



Craic, duende and conversational trances

The family have begun to suspect that, at times, I may drift off to faraway places. This may also happen in the consulting room in the late summer afternoons. A retreat occurs into the deep recesses and lacunae of the cerebral hemispheres. I can be woken from this fugue-like state when the conversation stops, or the tone of the enquiry alters and there are signals that a response is required. Those of us who are members of the school of advanced daydreaming know the rules.

Almost the exact opposite can also occur when one is really interested and connected to the person or patient with whom one is consulting. It is a state of heightened awareness that can be felt in what has been called the joint construction of narrative and shared experiences.

It is on those occasions, when patients connect to the doctor on an intuitive level that they feel as if they have really been heard by the doctor. Equally, the doctor can feel that he or she has also been heard on a more meaningful level than just the transfer of information. This may well help outcomes such as behaviour change, treatment adherence and patient satisfaction.

There can be a similar connection at a party or in a pub, which, in Gaelic, is called *craic*, and refers to the atmosphere or buzz. As you enter the door, you can feel and hear that this is a hummer of a party. You can sense the lift-off. At other parties, you may find the opposite and there is no *craic*. It is a bomber which is impossible to get off the ground.

There is a somewhat similar concept in Spanish called *duende*. This refers to a heightened state of emotion and connection, often associated with music, especially the flamenco. *El duende* is the physical and emotional response that is felt

inside on hearing great music, rhythmic movement and a heightened atmosphere. There can be emotions of release and freedom, but also of sadness.

Long ago, I once heard the *fado* sung in a bar in Lourenço Marques. The Portuguese singer expressed his sense of the loss and loneliness of being far away from home. There was hardly a dry eye in the bar.

These are partly transcendent states, and in Africa, can happen on a quieter level around a woodfire in the *bushveld* on a warm summer evening. A mood of contentment and connection to the universe is conveyed by the Afrikaans word, *gesellig*.

The American psychiatrist, Milton Erickson, merely by talking with patients, was able to somehow facilitate the changes that they needed. He got onto their wavelength and then assessed their response. He then altered his own responses, similar to tuning a musical instrument.

He used artfully vague language that was nondirective, yet allowed the patient to change in his or her own way. It has been called the art of conversational trance and is part of the discipline of neurolinguistic programming. This is about getting in tune and synchronising the rhythms of one's speech and nonverbal communication with those of the patient.

Craic, duende and conversational trance link to the atmospherics of communication at a subliminal level. When you are not connected, it is called daydreaming.

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