress' in relation to his guitar suggests the formation of an erotic bond which may be related to his bereavement. Hermeneutic interventions, then involve the therapist making room for developments, which, in my experience, are not usually directly shared with clients, but reflected upon in supervision. Hermeneutic interventions are then not delivered as a *fait accompli*, but they provide a point of departure, difference or possibility for phenomena in sessions to be developed or to continue. In this way, hermeneutic interventions provides an alternate to merely 'letting be' they invite change, development and growth - this was how Adam came to compose his bereavement journey piece.

Hermeneutic Interventions can bring variation to phenomena in session: a fingernail becomes a blood-red talon; a guitar becomes a phallic-symbol. In this way, an image or object's limits become 'de-encapsulated' – there is others way for a thing to be. Far from the therapist having the 'final word' of authority on how the phenomena is interpreted, hermeneutic interpretations are a way of the therapist modelling possibilities of relational difference, variations in thinking and understanding regarding what is happening in a session. Hermeneutic interventions are not intended to *fill* the cleared space, but rather for the therapist (or client) to 'offer' a perspective. If a fingernail is no longer simply a fingernail, then space is afforded to phenomena, in this way, the cleared space permeates phenomena of sessions.

Attunement

Attunement is a way of *being-with* what happens in sessions. Attunement involves the therapist 'tuning in' to the client or group, through making (sometimes minor) adjustments in pace and quality of movements, breathing, gestures, words, actions, utterances, thoughts, feelings and moods. Author and psychoanalyst Daniel Stern defined attunement as 'a performance of behaviours that express a shared emotional state' (quote). Stern carefully studied the interactions of parents with their infants (which he regarded as replicated in the client-therapist dyad in psychotherapy). By 'performance of behaviours' Stern places emphasis on the role of the body in attunement, particularly in vocal utterances, physical contact and facial gestures.

The priority of the body for communication is also found in the work of Dr. Albert Mehrabian¹⁴, he finds 55% of communication issues from what he calls 'body language', with only 7% found in words¹⁵. Attunement, therefore, is not just a feeling, but rather it involves a demonstrative and embodied performance. This makes Stern's attunement particularly compatible with the embodied and performative practice of dramatherapy. The cleared space seeks to provide the optimum environment for the therapist to locate, tune-in and *be-with* the client/group.

If congruence concerns the metaphorical *client-therapist thread*, tracing behind the steps of the client-therapist, then attunement concerns the quality of how the steps are taken: tentatively, fearfully, boldly or foolhardily. The therapist attunes through 'performing' an awareness of where the client is. At the same time, attuning to the client-therapist thread also needs to include a sensitivity towards what the client/groups need to continue - whether the client needs space, or close support, or encouragement or humour. In this way, the steps taken in therapy are co-created with the client.

Using Stern's language the main spectrum of therapeutic interventions relating to attunement is:

Communing Interventions – Purposefully Missattuning Interventions

Communing Intervention, refer to *being-with* another with no attempt to change what the other person is doing or experiencing. This type of intervention seeks to match the other's emotional state as exactly as possible. The therapist takes their lead from the client and

¹⁴ Professor of Psychology, UCLA

¹⁵ *Silent Messages: Implicit Communication of Emotions and Attitudes (1981)*

follows, noticing, responding and supporting in an on-going being of what is. Purposefully Misattunements Interventions, on the other-hand, seek to over or under match the client's emotional state, for example we may naturally raise our voices to meet the emotional intensity of an upset child and then, once met, calm ourselves down together with the child: lowering the voice, breathing deeper and using soothing self-talk. In calming the child, the parent (or therapist) then 'purposefully misattunes' away from where the child is (i.e. away from the distressed state). In dramatherapy Purposefully Missattuning Interventions can be delivered as artful and creative 'offers' to play i.e. a humorous over-reaction to a client that may be stuck in repetitious apathy.

Communing Interventions seek to relationally *be-with* the phenomena that is 'let be' through Epochic Interventions. Interventions may (though not always) shift on a trajectory from Epochic/Communing Interventions towards Hermeneutic/Purposeful Missattunement Interventions, as the therapy processes. This means that at the beginning of a therapeutic process the therapist is more inclined to simply 'trust what happens', in order to *be-with* the client; whereas later therapeutic interventions are more concerned with the question: 'what is happening'. In bereavement work this process involves a gradual assimilation of the *over-there, here* in the therapy room.

Animation

If the cleared space provides the space for bereavement work, then 'animation' concerns content (the fauna and flora) that passes into and out of the clearing. The word 'animation' derives from *anima* (life or soul). Animation therefore relates to life in the session: phenomena, movement, images, relationships, feelings, utterances, sensations...etc. This can well up through structured activities (such as improvisation exercises, drama games and warm-up exercises) or from what simply *happens*, even from such innocuous things as 'small-talk', slips of the tongue, humour, noticing how and where people sit, the energy in the room, the light, the colours on the walls, whatever piques the interest of the therapist or group. Animation can occur from the smallest of happening and can be exaggerated or distorted to greater or lesser degrees by the therapist.

Like us take an example of animation from a dramatherapy session. Sessions usually begin with the therapist and the group (in this case children) taking off their shoes:

A child notices a small hole in my sock, which was rendered much more noticeable as we'd all placed our feet in the centre of a seated circle. The skin of my toes was caught, exposed in relation to the myriad of covered toes that surrounded it. The attention of the group was rapt, I felt the potential welling up for giggling, humour and disgust, in a fraction of a second. I lifted the culprit toe a little, it 'looked' around, the other covered toes pulled away, with delight. The toe swooped down on the retreating toes, to squeals, excitement and energy that flooded into the room.

So the space of the session became animated. The 'looking toe' is absurd, that is, it is comprised of two seemingly disparate things - a toe and sight! This Absurdist Intervention is an invitation into animation and it 'works' because the absurdity is highly mitigated by congruence and attunement to the group. It is congruent, as the 'looking toe' hasn't been planned, but rather works with *what happens*. The group look at the toe and the toe looks back, there is an organic growth and bloom of the idea that occurs *with* (or congruent to) the group. In this way the intervention of animation does not present an unexpected challenge or threat to the group, rather it is a comic and pathetic 'surrender' to what is already there. The intervention, though spontaneous and frivolous is carefully attuned to the group i.e. the pace, intensity, pitch and movement of the 'looking toe' rises to meet the curiosity and expectation of the group, the 'looking toe' is 'looking' for what it has been called to do, it constantly checks with the group, offering and indicating its next move, testing it out before the flourish of animation comes through. This all happens at pace and in conjunction with the group, in this way it is co-created, spontaneously.

The first spectrum of interventions in the realm of animation is:

Absurdist Interventions – Meaningful Interventions

It may take a while for a group (particularly a group of adults) to tolerate Absurdist interventions. Congruence and attunement may necessitate the therapist's use of Meaningful Interventions, which does not place together two incongruent things. Absurdist Interventions invoke the imagination, they set a water-mark outside the realm of the merely logical and material realm (see the melting clocks and lobster-phone of Salvador

Dali). Another form of Absurdist Intervention occurs in the therapist's over-reaction to what is happening (which can also be a type of purposeful missattunement). For example, I may accidentally stub my toe and then over-react by falling to the floor and berating my toe, shouting 'you have always had it in for me – I'll get you back'. This type of intervention maintains congruence, by staying with what happens (the stubbed toe), whilst using the over/under reaction to attune to the group. Therefore, if the group's energy is raised and excited then I may choose to howl and roll around energetically; should the group's energy be low and tentative then I may choose to soothe my toe, explaining 'toe – it's not your fault, these things happen'.

Absurdist Interventions are often spontaneous, they are rarely thought out beforehand and they are often comic and irreverent. They often have more association towards tuning in to the affect and energy of a group, rather than process or meaning. Meaning may be applied from later to the content of Absurdist Interventions; for example, the exposed toe may come to be a regular feature or character in sessions, it may become - the scary toe, the toe seeking friends, the abandoned toe, the chasing/perpetrating toe, the toe in need of dialogue. The possibilities are endless, but this later 'reincorporation'¹⁶ of content allows the therapist to make a more Meaningful (or pointed) Intervention, according to the group's emerging process.

In bereavement work there is generally movement (or process) from absurdity to meaning. Bereaved clients often begin in a highly absurd or meaningless place, the experience of bereavement itself can issue an absurd state or feeling (i.e. the very absurdity of there being an empty space where a loved one used to be). Such absurdity can be highly arresting for children (and adults alike), it can induce fear and close down connections to the world and oneself - a sense of apathy can ensue. This was the case in Mary's starting position in therapy (Chapter Three), she doesn't know why she wants to be a lawyer (like her Dad) and her bereavement carries very little meaning for her, she sees little point in coming to sessions. Absurdist Interventions, then served to meet Mary's absurdity (such as with Mary's 'pregnancy') and demonstrated how such absurdity can not only be worked with, but can lead to meaning.

Emergent Interventions – Mergent Interventions.

¹⁶ See Keith Johnstone's *Improv* for more on 'reincorporation' in Improvisation.

Animation concerns initially the *emergence* of phenomena in sessions. Emergent Interventions welcome and invite the client to share images, experiences and feelings. This can be done slowly and carefully, in a ritual way, for example, the therapist may ask each member of the group to open their palms and for each person in turn, to reveal an imaginary object. Or, in improvisational play, in which images, sounds and movements occur spontaneously and at pace, often yielding a kaleidoscopic array of phenomena. Initially, such improvisations may need to be structured and facilitated, with clear boundaries of play and non-play. Improvisational work can be driven by the therapist, whom maintains a motivating proximity to the group, asking directly or indirectly – what happens next, what is around the corner, then what? Emergent Interventions are therefore usually concerned with movement through spontaneous flow, with the difference of becoming rather than the repetition of being.

In contrast, Mergent Interventions are concerned with still-ness, with a repetition of the same, which does not change, in this way there is no becoming, no flow. In bereavement work this relates to the impossibility of the deceased losing their once-*existed* state, their death provides an irrefutable truth that the deceased not only once-lived, but will never be able not to have not once-lived - this remains in the *over-there*. Mergent Interventions seeks to bridge the *over-there* with *the here* and invites the client/group to ‘take care’ of their own bereavements, *here*. Often in bereavement work there is a move from emergence to mergence.

Emergent Interventions invite movement through process and necessarily involve a degree of surrender (of both therapist and client); whereas, Mergent Interventions are more concerned with arriving (albeit at a ‘place’ of non-locality). In journeying through a bereavement process the therapist surrenders with the client, not only to an emerging thread, but also to an increasingly *self-generating thread* which issues from out of the darkness ahead. This *self-generating thread* may reveal secret passageways, hidden doors and false floors of the labyrinth, which, in merely keeping hold of the *client-therapist thread*, the client or group may miss. This guiding and illuminating *self-generating thread*, lessens the need for fore-sight from the client or therapist; they are therefore ‘taken’ by the thread that emerges *here* and bridges with the *over-there*. It is the self-generating aspect of the *client-therapist thread* which renders it animated and alive and indicates the ways to go.

In following the aesthetics, images and narratives of the *self-generating thread*, I have often found myself to be a Sancho Panza to the client's Don Quixote, faithfully following and serving the client or group's flights of fancy. Conversely, the therapist may be called upon to notice what emerges, to set the charge, even if it merely reveals the hard stone walls of the labyrinth. In this way the dramatherapist models and retains a quixotic soul.

Vitalisation

Vitalisation refers to the 'vital spark' in which the bereaved conceives a 'continuing bond' with the deceased. Vitalisation draws from the 18th Century theory of Vitalism which argued 'the origin and phenomena of life are dependent on a force or principle distinct from purely chemical or physical forces' (OED). The 'vital spark' (whatever it may be) separated animate from inanimate objects and therefore has particular relevance to bereavement work. Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein* (1818) was contemporary with the vitalism debate and tells the story of Dr Frankenstein's use of vital spark to bring his creation 'the monster' to life. Shelley subtitled her novel: *The Modern Prometheus*, suggesting her novel is read as a cautionary tale against over-reaching hubris of defeating death - so too in bereavement work.

An example of vitalisation occurs precisely at the moment Claire recalls and asserts her (deceased) grandmother as an alive and touching presence at the scene of the fatal accident (see Chapter 3). It is not the veracity of this incident which is important i.e. whether her grandmother was actually alive or dead at the time, but that Claire comes to her own view, predicated upon an emotional and phenomenological veracity, rather than a mere belief in the 'facts'. In doing so, Claire *vitalised* a connection with her grandmother, like a spark of animating fire which builds into a consistent flame. Vitalisation occurs at the beginning of an emotional commitment, familiar to the bereaved, in which the bereaved gains a sense, a view, a feeling of their future, which will continue, somehow with the deceased. In this way, *vitalisation* is like the moment of conception, or the moment Sleeping Beauty awakens, a moment that becomes a kernel of being which one's future coalesces around

The promethean-like 'transgression' of Claire audaciously challenges the authorities, whom had told Claire that her grandmother had died instantly, at the same moment that Claire forms and asserts herself - a continuing bond is formative for the bereaved too. Vitalisation

in bereavement is a transgressive and fecund non-localised connection, which, from the seed of alterity, enables a continual *being-with* the deceased.

Interventions in the realm of vitalisation occur across the spectrum:

Deconstructive Interventions – Re-constructive Interventions

Deconstructive interventions seeks to dis-lodge, disrupt or loosen usual patterns of meaning in response to the phenomena of sessions. For example, Claire's repeated hair-brushing in sessions could be seen as avoidant, narcissistic or 'off-topic', but why shouldn't Claire brush her hair, it may be *about* something important (in fact, it was!). A Deconstructive Intervention, deconstructs 'received meaning' so all that remains is a 'wondering humility' at the phenomena in the session. Such humility does not ignore the phenomena, but seeks to include it, to *be-with* it and if necessary to defer meaning. Claire, brushed her hair for many sessions, without my understanding what it was about. In retrospect, I feel what it was about was incubating a connection with her deceased grandmother.

Reconstructive interventions allows for the disclosure of (new) meaning - I use the term 'disclose' as the meaning may have been there all along. Reconstructive interventions consider new connections between phenomena and meaning, for example, that Claire's hair-brushing was *about* forming a connection with her deceased grandmother. Vitalisation often serves as a bridge between the deconstructed space of early sessions and the reconstructive space of later sessions, vitalisation is the spark or motor that enable reconstructions to occur. In respect of the meaning that is gained from bereavement work, the bereaved client is more able to take action and care in respect of their bereavement. In this way bereavement work is often a journey into new meaning and direction in life.

Back in the labyrinth, *vitalisation* metaphorically relates to Theseus's slaying of the Minotaur – a vital act, it not only kills the Minotaur, but enables a *volte-face* for Theseus to begin his journey home. In this way, *vitalisation*, relates to what the client has to do alone, the therapist can only follow the client so far. In Greek Mythology the labyrinth was created (by Dedalus) to house The Minotaur - it is the Minotaur's domain. It is Theseus that enters the house of the Minotaur, Theseus whom stalks the corridors of the labyrinth, becoming more and more like the Minotaur he wishes to slay. Both the Minotaur and Theseus are united by death – it will be either Theseus or The Minotaur death. So too do the bereaved transgress

into the *over-there* to vitalise with the deceased. Theseus's death-touch is a *penetrating ecstasy*, which, at once reaches into the Minotaur and back towards his Athenian Kingship, this one act determines his entire future course. In bereavement work *vitalisation* is both the *lysis* and *enantiodromia* of the work, where both the deepest and most horizontal point meet. Vitalisation occurs at the apex of the *client-therapist thread*, it is what the *client-therapist thread* leads to.

Ironically, in *vitalisation*, the client attests to the dead-ness of the deceased, the deceased is rendered dead again at the same moment that a continuing bond is formed. In this way the bereaved has to 'slay its own minotaur'. *Vitalisation* is not about resurrecting the deceased, but conceiving a continuing connection with the deceased, as dead. The *client-therapist thread* is delivered to the heart of the Minotaur, from where the client is able to pick up the beginning of a new thread: *the bereaved-deceased thread*. This new thread relates to the whole *bereaved-deceased dyad* – a relational *being-with* the deceased that continues in bereavement. *Vitalisation* is therefore also the beginning of a de-threading with the therapist, the *client-therapist thread* is transferred onto the *bereaved-deceased thread* and becomes what the bereaved takes from the bereavement work and eventually is what bereaved takes care of.

Incubation

Incubation, in bereavement work, concerns the development and formation of a continuing bond between bereaved and deceased. The continuing bond is incubated, from its early form as an idea, feeling, movement or gesture into action and autonomy. Incubation congeals around the *client-therapist thread*, it confers shape, colour and texture around the animating and self-generating thread. If *vitalisation* relates to the Promethean theft of fire, then incubation enables the flame to remain lit, to let the contours around the flame form into being. Incubation forms a shielding shape around the vital flame which serves to create the continuing bond with the deceased. In so doing, incubation is the repetition to *vitalisation's* difference. *Vitalisation* happens in the heat of ecstasy, whereas incubation relates to a cooling and forming, which enables reflectivity and for the bereaved to eventually 'take care' of what has been incubated.

Incubation does not follow on from vitalisation in a progressive or linear way. Claire was incubating the bond with her grandmother, through hair-brushing, as a precursor to vitalisation – in this way what was vitalised was foreshadowed through incubation. Incubation is the progenitor that calls, through repetition, to the *vitalisation* it ‘contains’. The bereaved are no strangers to repetition, the deceased, repeatedly, remain dead and the bereaved repeatedly, remain bereaved. It is this seed of difference (between life and death) that grows in bereavement and not just as a historical true event (that a person died on a given date), but as an event that holds throughout time. Bereavement can never un-happen, it continually discloses its own (non)being. A person’s bereavement remains ‘there’ even if unseen and forgotten - it happened and always remains so.

Repetition in bereavement provides the very possibility for difference to be disclosed, it is the motor that drives incubation as a container for difference (of *vitalisation*). We gain a (fleeting) disclosure of what is being incubated in bereavement work via synchronistic phenomena. Bereavement uncovers a way of *being-in-the-world*, a way that is not merely aligned to the material-scientific paradigm. Synchronistic experiences can therefore become highly significant in bereavement work and are indicative of the incubation of continuing bonds with the deceased.

Continuity

The realm of Continuity refers to the bereaved’s *taking care* of their own bereavement. As explicated earlier, ‘taking care’ (a Heideggerian notion) concerns action, autonomy and authenticity, concomitant with the bereaved’s claiming their own authentic *mine-ness* in the doing. Claire *takes care* of the continuing bond with her grandmother in her action and commitment to go to Equestrian College. Whether Claire actually attends Equestrian College neither validates or de-validates the care taken - ‘taking care’ is not predicated upon a particular outcome; rather, it is realised in a shift from passivity to activity, so that bereavement is no longer something that is merely done *to* the bereaved, but is something that enables the bereaved to act in the world.

In the words of Seamus Heaney, taking care in bereavement relates to the bereaved being their own happening of 'pure change'. Though the deceased's sphere of influence on the bereaved wanes, the deceased continues *with* the bereaved – on the terms 'taken' by the bereaved. The death of a loved one, then becomes the potential for the bereaved's liberty to not only re-create one's own life, but to recreate what it means to continually *be-with* the deceased. Ironically, this may be a taking-leave, a parting touch or even a forgetting. Bereavement work opens the bereaved to continuity through the repetition and difference of *vitalisation* and *incubation*, the deceased is repeatedly *over-there* (in dead-ness, non-local, otherness) and repeatedly *here* (in alive-ness) *with* the bereaved, both repeat, and in repeating – continue.

The main spectrum of therapeutic interventions in the realm of continuity are:

Taking-Leave Interventions Vs Taking-Care interventions:

Taking-Leave Interventions emphasize the bereaved's 'futuraity' against the deceased's 'historicity' and points towards a separateness between the two. Taking-Leave Interventions display the therapist's sensitivity towards the client's commitment to futurity. This is not only paralleled, but lived-through, in the client-therapist dyad. As the end of the therapy approaches client and therapist will go their separate ways and decline from regular meetings, Taking-Leave Interventions draw the client's attention to this, through the client being invited to reflect upon what is to be 'left behind' and what is to be 'taken' from the work. Taking-Leave concerns the return of circumspect phenomena, back to the background, providing room for the client to choose what will now happen, what will be. The dramatherapist, for example, may invite the client to participate in rituals that focus on naming what is to be 'taken' and what is to be 'left here' in the therapy space.

Taking-Care Interventions relate to the bereaved's active claiming and appropriation of their bereavement, with an emphasis on 'their bereavement'. The bereavement, now claimed through the bereaved-deceased dyad, becomes the client's, to use as a resource, to make a life change or to forget. Taking-Care Interventions of the therapist posit the client's potential space, duly incubated, beyond the therapist - in this way, the clearing of bereavement becomes illuminated *for* the client. Taking-Care Interventions display the therapist's sensitivity towards the client's *own* interpretation, meaning and action from the work. In the same way that Barthes argues the birth of the reader comes with the death of

the author, so too does Taking Care Interventions witness the symbolic death of the therapist and the therapy – it marks an end point that the client moves beyond.

On a wider scale, by taking care of their bereavement, the bereaved ‘moves beyond’ the repetition of bereavement. Difference, in action and life, comes to the client that takes care, this does not cease the repetition of bereavement, but it places the emphasis on the *here*. In this way the bereaved remains against (different to) but *with* the deceased. The duly ‘bonded-bereaved’ can then be said to be ‘free to continue’. Continuity in bereavement is a living adjustment to a state of being that is both free (becoming) and bonded with the deceased (being). Bereavement then grasps the eternal repetition of being from its differential state of becoming.

We can then imagine the bereaved analogous to Sisyphus, condemned to eternal toil, yet (as Camus says) ‘happy’¹⁷. The bereaved are duly ‘gifted’ with an insight into eternity, the task for the bereaved, as for Sisyphus, is to continue. To this extent the therapist working with the bereaved is called upon, not so much to lessen the fear of the instability of being, (see Developmental Transformations) but to lessen the fear of the repetition of being.

¹⁷ The Myth of Sisyphus