

## **The Role of Place in Personal and Systemic Transformation**



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## Abstract

## The Role Of Place In Personal And Systemic Transformation

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Belonging, balance, and predictability are essential foundations of healthy human relationships. This study examined whether people form energetic attachments to significant *places* and the specific role of *place* in human systems. This research investigated the connection between people and *place* using the lens of Systemic Constellations, a facilitated experiential approach to personal and systemic transformation.

## Acknowledgements

The process of Constellations brings to light the purposefulness and rightness of oneness, order, tradition, and ritual in life. This project is the culmination of two years of study and research, yet it also represents a seven-year cycle of my life. As a Constellation, it illuminates the triad of *love*, *learning*, and *loss*. For this reason I acknowledge my relationships with the many souls who have journeyed with me in various capacities over this time:

*Love*—My deepest love and endless gratitude to my children Lindsay and Tyler Rogers who continually inspire me to be a better parent and better person. I am who I am because of you; I gave birth to you, but you gave life to me.

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*Loss*—Farewelling a marriage in the process of soul growth is a painful loss, yet despite the trauma, I remain grateful for the spiritual learning taken from a decade-

long relationship. A formal acknowledgment of my younger brother is long overdue. Stuart, you left this earthly plane too soon; losing you was unbearable. Through Constellations, I have been able to retrieve the part of my soul that died with you. I carry you in my heart always and dedicate this work to your memory.

Sydney Australia, February 2010

## Introduction

In January 2008, I first heard about the *Powers of Place* project, led by Renee Levi, through Nancy Southern at Saybrook University in a call for interested volunteers and contributors. Due to transformative experiences of *place* in my own life, I knew I wanted to contribute to this project although it would be six months later before I would meet Renee Levi and discover more about her research into *place*. The project resonated with me. In my personal life, *places* have been powerful containers for personal transformation; they have called me out of my country of birth, reconnected me with my ancestry, and re-united me with myself.

*Dis-place-ment* has also been a theme in my life and, as an immigrant in a melting pot of foreigners to Australia, I also find the word *place* evokes an emotional response from a great many people I meet.

Relocation is a centuries-old issue. Prior generations moved from their *places* of origin and ancestry due to political and economic necessity rather than opportunity and discretion. Today, more and more people leave their *places* of origin by personal choice, while many others are still facing *dis-place-ment*—removal from their *place* of origin—due to war, disease, political dissent, economic instability, and environmental disaster. The issues surrounding increasing mobile populations enhance the importance of understanding the connection between *place* and human systems. Regardless of the reason, moving inherently means *re-place-ment*—the loss of one location and the assimilation into another.

*Researcher's Personal Narrative*

In April 1997, after accepting a consulting assignment in Australia, I arrived for the first time in Sydney. As I stood in the aisle of the QANTAS 747 jet waiting to exit, a strange feeling overcame me. I experienced a magnetic force that seemed to pull my feet through the airplane as if it didn't exist at all. I felt drawn to the earth of this foreign continent even though I had not yet deplaned. In that moment, I sensed a surge of energy and that an extraordinary bond with this new *place* was being formed. Despite not knowing exactly what I was getting myself into in terms of work and living arrangements, I intuitively knew that I did not need to worry. Some 7,500 miles from my *place* of birth, this new *place* spoke to me in the language of the soul; a voice from deep within said: "you're home." Although my rational mind had difficulty comprehending the thought, I knew it was true and began to breathe differently. I felt connected, as though I belonged to this country even though I had just touched down.

As a child, I had been told of my German heritage on my father's side—of my grandfather's family's emigration to the United States and of the political tensions in Prussia that drove them to seek a safe haven in America. This grandfather played a relatively small role in my young life, yet at the age of 17, I found myself living with a family in the northern region of Germany and attending a high school in a small village in a farming community. I quickly learned to speak the German language with fluency and without an accent even though I had neither learned it at school nor heard it spoken in my home.

Living in the German countryside with the smell of the rich, dark earth triggered my olfactory nerves and stirred something deep and ancient within me. Though I did not understand it at the time, I felt an indescribable connection with my ancestry—

my family soul. In this *place*, I *knew* myself; *I knew how to be German*. I felt I belonged to this *place*. The German culture penetrated my being, scrambling my native California identity. Was the intensity of this experience in Germany somehow linked to the family's displaced German cultural heritage? Did this ancestral homeland call to me from across generations? Does the longing for lost *places* loop within the family system until it can be expressed?

Psychologist and author Ursula Franke, one of the world's leading Systemic Constellations facilitators, suggested that the "third generation can open its eyes and look at the *place* from which the first generation was removed" (paraphrased from a training workshop October 6, 2009).

When I returned to California one year later, I found myself disoriented, confused, and disconnected. In an era when teens were not world travellers, none of my peers had ventured outside the United States or lived overseas. I found no one with whom I could share my experiences and had no way of expressing my deep sense of loss. My own feelings of dis-*place*-ment created identity confusion, which resulted in isolation and bewilderment that drove me into what I now recognize as depression, although at the time it went undiagnosed.

Disconnection haunted me for two decades; I was lost and without a personal sense of identity. When I found myself living in Australia, where the lush, bushy landscape meets the blue ocean and the sky stretches endlessly, the lightness of the energy teased out my sadness and transformed my spirit. Was it the *place* itself, or was it the ability to connect with myself and establish a unique personal identity apart from family and ancestral enmeshment? Perhaps *place* plays a role in the creation of the emotional stories we make into our reality.

In recent years I have searched for language and metaphor to give voice to these life-shaping experiences of *place* that have both moved my soul and connected me with my deeper nature. More recently and perhaps most importantly, through experiencing and facilitating an energetic process known as Systemic Constellations, I have witnessed the power of *place* in the lives and systemic patterning of others.

Where families have been *dis-placed* through war, political unrest, or emigration, *place* emerges as a cornerstone of their stories and healing processes. Similarly, those with mixed ancestry gain new insights and understanding into unconscious patterns in their lives through hearing voices of their *places* of ancestral origin and witnessing the entanglements between the people and the *places* that hold their cultural identity and shape their family patterning.

Through the facilitation of Constellations processes, I have increased my understanding of the importance that *place* has in people's lives and how disconnection from *place* can impact a family system, affecting individuals over generations. I have observed that *places* are entities that *have distinctly different characteristics*. For example, in my workshops, I have found that different people who have represented the entity of Germany in Constellations consistently report feelings of heaviness, coldness, and deep sadness, while those who have represented the country entity of Australia report a sense of lightness, playfulness, and expansiveness with equal regularity. This led me to question this phenomenon and to seek to better understand the *power of place* and the relationships between people, *places* and belonging.

### *Research Objective*

This paper grew out of both the longing to understand and the need to contribute research toward understanding the phenomenon of Constellations. This project consists of a brief review of related literature and provides a qualitative inquiry of phenomenological reports of Constellations facilitators drawn from interviews about their personal experiences as Constellations representatives, clients, and facilitators. It concludes by summarizing the findings from and discussing possibilities of the research.

### *Organization of Materials*

This project is organized in a series of sections, including a brief review of relevant literature, a description of the research method, a summary of the research data including emerging themes, and an exploration of potential implications of the analysis.

### *Definitions*

To assist the reader in better understanding some of the Constellations specific language and other terms in this paper, a list of definitions is included in this section.

**Client**—The individual seeking clarity or harmony by bringing a personal or professional issue to a Constellation process.

**Constellation**—A phenomenological, trans-generational exploration of client issues. The method of practice stems from family systems therapies and indigenous ceremonial practices. The process primarily seeks to identify systemic behavioral patterns and release energetic blocks from the system.

**Energy**—A pattern of belief that evokes an emotional or behavioural response.

**Facilitator**—A Constellations practitioner.

Field—The total context of influences on individual behavior (Reason & Bradbury, 2008, pp. 38 – 40).

Focus—A representative of the client (Hellinger, 1998).

Personal Constellation—The process of examining an issue in the context of the client's family system.

*Place*—A non-human, geographic entity within the system of interest that represents a significant part of the Constellation.

Representative—An objective participant in the subjective Constellation process of the client (Hellinger, 1998).

## Review of the Literature

*Systems are not simply the collection of individuals, they are patterns of relationship – we exist only in relationship.* Barry Oshry

### *About Systemic Constellations*

Systemic Constellations (hereafter referred to as Constellations) is based on the work of Bert Hellinger, who became a psychotherapist in Germany after leaving the Catholic priesthood. Hellinger's significant influences included Transactional Analysis, Catholic missionary work with the Zulu tribes in South Africa, and ecumenical training in group dynamics led by the Anglican Church in South Africa (Franke, 2003b; Hellinger, Weber, & Beaumont, 1998, p. 193).

Cohen (2004) suggested that despite the proliferation of Hellinger's work in Europe and other parts of the world, Constellations remains relatively unrecognized in the United States (p. ii). In Australia, the story is much the same. This may be attributed to the lack of scientific studies or peer reviewed material available on the subject. Cohen (2004) raised the point that the lack of acceptance within the community of mainstream psychologists stems from its experiential nature, roots in depth psychology and departure from the clinical or medical model of psychology.

Simply defined, a Constellation is a pattern of interconnected relationships. It is a phenomenological process used for exploring client issues within the context of the system in which they were created. It provides a means of demonstrating the multifaceted interconnectedness of the world in which we live and the multi-dimensions of the systems within it. A Constellations process offers an experiential process aimed to uncover the root of systemic imbalance and gently restore harmony to the system. In doing so, it provides a window to the hidden intelligence available

beyond what we are accustomed to seeing with our eyes and rational minds. Through experiencing the principle of the whole (Scharmer, 2009), it enables mindsets grounded in individualism and materialism to expand to a deep understanding of the vast invisible web of interconnected relationships that exist within our complex human systems.

The Constellations process is an unconventional therapeutic modality intended to uncover the root cause of patterned dysfunction and release the blocks at an energetic level. Facilitators are trained to avoid cognitive and emotional content, gathering instead historical facts from a client's system. The Constellations process provides a spatial representation of people's inner or emotional images of their relationships to people or entities within a larger system, such as a family, group, or organization. For example, a person can represent close connection with another person by placing representative objects nearby or facing one another. Similarly, difficult relationships can be expressed through psychic distance and or spatial positioning.

The Constellations process illuminates the psychic distance or subjective emotional attachments and detachments, as well as the hidden dynamics and systemic imbalances (Horn & Brick, 2005) by examining the placement of representational objects in relation to one another, by the exclusion of certain objects and not others, and by the overall sequencing of the objects. Organizational issues can be also explored using this method.

The Constellations process simulates the intricacies, complexities, and interconnections within dynamic relationships reaching beyond the known (Cohen, 2009; Horn & Brick, 2005). Constellations is work that enables the systemic patterning across multiple generations to be revealed, acknowledged, and

energetically shifted in the individual bringing ecology to the whole (Boszormenyi-Nagy, 1973; Hellinger, 2001). The work of Constellations seeks to uncover and resolve persistent patterns of feelings, impulses, and compulsions residing beyond individual cognitive awareness (Cohen, 2009, p. 8).

At the core of the Constellations method is an acknowledgement of some basic principles of systemic order, including: the universal *right of belonging, ranking* according to the order of arrival into the system (first versus last), as well as importance of role or ability to the survival of the system (manager versus clerk), and *balanced giving and receiving* (Hellinger, 1998, 2001; Horn & Brick, 2005). Hellinger, Weber, & Beaumont (1998) suggest that these orders are fundamental to fulfilling the human need to “relate intimately to others” (p. 5).

When the systemic equilibrium is disturbed, relationships suffer or break down, and the effects can be felt across generations. In Constellations, the principles of order can be represented either in material form or through visualization (Franke, 2003a). When an inner image of emotional connection is externalised either physically or figuratively, a person is free to observe and reflect on the spatial placement of the relationships. In the course of the Constellations Process, the relationships shift and align through symbolic reorganization based on the orders of systemic balance (Hellinger, 1998, 2001; Horn & Brick, 2005).

Constellations can be thought of as an inquiry tool for examining blocks in the flow of energy within human activity systems. As a process, it enables individuals and groups to examine the issues they face in a current scenario, imagine a future state, enter the energetic field of the system, make observations on data from the Constellations process, and reflect on what they witness. In this way, Constellations itself can be seen as a form of action research. While an individual, may bring a

personal or professional issue, which becomes the focus of the Constellation process, the process itself offers clients, representatives and observers meta-positioning. This third person perspective allows them to observe themselves and their issues within the context of the larger system. Often a different vantage point is all that is needed to help people shift their attitudes and ideas about a particular issue.

When a client's inner image is externalized, the client has access to different information; once freed up from the current experience, the person can view their story through a new lens. Representatives can be thought of as objective participants in a subjective process. Representatives are present to the energetic or morphic field (Sheldrake, 1987) of the client. Senge, P., Scharmer, C. O., Jaworski, J., & Flowers, B. S. (2004) described the field in terms of a "primary knowing" in which the perceptual boundaries of human subject-object awareness dissolve, extending the individual's field of awareness (Rosch, 1975; Senge et al., 2004). In a state of openness, information from other fields is then accessible and can be *in-corporated*; that is: sensed in the physical body, taken into awareness in the mental body, *and thus reported verbally*.

Through the *reports* of the representatives, hidden information in the client's system comes to light. During a Constellation process, representatives respond to the facilitators' questions, such as, "How is that?" or "What is happening now?" As clients witness the movement and the responses of the representatives, they are, in my experience, amazed at how accurately representatives depict the dynamic of their human systems. That the representatives "know" can be attributed to the direct contact with "'interconnected wholes, rather than isolated contingent parts and by means of timeless, direct presentation' rather than through stored 're-presentation'" (Rosch, as cited in Senge et al., 2004, pp. 98 – 99). Senge et al. (2004) describe the

ability to know as *presence*. Constellation representatives are aware of what is emerging in the client's field; they also frequently report a simultaneous sense of becoming alert to suppressed or unexpressed aspects of themselves. According to Mahr (2004):

Representative perception is non-local i.e., its action is not limited to spatial closeness of the persons involved: it is independent of the distance of those perceived. And representative perception is trans-temporal i.e., it includes events reaching far back in time and into future potentialities. And it includes the deceased persons i.e., relatives we know of or people who we never met or never heard of, who were deeply influential for the survival and well-being of our family and who's life and fate, even way back over several generations, was crucial for us to be here today. (p. 1)

Of the observable phenomena of Constellation representatives' awareness through which surprisingly accurate reports of information from the client's field emerge, Schneider (2007) wrote:

When interconnected parts become a whole, they need no energetic transference process 'to know' about each other. If the processes of spirit and soul have a 'real basis' inside the brain as well as outside the brain, then it is presumably based on the principles of matter, energy and information, as they are made clear in quantum physics. (p. 177)

The Constellations method enables the client's perspective to shift from being inside the issue to witnessing it from a third person vantage point. When enough internal resources have been gathered in the course of the process, the client is able to participate in the solution and generate new options, beliefs, and attitudes with which to move forward. "The shift in imagery changes the nature of our attention" (Wheatley, 2006, p. 57).

Cohen (2004) traced the lineage of Hellinger's Constellations method to depth psychology, suggesting "the manifest contents of conscious awareness floats above a

field of unconscious latent content. This latent content shapes the manifest content. The object of depth psychology is to influence the field of latent content” (p. 42).

*The Mystery of Constellations-A Quantum Perspective*

Physics principles may indeed hold the answer to the mystical aspects of Hellinger’s Constellations approach. According to Mindell’s (2007) writing on quantum perspective, reality is multi-dimensional. The mind enables people to operate both from within their experiences and separate from them. Mindell (2007) used an example of a moviegoer watching a movie while sitting on a chair watching inside the theater. The individual observing the movie is also inside the emotional context of the movie and participating at a still deeper level within the awareness of each character in the movie (p. 67). Mindell (2007) put it another way: “You sense events, you experience directions – yet you simultaneously *are* the events, and directions and paths” (p. 67). According to Mindell (2007),

Physicists know the rules of quantum theory work, but not why they work. Therapists have noticed that the basic part of the human being, our deepest psychology, seeks to know itself and realize itself. In psychological and anthropomorphic terms, the quantum wave self-reflects because the universe wonders about itself, seeks to know itself. (p. 65)

Mindell’s (2007) work on quantum philosophy illustrated the dreamlike quality of Constellations and its ability to bring forth a solution from the reflective process in a systemic context. He suggested that personal reflection *is* a systemic action. “Working on yourself alone or with others is one way the universe gets to know itself. If you are stuck on some problem, the entire world around you is stuck as well” (p. 68). This philosophy is mirrored in Native American healing ceremonies, which are conducted as public and community-wide events, where treating the few heals the

many. “If one person is not well, everyone is not well in some way” (Mindell, 2007, p. 200).

Wheatley’s (2006) description of systems as webs of unseen interconnectedness can be applied to explain the effectiveness of Constellations. Wheatley (2006) suggested that localized action can have profound impacts on the larger system. “Acting locally” creates sensitivity to the dynamics of the system, which increases the effectiveness of action on the whole (p. 45). Awareness occurs “inside the movement and flow of the system” by virtue of observing the complexity of events and relationships simultaneously (p. 45). Localization also means that it is less important where one begins to work in the system, but the quality of the processes one uses. Wheatley (2006) wrote:

Because of these unseen connections, there is potential value in working anywhere in the system. We never know how our small activities will affect others through the invisible fabric of our connectedness. I have learned that in this exquisitely connected world, it’s never a question of ‘critical mass.’ It’s always about *critical connections* (p. 45).

#### *Understanding the Field*

Wheatley (2007) described a *field* as an unseen force “with invisible influences in space that become apparent through their effects” (p. 51). She used the analogy of fish swimming in water. Each movement of the fish can be seen as an imperceptible force that impacts on other the fish and sea life around it (Wheatley, 2007, p. 53). Fish move within the flow of the field, continually reacting to changes, which may help to explain their instinctive cohesive movement within the school.

According to Wheatley, although a field cannot be seen with the eyes “we can easily see its influence by looking at behavior” (p. 55). These behavioral cues hold the key to unconscious messages transmitted within the systemic field, such as whom or

what is valued, and what are acceptable norms and how to navigate the unspoken rules (Wheatley, 2007, p. 55). Similarly, Boszormenyi-Nagy (1973) suggested individual behavior is played out against the backdrop of ancestral history and the motivations to act are so embedded within the system, or energetic field, that they are unconscious to the individual (p. 5). The individual energies and systemic patterns merge into the systemic field, which becomes the cultural blueprint, the psychic DNA of the family or system. The information arising out of the field helps to understand the patterns and dynamics and the influences that shape the behavior of the members of the system.

Mindell (2006) posited that spaces are not empty; even a void contains electromagnetic energies in motion (p. 238). Constellations use spatial representation of relationships within a defined space. The story of the system is portrayed in spaces between the representatives. The field is alive with the electro-magnetic energies that repel or attract the members of the system. According to Franke (2005), parts of a system are in resonance with the whole system (p. 32). Similarly Levi (2003) reported that there is a physical connection and vibrational exchange that operates between people continuously even if they are unaware of it (p. 2).

Ainsworth (2009) suggested that little research has been done to examine individual development in systemic contexts and notes the potential for applying understanding of higher states of collective consciousness in organizational life (p. 23). If invisible dynamics exist within the fields or systems in which people live and work, we would do well to understand the forces that drive the attractors and repellents, so that we can understand how they impact our psychology individually and collectively and the effects on the environment. What if we are as much a part of our *places* as we are our families and communities?

Sheldrake (1987) suggested that the “extended mind” is a widely recognized belief in indigenous cultures and ancient religions. He expounds the Jungian collective consciousness positing that individual minds merge in extended space and time, where systemic patterns and group or cultural norms are stored. Sheldrake (1987) wrote:

Insofar as we tune into archetypal fields or patterns which other people have had, which other social groups have had, and which our social group has had in the past, our minds are much broader than the ‘things’ inside our brains. They extend out into the past and into social groups to which we are linked, either by ancestry or by cultural transmissions. Thus our minds are extended in time, and ’t [sic] believe they are also extended in space. (p. 3)

Sheldrake (1987) extended his theory of the expanded mind and morphic fields to nature. He suggested there is a “science of places” also known as the ancient system of *geomancy*, which explores the interrelationships of places” (p. 6). He also indicated that the current dominant world ideologies have “forgotten” the ancient orders whereby all interconnected relationships are harmonized through complex, systematic balancing of fields and energies. Sheldrake (1987) believed that ancient peoples were well attuned to systemic consciousness and understood the importance of systemic harmony and the natural forces that exist between people, places, and natural forces (p. 7).

Ancient peoples lived closer to nature than the average Westernized citizen of today. In doing so, they had an intimate understanding of their connectedness and dependency on the earth’s fragile eco-systems. This may have contributed to their reverence and appreciation of the systemic aspects of life. They acknowledged themselves as a part, not master, of a living system; a system in which where each

member has a unique and valuable *place* and co-contributes to the well being of the other.

Lipton and Bhaerman (2009) identified that the mainstream scientific community still largely contests Sheldrake's work. The authors pointed to Sheldrake's unconventional experiments with animals who seem to communicate at a distance, and a dog's reported ability to *know* in advance when its owner was arriving home. They suggested that the ability to derive information from the "cosmic soup" is as useful as it is expedient (pp. 104 – 107).

Lipton and Bhaerman (2009) refuted the notion of materialism as the only reality. Quoting Einstein, the authors explored concepts of energy within space and the possibility of "the field as the only reality" (p. 104). They wrote of the palpability of "invisible energy forces" (p. 104) citing compelling theories from quantum physics such as "zero-point field" in which "the energy within a single cubic foot of perceived empty space is enough to boil all the oceans in the world" (p. 104).

### *Defining Place*

For the purposes of this project, *place* is defined as non-human, geographic entity within the system of interest that represents a significant part of the Constellation story. *Place* may be a country, locality, region, or other significant locale that emerges within the Constellation process of the client.

For example, in one Constellation, the countries of Scotland and Australia were identified as important *place* entities. The focus of the Constellation was a woman named Gail (not her real name). Gail expressed having had lifelong difficulties with relationships, especially with her family of origin. Throughout her life, Gail

experienced severe shame and guilt, although she was unable to pinpoint a specific incident or reason that would cause her to feel that way. From her early childhood, she felt alienated from her family and society. She later married an Aboriginal man and felt more at home within the Aboriginal culture than she did her own Anglo-Saxon culture.

Gail's Constellation history revealed that her ancestors had emigrated from Scotland to Australia in the 1800s. Her ancestors had been driven from their Scottish land through war and persecution, and upon arrival in Australia, had likewise violently driven the Aboriginal owners from the Australian land where they took up residence. In her personal Constellation, Gail was able to see her family pattern and was able to identify with and embrace her Scottish roots as well as her Australian homeland.

In the Constellation, Gail's representative was unable to connect with her immediate family members. She turned her back on them. Only when the *place* of her ancestral origin (Scotland) was brought into the Constellation was she able to turn around. When Scotland spoke, something resonated within her, and she began to soften. When Gail's representative could see the violence of her ancestors' actions within the systemic context, she was able to release her personal feelings of guilt and shame and her judgement about her family. Understanding that her ancestral *place* (Scotland) grieved the suffering of its people through war and starvation appeared to arouse feelings of compassion toward her family as she witnessed the unconscious repetition of an ancient pattern of domination and control. As a client, Gail, witnessed the Constellation and wept. The connection with her ancestral *place*, created the portal of healing the family rift within Gail.

Psychologist Ursula Franke, one of the world's leading Systemic Constellations facilitators, in a face-to-face interview I had with her, said, "In a Constellation, *place* will represent the collective experience of the story. If there is sadness or pain associated with that *place*, it will show up in the representative. As the Constellation shifts, so will the experience of the representative" (Franke, October 3, 2009, unpublished face-to-face interview).

### *Resonance with Place*

Franke (2005) suggested that the body is "an instrument of resonance that carries precise information" about the world around it and the system(s) it belongs to. Levi's (2003a, 2003b) study on collective resonance posited that human systems are alive with "energetic vibration"; as such they unconsciously entrain with the resonance of like vibrations. Are places also highly in tune with the energies and emotions represented in human systems? What systemic information does *place* hold, and how might we connect with this information to facilitate transformation in the system? Perhaps the land carries the music, the frequency, of the collective. It may be that *place* is the drumbeat our hearts hear; offering soul sounds that return us to grace.

Levi (2003b) indicated *resonance* is due to the transmission of like patterns of vibration, which produce an ideal operational state in human groups (pp. 5 – 6). If bodies synchronize unconsciously through vibrational alignment, then it stands to reason that they may also entrain with particular environments. Recognizing "the power a sacred space makes possible" (p. 123), Senge et al. (2004) called for the rediscovery of the sanctity of those *places* that have a harmonizing effect on people such that they can reconnect with themselves and others. Levi (2008) suggested the power of intention and activity associated with *place*. She described ancestral energy fields as surrounding and having an influence on *places*.

Chalquist (2007) suggested that there is a strong psychological connection between humans, human systems, and human habitats. According to Chalquist, storytelling is an ancient vehicle for anchoring the spirit of a people to the spirit of land; the connection transpires through imagination and fantasy (Chalquist, N.D, [www.terrapsych.com/whatisTP.html](http://www.terrapsych.com/whatisTP.html)). This theory is consistent with the Australian Aboriginal concept of *Dreamtime*, which is the indigenous recognition of a living spirituality and the awareness of the significance of the interconnectedness of humans and nature and humans and the non-material world (Voigt and Neville, 1997; Wolf, 1995).

According to Chalquist (N.D.), *places* are indeed repositories of human emotion and geographies and localities have the ability to hold both human joy and suffering. An individual's story is directly intertwined with the story of *place* "because these places take on the qualities of the psychological field or 'life space' of the inhabitants" (Chalquist, N.D, [www.terrapsych.com/whatisTP.html](http://www.terrapsych.com/whatisTP.html)).

Robert and Schmucker (2006) created a birthplace Constellation designed to connect the client with their birthplace as an alternate intra-personal resource. The authors indicated that connecting experientially to the environmental elements surrounding one's birthplace, such as a lake, ocean or forest, can provide an intimate awareness of nature useful in helping people create a sustainable relationship with their current *place* (Robert & Schmucker, 2006).

Briskin, Erickson, Ott, and Callanan (2009) suggested the power of reconciliation that comes by gathering the wisdom of the collective, which is highly relevant to Constellations work. Seeing the self in a historical and systemic context enables individuals to move to a higher perspective. The collective framework provides a wider lens—what has been hidden comes into view. What surfaces is a new

and creative solution to destructive patterns and cycles of fixed perception, cognition, behavior, and emotion. A new reality emerges.

## Methodology

### *The Aim of the Research*

Given the worldwide dearth of peer reviewed materials available on Constellations, the purpose of this research was to contribute to furthering the understanding and application of Constellations as method for maximizing human and organization potential. A Constellation process is a non-linear systems approach that can be used to restore personal and systemic equilibrium. As such, I hope that additional research will assist the credibility of the method so that the fields of organizational psychology, organizational and leadership development, management consulting, and executive coaching can embrace it.

This project queried the specific role of *place* in human systemic orders. This research sought to understand the relationship between *place* and the human sense of belonging. The research examined the aforementioned relationship using the Constellations method of personal and systemic transformation. Having reviewed most available literature in the field of Constellations, I found only one paper written with respect to birthplace (Robert & Schmucker, 2006).

Belonging to our human activity systems supports our ability to grow and develop. Hellinger, Weber, and Beaumont (1998) described the key relationships drivers including the need to belong, the need for balance, and the need for predictability (p. 5). These are essential relationship enablers as well as constraints. Because *place* can be described in language by way of physical locality or land mass (such as Sydney, Australia) as well as in conjunction with emotional connection; that is, *mother country, fatherland, home*, this study also examined the relationships between people and their *places* of origin and ancestry.

### *Inquiry Questions*

Some of the burning questions that captivated my curiosity and underpinned this inquiry are listed below:

- What is the relationship of *place* to a human system?
- What is the order of the *place* in the system?
- Do disrupted relationships with *place* influence relationships within the system?
- What happens to the system when attachments to *place* are disrupted?
- Where *place* appears to play a significant role in transformation, what are the factors and conditions that assist in restoring balance?

### *Research Objective*

The objective of this study was to explore personal experiences of Systemic Constellations in which *place* was identified as a distinct entity and played a role in a personal and/or systemic shift.

### *Research Design*

This study followed a qualitative inquiry to identify how Constellation facilitators perceive the role of *place* in transformation. Reason and Bradbury (2007) suggested that action research invites participants to examine their own experience in order to increase conscious awareness through a reflective process (p. 77). My approach aimed to query participants in order to gain an understanding of their insights and experiences with regard to *place* in the systemic narratives of their clients. I designed the interview process to gather information as well as raise participant awareness through a reflection. Reason and Bradbury (2007) illustrated the construction of awareness using a value triangle with knowledge, action, and consciousness (p. 76) to represent the invisible structures of the *knowing* process.

### *Research Method*

Three one-on-one, face-to-face interviews were used to gather qualitative information about facilitators' experiences of *place* in Systemic Constellations work. Focused, open-ended inquiry questions were used to elicit reflections on the participants' experiences of facilitating, witnessing, and experiencing Constellations. The length of the interviews varied from 35 to 60 minutes. The specific interview questions used are included in the Interview Questions section below.

### *Scope*

This data obtained is limited by the sample size of three, which reflects the scope of this particular project. I acknowledge that a significantly larger sample size would be required to draw definitive conclusions.

### *Selection Process*

Three volunteer participants were selected to complete this study based on their experience as Constellations facilitators and their personal experience in which *place* appeared a systemic entity. Participants were selected from a pool of practitioners within a Constellations peer group in Sydney, Australia. Selection was based on the participants' willingness to volunteer; their stated experience of representing a *place*; and their experience of facilitating at least one Constellation where *place* was identified as an entity in the client's system. All interviews were conducted in Sydney, Australia. All participants were female. All participants reported on their own experiences and observations of both male and female client experiences. Interestingly, all participants were immigrants to Australia, although this was not a selection criterion.

### *Interview Questions*

The participants interviewed were asked to reflect on the interview questions identified below.

1. Have you a represented *place* in a Constellation or has *place* played a major role in your Constellation?
2. What was your experience as a representative or a witness to your own Constellation?
3. Why was *place* represented in the Constellation?
4. What was the relationship of the *place* to the *focus* of the Constellation?
5. Can you recall what was happening before the *place* emerged as a represented entity (Describe your thoughts, feelings, actions, etc.)?
6. What was the significance of *this place* to the system?
7. What insights did you gain from the experience?
8. What shifts (if any) in your own awareness of *place* have you noticed because of your experience and how does it contribute to your Constellations practice?

## Summary of Findings

The purpose of this section is to synthesize and report on the data collected during the interviews. The interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. I listened to each recording a minimum of three times, listening for common themes and experiences. I also read and re-read the transcripts at least four times each to verify the themes and extract direct quotes supporting the themes. A discussion item was considered a theme if it was discussed by two of the three participants.

Table 1 summarizes the shared characteristics and responses that emerged from the three interviews.

Table 1

*Summary of Shared Characteristics and Responses.*

Presenting Conditions and Symptoms	Identified Systemic Causal Factors Linked to Place	Reported Transformative Results
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Disconnection</li> <li>• Disorientation</li> <li>• Lack of direction</li> <li>• General unease/anxiousness</li> <li>• Not belonging</li> <li>• Longing</li> <li>• Internal conflict / addiction</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unresolved Grief or Loss</li> <li>• Anxiety</li> <li>• Shame</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Freedom</li> <li>• Ease</li> <li>• Relief</li> <li>• Acceptance</li> <li>• Peace</li> <li>• Belonging</li> <li>• Empowerment</li> </ul>

This section contains verbatim quotes extracted from the interviews and forms the basis of the research data from which the conclusions are drawn. A discussion on the potential meaning of the data and implications of this study are described in the final section of this paper.

*Reported Presenting Conditions Prior To Constellation Where Place Emerged in the Constellation*

This section contains reflections extracted from the interviews. The quotes are responses drawn from the participants, who were asked to recall what was happening before *place* emerged as a represented entity in their own personal Constellation. The significance of the quotes is extended by the fact that, as practitioners, each had experienced numerous personal Constellations as a requirement of training, yet the emergence of *place* had a significant effect in shifting elements that remained stuck in their systemic patterning. Common characteristics were reported as anxiety, sense of not belonging and internal conflict, or lack of direction. The quotes below represent Constellation experiences, where they themselves were clients.

- “Before ... I had sort of an anxiousness....”
- “I always felt not connected to [my country of origin] before and something felt like I’m not belonging or deserving something.”
- “The feeling that I had towards Slovenia before, not belonging, [I had] also with my father.”
- “I felt belonging to both [country of birth and country, Germany, and of ancestral origin, Poland] but also feeling conflict with both and have a huge issue [of] feeling challenged or being torn between those two forces, which is reflective of my family situation than belongs to both [places].”

The following additional quotes were noteworthy from the interviews. The excerpts below represent observations by the interviewees in the role of facilitator where *place* contributed to personal change in their clients. The following quotes are in response to what was happening before *place* emerged as a represented entity in a Constellation they observed or facilitated. All respondents answered with observed experiences of Constellations they facilitated for their clients.

- “He [the client] said he was lost.”

- “Often there is this longing and sense of loss when you go from one country to another.”
- “He was the only one ... here [in Australia], the rest were in Lebanon and he very much struggled with addiction and being here, drawn back to Lebanon but partly didn’t want to go back to Lebanon.”
- [He was] Always ashamed about his background.”

Noteworthy causal conditions of the presenting conditions are symptomatic of unresolved grief or loss, anxiety and shame.

### *Transformation*

This section contains verbatim reports of personal and observed effects in clients of Constellations where *place* played a role. Two-thirds of the participants could identify clear and significant shifts within themselves following the Constellation where *place* played a role. All participants identified shifts in the clients and in the Constellation.

The following quotes were taken from the interviews. They represent a perceptual, behavioral, emotional, and attitudinal transformations resulting from the Constellation experience where *place* was represented. The key areas of change indicated appeared to be: increased sense of belonging; increased personal freedom and inner peace; an overall sense of relief or a general sense of feeling more at ease; a sense of personal empowerment; increased acceptance of self and others; and increased self-awareness.

### *Belonging*

Two thirds of respondents identified feelings of an enhanced sense of personal connection, also described as belonging, following a personal Constellation where *place* emerged as a significant factor.

- “It was just like coming home, coming home within myself by having that Constellation.”
- [The Constellation has] contributed a lot to it in that it so strongly let me feel its [Germany’s] real power...belonging. Belonging to me is ...not just influence, not just connection, it is [being] ‘part of’.” Connection is something we have or have not. Belonging, to me, is something that’s there and we can’t cut.”

### *Relief, freedom, and inner peace*

All interviewees described a sense of relief, freedom, and/or inner peace in their clients or for themselves following a personal Constellation.

- It was such a relief in my body.”
- “He said that that Constellation, because he was always ashamed and couldn’t really talk about the background – he’s a white man – but his father’s side was Aboriginal; always ashamed and couldn’t really talk about the background, his Aboriginals, and he said since then [the Constellation] there’s just a relief in him and the feeling of love and honouring for Aboriginals in his own life...it just shifted and he smiled. Whenever he sees me he says, ‘You will never know what that meant for me.’”
- “It’s a perception of freedom.”
- “It’s a sense of freedom.”
- “I feel really welcomed and...free within myself.”
- “He [the client] was quite split and he was a troubled man; quite a troubled man and when I talked to him ... just the whole body, the way he is now, you can see that he is in peace.”

### *Empowerment*

Feelings of greater personal power following a personal Constellation in which *place* played a significant role were identified and described as follows:

- “I extracted myself from awkward systems that have strong command and control structures....It gives me a sense of independence and responsibility.”

- “I’m not reacting, I’m responding...”

### *Acceptance and self-awareness*

Respondents described a sense of relief, freedom, and/or inner peace in their clients or for themselves following a personal Constellation where *place* played a significant role.

- “I have a systemic belonging to my country which was not of my choosing.”
- “I recognize what’s German about me; I’ve learned to recognize what that German thing is.”
- “You don’t choose who gives birth to you; it’s the country [place] you been given birth to.”
- “Accepting even though I don’t agree with the ideology, this is where I come from. Without necessarily even having to live there it’s still a sense of belonging.”
- “I’m respecting place more in its power; it’s the sum total of experiences in the ancestral line.”
- “He [the client] seemed to feel more at ease with his fate and struggle less against it. Even though he might still not have a full direction, there is more acceptance coming and that’s always the first step to change.”
- “What I probably recognized is an understanding [of] that connection [to country of ancestral origin] better, and what I’m carrying from the time is the connectedness with a great deal of suffering....Now I’m coming to understand that it has nothing to do with me but is part of me.”
- “I feel a healthier perspective that allows me to put [the suffering] into its right context.”
- “My awareness is much higher around that [abuse of power relating to country of origin].”
- “One thing I often see is ... kind of more a feeling of at ease with how they [the clients] are, more self acceptance.”
- “He [The client] seemed to feel more at ease with his fate and struggle less against it. Even though he might still not have a full direction, there is more acceptance coming and that’s always the first step to change.”

*Reports of Personal Experiences of Representing a Place in a Constellation*

This section represents quotes extracted from the interviews where respondents personally experienced “representing” a *place* (country) in Constellation; that is, where they were not in the role of facilitator. The responses answered the questions “What was your experience as a representative or a witness to your own Constellation?” and “What was the relationship of the *place* to the *focus* of the Constellation?”

Themes that emerged from the research revealed different *places* as having unique characteristics, including distinctive energies that could be experienced as bodily sensations; unique personality traits, such as violence, protectiveness, and playfulness; and a sense of relatedness with the client.

*Energy*

All interviewees discussed *place* in terms of “energy.” Each could identify and describe distinctive characteristics of energetic changes to their own bodies and thoughts during the Constellations process as well as witness energetic shifts within representatives. All participants had a common understanding of energy, and although each defined the word somewhat differently, the way they each used it to describe experience was virtually the same. In all cases, energy was a physical or emotional sensation that could be experienced somatically within them or was physically recognizable in another.

- “I just remember the energy and the feeling in my body when I was there [representing a country].”
- “I represented South America, Chile, the country, and I thought, well I don’t know how I can get into that energy, but it was really pretty quick.

- “I [representing Chile] feel the energy, feel the energy. I feel really strong but I feel a bit sort of violent and protective.”
- “When you are a representative, the intellectual just goes and I was just in my body reading the sensation.”
- “The person [representative of Lebanon] wasn’t that big..., but the energy around, it was like the face and it like was saying ‘I’m so angry’; it was like the energetic field was quite -- very powerful. I never experienced that in any other country or any other Constellation.”

### *Personality*

Two thirds of the participants described *place* as having a distinct personality, and attributed human qualities to it. These participants were able to cite a number of separate experiences representing different *places*. They attributed unique personality traits to individual *places*.

- “As a representative it was the experience of ... almost a personality.”
- “[I had a] feeling of being drawn to... like a feeling of wanting to protect.”
- “Countries behaving like personalities with very strong values and a sense of owning their people.”
- “I [representing Chile] felt quite strong within myself but also like some violence within myself and I couldn’t understand.”
- ”I can describe it [representing a country] almost as a personality.”
- “The sensation of [representing] Chile was very playful and a lot of music and very physical and sensation of salsa and just this joyfulness that had to do with people just having fun together.”
- The country, Australia was standing there ... and they were sort of – it was like really friendly with each other.”
- “Lebanon was really, really angry. So angry.”

### *Relationship*

Two thirds of the participants described a *place* represented in a Constellation as having a bonded attachment to the client (representative).

- “It was the sensation of belonging attached to place.”
- “I [representing Chile] didn’t want them [the client] to go to the other country. I didn’t want them to go.”
- “[As I was representing Chile, I was] perceiving the representative of the individual [client] as belonging to me.”
- “[As I was representing Chile, I was] feeling drawn to... a feeling of wanting to protect [the client].”
- “Lebanon itself, the energy of the country, was saying it felt betrayed, it felt really betrayed [when the client left the country].”

### *Places*

The following *places* were identified during the interviews:

- Chile (n = 2)
- Slovenia (n = 1)
- Australia (n = 2)
- Germany (n = 1)
- Poland (n = 1)
- Lebanon (n = 1)
- Scotland (n = 1)

Note that *n* represents the number of times a country was identified across three interviews.

*Insights Gained as a Constellations Practitioner*

This section reflects data gathered from the interviews where respondents identified insights, gained through the interview process, which they found useful in enhancing their own Constellation practices. This section represents responses to the questions, “What insights did you gain from the experience?”; “What shifts (if any) in your own awareness of *place* have you noticed because of your experience of the Constellation?”; and “How does it contribute to your Constellations practice?” The excerpts below represent quotes that were noteworthy from the interviews.

Emerging themes appeared to include the importance of understanding the interconnectedness between people and *place* as well as an awareness of the dynamic surrounding the loss of *place*.

- “[There is a] connectedness between belief systems and place and people[‘s] behavior attached to that.”
- “For me it is a simple aspect of giving it [country/place] shape; giving it shape and presence, making it real, bringing it from the abstract into something corporate.”
- “It’s [place is] more than just the dynamics in the family.”
- “Introducing place of origin – some movement can happen.”
- “Seeing there is more than one influence [country of origin] makes them [clients] feel more at ease and okay with not feeling...maybe not fitting into a culture; not knowing where to go.”
- “How important it is how connected they [the client or members of the client’s system] are to the country and they may [be] suffering here.... “
- “We can foresee a lot of other [in addition to addiction] symptoms, but it’s connected to the country....It’s unfinished business; peace is not made with that and then they are suffering the pain or the grief or the end result. The feelings are there and then they to medicate. So quite a lot of illnesses I can see result from that [lost connection to place].”

## Discussion

*We can only meaningfully understand ourselves by contemplating the whole of which we are an integral part.* Robert L. Flood

The research conducted in this study begins to answer the questions: “What is the relationship of *place* to a human system?”; “What happens when associations to *place* are disrupted?”; “Does *place* play a role in personal and systemic transformation?”; and “Do disrupted relationships with *place* influence relationships within human systems? The scope of the project was limited in size, thus a more in-depth study to draw out definitive conclusions is recommended. This section provides a discussion of my ideas and interpretations drawn from the qualitative research data collected. Analyses and implications of my findings are set out in the seven subsections below.

### *Place Has a Role in the Human Narrative*

Working with Constellations provides a means of physically representing and understanding the complexities and the myriad components that comprise dynamic relationships in human systems. Constellations illuminate morphic fields (Senge et al., 2004; Sheldrake 1987), the water in which we all swim and the invisible currents that direct the flow of our unconscious movements.

Whereas humans are mobile, countries or *places* represent notional boundaries of fixed landmasses—they represent the earthbound fields that absorb our individual and collective experiences. Potentially, the fields that contain a country’s borders also hold the energies of its inhabitants and are alive with memory. Conceivably, this study has revealed that *place* is a field that stores not only the collective culture, but the unique joys and sorrows of individuals, families, and groups that have resided

upon it; like a mother, *place* rejoices with its peoples and cries when they cry. A possible explanation may lie in the theories of resonance (Boszormenyi-Nagy, 1973; Chalquist, 2007; Franke, 2003; Levi, 2008; Sheldrake, 1987) suggesting that *the places we leave behind remember our stories because they are part of them*. In this light, we can begin to see that *place is a fundamental component of the human narrative*.

#### *Place Has a Role in Personal and Systemic Transformation*

All participants in this research indicated that *place* had a distinctive energy and was interconnected with the human systems represented in the Constellations. All participants cited personal experiences as well as observations about their clients' transformative experiences associated with *place(s)* of origin or ancestry. All interviewees referred to the energy of *place* as palpable in the Constellation process; that is, the energy of each *place* could be felt in the body and had different qualities from those of the human elements represented, such as mother, father, grandfather, etc. The respondents all spoke of shifts within the human system that began with the acknowledgment of the familial or ancestral *place where a traumatic event or emigration occurred*.

Not only did interviewees link *place* to the human story, their responses associated the *loss of place* with unresolved grief or trauma that reverberated across generations in terms of relationship difficulties, lack of personal direction and addictive behavior. On the other hand, reconnection with *place* within a Constellation was associated with significant personal transformation, such as a sense of relief, renewed sense of belonging, freedom and empowerment. Refer to Table 1.

The findings from this brief study support and expand Levi's (2008) research whereby transformative shifts occurred when people "moved from identification with self to identification with larger wholes" (p. 41), specifically, the narratives of *dis-place*-ment from previous generations and the resulting impacts on the family system. Refer to Figure 1. Participants identified that themes from their personal difficulties resonated with the sense of loss of *place* revealed from representations of previous generations through their Constellations processes. Once able to see their issue in a systemic context, they unanimously expressed a general sense of acceptance and easing of personal tension. These findings also support and expand Chalquist's (2007) notion that human evolution occurs, as "the world grows more sensitive to itself as an inner-outer whole" (p. 117).

This study reveals that understanding the energy field of our *place* may link us closer to it, providing another avenue for personal development and healing. If, as this study suggests, we can call upon the energy of a lost *place* at any time, establishing a connected presence with *places* (or people) gives us the power to simultaneously heal our systemic past and transform the future of our system in the present moment.

The findings suggest that we carry the energy of our entire system with us at all times, and despite the intergenerational narrative of loss of *place*, we may never really leave any *place* or anyone at all—*place* is ever present.

#### *Place Has a Significant Relationship to Human Systems*

The data from the interviews pointed to numerous interconnected fields operating in relationship to a human system, as illustrated in Figure 1. Note that in Constellations, each field within the larger system can be visibly represented. Respondents identified *place* as standing *behind* their ancestral and familial fields, as

if encompassing the collective energies of their families and ancestors. An archetypal pattern of *place* in Constellations is shown in Figure 1.

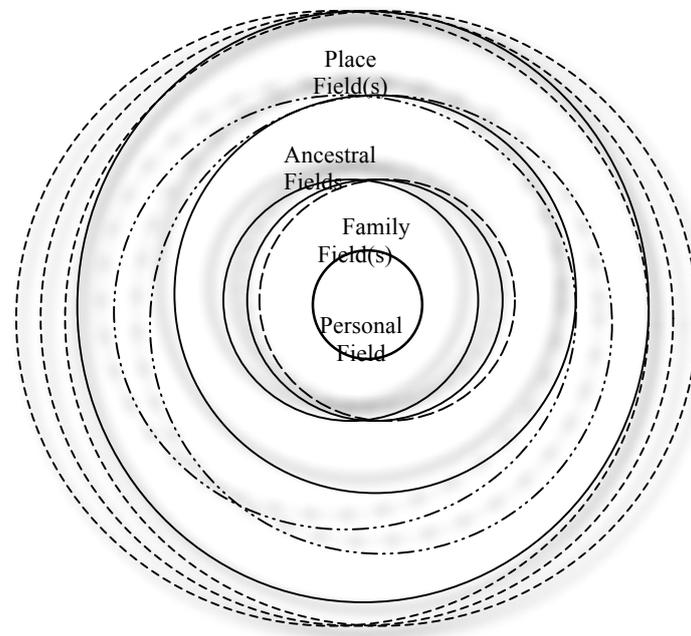


Figure 1. The relationship of *place* to human systemic fields.

It should be further noted that respondents articulated unique energies or fields for *places* of origin or ancestry that were different from the people in their systems. The *individual* is a singular, personal field. *Familial fields* are represented in Figure 1 by the energetic fields of mother, father and extended by secondary marriages or significant relationships as indicated in the illustration by a third dashed line surrounding the family field. *The family field is imprinted with the collective emotional impressions of the family of origin.*

Similarly, the *ancestral field* can be thought of as surrounding the family field. The archetypal energy of the collective ancestry is distinguishable from *place* of ancestry within a Constellation. Participant responses indicated that *the ancestral field carries the memories and experiences of the pattern of preceding generations of each*

*family line* as depicted above with solid and dotted lines. As shown, each *place* of family and ancestral origin can be separately identified and consequently operates as a unique entity in the systemic patterning.

One respondent said that a representative of her the ancestral *place* (Germany) described bodily sensations of feeling like she (representing Germany) was being “run over by heavy machinery.” According the respondent, her birthplace in Germany was occupied by Nazi forces during the war. The respondent stated feelings of guilt and shame associated with “being German” and had consequently emigrated to England and later Australia. By bearing witness to the suffering of her *place* of origin through the lens of Constellations, the respondent was able to contextualize and in some ways normalize her own sense of unrest and gain a “healthier perspective.”

Perhaps the greatest sign of individuation is the ability to identify our unique personal field within a larger system of fields and maneuver within the complexities of the collection of energies that make us who we are. Can it be that true individuation is the realization of one’s systemic interdependency rather than the identification with one’s separateness?

Hillman (1975) describes the on-going psychological tensions between the fantasies of independence and dependence, yet an inter-related understanding relaxes the polarization. When we truly come home to ourselves, we perceive the whole of the larger system and where we fit within it. Accepting this allows us to come home to *all* that we are, which is the compilation of energies from *all* of our fields.

### *Place Has a Role in the Complexity of Human Belonging*

Despite the variability of human experience, *place* is a constant; relatively speaking, lands do not move. Moreover, we each have a *place* of birth, which is our

entry point upon the earth. It is norm is to ask another person, “Where are you from?” as a way of getting acquainted. This question reveals part of our human psyche, which is driven to be in relationship with a greater whole. Were *place* not inherently connected to human systems, the social inquiry might be instead “*who* are you from?” In fact, humans are interconnected with *places* and people; we are borne to our *places* as much as our families. Whether recognized or not, human connection with the earth is innate and universal. In the Western world where there is an increasing emphasis on materialism, can connection to *place* play a role in reshaping human values?

This study found dis-*place*-ment to be common theme for respondents and their clients. Table 1 identifies symptomatic feelings of not belonging, disconnection and disorientation, lack of direction, general anxiety and addiction. The uniting factor underlying these conditions was reported consistently as disconnection from *place* somewhere within the systemic field; that is, disrupted connection to *place* of origin: personal *place* of birth, one or more *place(s)* of origin (parental *place[s]* of birth), or ancestral *places* (ancestral *places* birth and origin). Combined, these *places* form an inner architecture or structure in relation to our *place* on earth. The *Constellation of belonging*, represented in Figure 2, may provide clues to an individual’s sense of feeling grounded, self-directed, or settled in life, as opposed to restless, anxious and adrift.

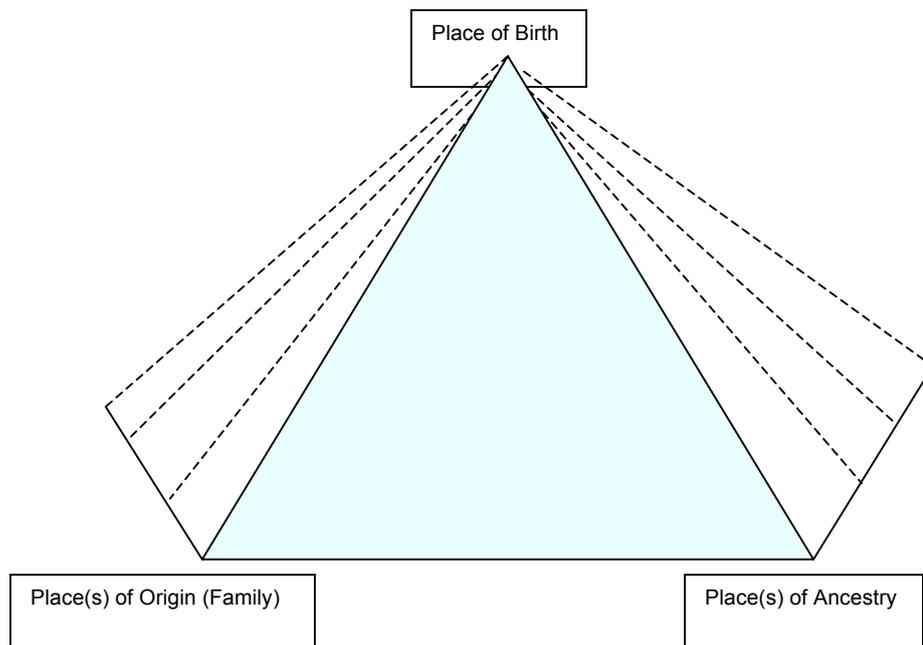


Figure 2. The Constellation of belonging.

Figure 2 captures the multidimensionality and complexity of belonging that were thematic in this study. Using a Constellations approach, I found that a personal sense *belonging* is a triangulation of relationships between *three pillars of place: birth, origin and ancestry*. In this study, disconnection, *dis-place-ment* and other related feelings, as identified in Table 1, are linked to complex or unresolved relationships with multiple *places* of origin or ancestry; that is, where mother and father came from different *places* and migrated the family to different *places*. Dashed lines in Figure 2 depict these movements. Where the disruption led to disturbance, the vectors (represented by dashed lines) signal the *movement away* from connection with self. The vectors indicate disrupted connection with *origins of belonging*, which I found to be associated with symptoms of disorientation as set out in Table 1.

In cases where there was unresolved grief or loss associated with *place*, it may be that a psychological splitting occurred somewhere within the system. If, as Hillman (1975) posited, “Schismatic parting is filled with rancour, bitterness” (p. 83), the energy of the suppressed grief may be carried within the system, causing unresolved tensions and unrest to be carried forward into future generations. In this study, where a system had numerous *places* of ancestry and origin, the sense of personal disconnection appeared to be greatest.

The findings from this study suggest that if the physical and emotional schism of leaving a *place* is not reconciled, part of the human spirit or emotional body may stay behind in or connected to that *place*. Lipton and Bhaerman (2009) stated that the heart is the transmitter of emotions that influence the world around us. My findings indicate that if *place* is an unacknowledged member of the system, feelings associated with grief (because of *loss of place*) significantly influence systemic fields and can be passed negatively into the future. Unresolved grief may continue to be broadcasted from hearts of the past and felt, like ripples, across generations.

#### *Constellations Work has a Role in Identifying and Transforming Issues of Place*

One respondent identified facilitating the Constellation of a man who was a professional pilot. The pilot expressed feelings of disconnection, disorientation, and lack of direction. The Constellation revealed his *place of birth* as New Zealand. His *places of origin* included Hong Kong, Malaysia, and Australia. His *places of ancestry* included Scotland, England, India, and unidentified origins in Asia. With a history of unresolved relationships across more than eight *places*, disorientation and disconnection seemed a natural outcome to an outsider, but not to him. As he joined his Constellation and was supported by representations of his *places of belonging*, the

man appeared to relax and accept his career choice and personal fate. The respondent commented that through the Constellation, the man recognized that being a pilot was perhaps an unconscious expression of his desire to connect to his global origins and ancestry and that his restlessness was founded in his personal archaeology.

### *Constellations Reveal Unique Characteristics And Energies Of Places*

Although research is being done in the area of energy fields, the topic is still hotly contested between the disciplines of humanities and hard sciences. I believe Constellations work has a merit in phenomenological inquiry into the benefit of energy and or belief system research and practice. This research indicated that Constellations is a method of working with human systems or fields and revealing patterns of blocked energy for the benefit of the individual and the collective. This research revealed that through acknowledgement of and reconciliation with *place*, systemic blocks can be cleared.

### *Place Has A Role In Healing*

All respondents identified that Constellations provided a means for *places* as well as people to express their grief and loss of as members of the same system. This study showed that energetic reconnection with *places* from which there was an ambiguous parting transformed the system; that is, representatives of systemic components visibly relaxed or expressed relief in some way, as did the clients. These findings strongly suggest that Constellations work provides a means of targeting and repairing unrecognized trauma, grief, and loss associated with disruptions with *place* across one or more generations.

## In Conclusion

*I think if we can find our place, we will find our purpose.*  
Bill McDonough

### *Originality of Research*

The longing to feel a sense of *place* of belonging is universal and essential to humanness. The quest for it is timeless. Without it, people often feel lost, disconnected and anxious. I found no previous research into the role of *place* in human systems. Applying the filter of Constellations made this a particularly original study. This research extended the field of Humanistic and Transpersonal Psychology by contributing to the research literature into Constellations. It also extends the Constellations specific literature.

### *Significance of Research*

This study identified a modality for therapeutic practitioners to help clients identify complex issues of belonging and other matters of personal archaeological exploration that can lead to transformation. It has the potential for offering clients the benefit of healing deep personal issues without the extent or on-going expense of long term therapy, let alone the often traumatizing effects of telling and reliving painful narratives (Cohen, 2004).

These research findings point toward the importance of *place* in personal well being and the renewal of the psyche. The classic film *The Wizard of Oz* portrays the archetypal search for a *place* called *home*. The main character Dorothy, after a prolonged search, finds that she is able to use personal will and imagination to transport herself *home* and realizes that, despite her extensive journeys and

adventures, she never really left that *place* at all. In an interconnected world, it seems of utmost importance to understand the energetic connectedness and that we may not need to be in physical contact to be present with someone or some *place*.

This study aligns with and extends Hillman's (1975) explanation of collective unconscious or *family fantasy* (p. 177). This body of work suggests that the mythology of belonging includes *place* in shared experiences. *Place* holds the story of the journey of the system—the sum of the collective experiences.

### *Summary*

In addition to other benefits not examined in this project, Constellations offers a process for identifying the relationship between people and *places*. Through the lens of Constellations, this study found that, viewed holistically, energetic systems include people and *places* within the same collective system (refer to Figure 1). This research revealed that *place* is often the forgotten element of the family story, and the grief and loss of leaving a *place* can reverberate across generations. *Place* is an important dynamic in the system and often the missing force. Introducing *place* in a Constellation was found to be a way of creating movement toward unblocking difficult or deadlocked family dynamics. Where inter-personal connections were particularly strained or irreconcilable, *place* enabled hidden issues to be illuminated.

While the findings of this study were preliminary due to the sample size, they indicate that when people are able to acknowledge relationships with their *places of birth, and origin and ancestry*, not just the facts of their geographical origins, they feel more at ease. This research identified three pillars of belonging that form the foundation of personal or inner architecture (refer to Figure 2).

This project also found that Constellations provides a means for giving a voice to the *places* in our lives. Participants in this research articulated repeatedly that *places feel connected to people* just as people experience affinity with places. Resoundingly, participants indicated that loss is also felt by *places* in the system.

Further study is necessary to determine whether exploration of personal archaeology can help fortify or rebuild people's self-concept, however, the findings indicate that using the concept of a *Constellation of belonging* can provide people with another view of the "inside story" into their personal evolution (Chalquist, 2007, p. 117).

There is a need for and power in acknowledging the interconnectedness of places and people within human systems. This study identified the case for personal and collective remembrance of and reconnection to *places of origin and ancestry*. If disconnection from our pillars of *place* leads to imbalance and unhappiness, the restoration of personal and systemic harmony depends on how we honor our association with the *places* in our collective experience. If we believe in the interconnectedness of systems, then *place* may be a key to loosening deadlocked issues within the human systems. Remembering and acknowledging *place* is also an essential way of bringing us home to ourselves.

### *Implications and Impacts*

The implications of this study extend to personal, therapeutic, educational, social, and business realms. Acknowledging *place* in human systems can improve the way in which people interact with their environments as well as how they transition from *place* to *place*. Incorporating ideas, rituals and practices about *place* into systemic practices can positively affect human activity systems.

The human need to belonging is well documented (Maslow, 1973). Similarly, Senge et al. (2004) identified the growing need for humanity to connect to a sense of purpose through self-discovery and identification with that which is greater than the self—a collective. The authors described the power of understanding and viewing ourselves as a component of the whole *and as the whole itself*. They encourage us to view ourselves as separate “without separateness” (p. 240).

In a rapidly changing and increasingly polarized world, our communities need psychologically robust citizens who are emotionally equipped to withstand the mounting pressures of stresses brought about rising levels of uncertainty and chaos in day-to-day living. As Western institutions and hierarchies dismantle and environmental crises around the world edge us closer to the brink of our deepest fears, there is a growing need for a sense of collective awareness and purposeful action. As long as individuals feel isolated, *dis-placed*, and disoriented, they are, to one extent or another, self-absorbed.

Lipton and Bhaerman (2009) stated that the human neural system seeks harmony (p. 24). Changes in the brain alter perception. There is great benefit in establishing a strong sense of personal architecture by connecting people with their *places—stronger people make stronger societies*. Understanding and connecting to *place* has the ability to balance individual and systemic disturbances, which provides the ability *to see* with fresh eyes; greater clarity leads to a greater sense of purpose. Connecting to *place* provides a pathway that can help people lead more fulfilling lives, which will, in turn, fortify human systems on every scale.

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