

**THERAPISTS AND SENSE OF SELF:**

**THEMES OF LOSS**

**by**

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**ek onthou:**

**vir daardie één maatlose oomblik**

**was my hande óm die son 'n kou**

**en ek het gesien**

**fladderend, vlugtiger as enige kleur of silhoeët**

**en ek het gedrink**

**totdat my tong stom was van die pyn:**

**Breyten Breytenbach**

**(Voetskrif, 1976)**

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## SUMMARY

This study constitutes an exploration of the role of the experience of loss in the social processes of meaningmaking - regarding self, other and the world - especially as it applies to therapists.

Traditionally a focus on loss has entailed a description of the mourning processes brought about by this inevitable but dreadful event. Here the lens is widened to evolve a description of how the loss experience can contribute to a transformation of a person's sense of her self and of her patterns of relating.

This description rests on a social constructionist understanding of the experience of self. A person's sense(s) of self is seen to evolve within the usual and seemingly predictable patterns of connecting and disconnecting that constitutes the social webs of the discursive communities that people move in. Thus her sense of I is indelibly linked to who and where her Yous are. Indeed, all meaning is proposed to evolve from a template of connection-disconnection patterns. The experience of loss is seen to be able to disrupt these seemingly stable patterns within such a community sufficiently, as to be able to bring about in depth transformation of the meanings evolving from these habits of relating. One nuance of these meanings in transformation, entails a person's sense of her self.

Experiences of, and struggles around connection and disconnection are centrally important in the world of therapists. It does not only constitute a basic focus of their work, but is also the template in their personal lives that contributes to their own evolution as therapists. Thus the experience of loss is specifically explored as potentially transformational - on a personal and professional level - in the lives of therapists.

## INTRODUCTION

Some years back I was sitting in a group of therapists from many different parts of the world, sharing versions of life stories, therapeutic impasses and life-altering experiences. Again and again I heard stories of loss come up, in many forms, but relentlessly. In this seemingly varied group - an international training group attending a practicum with Maurizio Andolfi in Italy - I expected to encounter epistemological sameness and personal difference. Yet there were many threads defying the apparent boundaries of time and space. Amongst these, it was the rhythm and also centrality of the loss story that seemed most apparent to me.

I reflected on questions of co-creating a context within which certain issues emerge most easily. Certainly my own stories derived from experiences with loss and violence contributed strongly to this lens. The very painful encountering of losing important people in, and aspects of my life has made loss a very salient issue to me over many years. However, this aspect of the co-creation could (and should) not invalidate the rhythm with which I heard the story of loss being brought forth by therapists. I was reminded of how often before I had also heard therapists refer to personal experiences of loss within different contexts in my own country. I started trying to make sense of what the role of experiencing loss is - an experience that seemed to be so central and prevalent in people's and especially therapists' evolution of themselves in relationship.

This issue connects to some of the central questions that arise when thinking about therapy. One question concerns the elements that ensure the maintenance and the development of relationships in the therapeutic realm,

including those formed and forming around the therapist. Another question is, how does one construct the meanings attributed to these elements.

Many authors acknowledge that one of the most important of these elements concerns the personhood of the psychotherapist. She herself also emerges from, moves in and co-creates intricate webs of relatedness. These patterns of which she is such an intimate part play out on personal, as well as wider social, cultural and societal levels. Here she, like her clients, encounters the nuances of struggles like those for self-preservation and loyalty, separateness and belonging, and authenticity and acceptance, that can mark the struggle of living and dying. The experience of living and dying is translatable to being an indivisible part of a relational domain, implying that the experience of connection-disconnection and the inescapability of the interpenetration of world and individual form the basis of all human existence.

It is through movements in the web of connection and disconnection that a fuller awareness of these patterns - also their previously hidden sides - and with that of self within this relational domain, can emerge. The experience of loss represents an important punctuation of these relational shifts and the meanings attributed to and during this process. It is a moment where a person finds herself distanced from a part of her own history, having less to do with the people with whom she has constructed it - a moment where narratives (also new and/or hidden ones) of her own connection and disconnection, and thus of herself within the relational domain of living, emerge more fully and strongly, even if painfully and confusedly.

Thus, from the therapist's constructions of the shifts in relational patterns (also those she has inherited familially or culturally) - as punctuated by the experience of loss - emerge and transform her everchanging sense of self which is crucially important to the live process between people in the therapeutic relationship.

The centrality of the personal experience of loss also emerges in the literature. Many therapists punctuate in their writing their experiences of loss. Whitaker (1991) writes in the preface to his book *Midnight musings of a family therapist* (what he calls a how-I-think-I-learned-to-do-it book):

I wrote this Preface at 4 o'clock in the morning on the 50th anniversary of the day I sat by my father's hospital bed and watched him draw his last breath. How does life happen to me? How can I get more to happen? May more and more happen to you.  
(p.xi)

Sluzki (1991) reflects on how his sense of who he himself is, changes at the point where a long-time friend of his dies. McGoldrick (1991b) describes how damaging it was for her and her work to try and avoid, through professional calmness, the awful reality of the death of her mother. She also describes the different experience when her father dies later.

Most often efforts at describing the dynamics of the loss experience, focus on the issue of dealing with this as an inevitable but dreadful event. However, this lens seems too reductionistic when considering a few factors. Firstly, the stories people and therapists tell seem to hint at a far greater complexity. For example, one can hypothesize from listening to these stories that the experience of loss is in some way connected to an altered experience of self. Secondly, seeing the rhythms of an ecology of connection-disconnection as the template for all meaningmaking, implies that an unexpected experience of loss must also in some way affect existing sets of meanings. If meaning and growth is rooted in the patterns of human relationships, if human participation in the life cycle is inevitable, and if the human life cycle is one of crisis and re-creation, then loss does perhaps play a seminal part in a process of meaningmaking.

This study, then, will constitute an exploration of the role of loss in the social processes of meaningmaking - regarding self and other - especially as it applies to therapists. In the study, processes involved in the social construction of the psychotherapist's sense of self will be considered. More specifically, the study will concentrate on experiences of loss as a focal point or punctuation of the therapist's experience of being and not-being with other people, bringing forth and transforming her constructions of self within a relational domain.

This theme embodies many important nuances of relatedness within and without the therapeutic domain, which will need to be considered. Such an exploration can contribute usefully to the way work on the self of the therapist is approached and thought about, for example, by recognizing experiences of loss as (possibly) important entrances into the intricacy of processes playing out in the personal/professional domain. It can also contribute to the ways in which the experience of loss is approached by proposing a hopeful story about the possibilities of transformation around this painful experience.

This exploration of loss and sense of self will be done here firstly (and mainly) within the ambit of an academic language, and then through the language of personal experience.

The academic exploration will be done within three sections: firstly, the theoretical evolution of the construct self will be discussed; secondly, a reflection on issues around the therapist using her self in healing will be given; and in the third section the process of loss will be explored. Within each section the same funnel will be used: first considering moves around that area that shift away from more traditional (modernist) thinking, and then reflecting on the moves around that theme once crisis (in some form or another, but most specifically connected to the experience of disconnection) is encountered.

## **SECTION I**

### **IN SEARCH OF SELF - A THEORETICAL JOURNEY**

In this section the move towards a view of the self as co-construction will be discussed. Firstly, an overview of traditional empiricist views of the self and a perspective on the social function of these notions will be given. Then a contextual understanding of the origins and content of a move towards postmodernism will be proposed. A more detailed discussion of the social constructionist view of the person (as a specific example of postmodern thinking) ensues. This perspective is also proposed as the theoretical basis for this study.

## CHAPTER 1

### TRADITIONAL VIEWS OF SELFHOOD

One of the basic tenets of traditional views in psychology is the idea that the individual person is the proper object of psychological inquiry. This stems from the influence of the Newtonian understanding of science and endures in many professional conversations in the field. It is understood that, whatever else it may do, psychology's task is to study the individual and to develop the laws of her functioning (Kvale, 1992; Shotter & Gergen, 1989).

These conversations are of course imbued with historical emanations that do not only stem from what is described as the field of "psychology". Gergen (1991) states that cultural life in the twentieth century has been dominated by two major vocabularies of the self. Largely from the nineteenth century, we have inherited a romanticist view of the self, one that attributes to each person characteristics of personal depth. In the early twentieth century a modernist world-view arose that threatened the romanticist language with a central focus on the person's ability to reason - her beliefs, predictability and conscious intentions.

(This differentiation of periods in history is arbitrary and only one of many views. Some maintain, for example, that romanticism is truly part of modernity and ranges from the fifteenth to the nineteenth centuries and that post-modernism has been evolving over the last 150 years. Others contend that postmodernism only originated in the late 1960's and 1970's (Rosenau, 1992).

In this study the romanticist and modernist periods are distinguished in a particular way for the sake of stressing the development of different traditional conceptions of self, first in the hermeneutic tradition and with a focus on kinship, and later with an adherence to the machine metaphor.)

### **The Romanticist View of the Self**

In this vocabulary dimensions of passion, soul and creativity are explored (Gergen, 1991). This is, for example, expounded by Keats (in Gergen, 1991) whose belief that beauty is truth emerges strongly in the following passage from *Complete Poems*:

*I am certain of nothing but the holiness of the heart's affections and the truth of imagination. What the imagination seizes as beauty must be truth - whether it existed before or not - for I have the same idea of all our passions as of love: they are all in their sublime, creative of essential beauty.*  
(p.78)

The romanticists see the truly important feature of the person as lying beyond the bounds of observation. It cannot be ensnared by the simple practices of reason. Wordsworth refers in this vein to his internal functioning as "a presence that disturbs me", while Shelley refers to an "unseen power" (Gergen, 1991, p.20).

Furthermore, the person is seen as inherently good and corruptible by nature. Living is responsive and not about the accumulation of knowledge. Wordsworth (1954) in *Expostulation and Reply* says:

*The eye - it cannot choose but see;  
We cannot bid the ear be still;  
Our bodies feel, whe'er they be,  
Against or with our will. (p.77)*

In his preface to his own lyrical ballads, he describes his work as a homage paid to

*the native and naked dignity of man, to the grand elementary principle of pleasure, by which he knows, and feels, and lives, and moves. ...We have no knowledge, that is, no general principles drawn from the contemplation of particular facts, but what has been built up by pleasure, and exists in us by pleasure alone. The man of science, the chemist and mathematician, whatever difficulties and disgusts they may have had to struggle with, know and feel this. (Wordsworth, 1954, pp.16-17)*

The work of Freud (1954) needs to be mentioned when discussing the romanticist vocabulary of the self. According to Gergen (1991), Freud can be seen as a transitional figure between the romanticist and modernist tendencies. Like the romanticists he saw the main driving forces behind human functioning as lying beyond the reaches of consciousness. Accordingly he saw the inner resource essentially as the energy of desire.

However, his intellectually sophisticated efforts at describing the dynamics, explaining the content and looking for subjective proof of the unconscious, joins in the modernist reaction against the mystification of the self.

### **The Rise of a Modernist View of Self**

Early in the twentieth century a new form of consciousness and description, termed modernist, began to emerge and replace the romanticist views of the person. (Friedman (1993) distinguishes between modernity and modernism. According to him, modernity refers to the social organisation which released the individual from the ideologies and beliefs which compelled personhood to be dominated by the ideas of kinship. Modernism he sees as modernity's dominant epistemology. This form of enquiry proceeds from the assumption that our rationality, if carefully applied, will provide a complete and appropriate understanding of being.)

While the roots of this thinking can be found as far back as in the dualistic theory of Descartes (Storig, 1979), it is during the first parts of this century that it can be described as becoming the dominant language of the moment. Much has been written about the timing, reasons for and qualities of this shift (Rorty, 1991; Storig, 1979). It is not the intention here to join into this debate. Suffice to say that these changes in vocabulary and thinking accompanied a time characterised by expansionist Western economic markets, mass production and impending war.

The grand narrative of modernism can be described as one of continuous upward movement, of improvement, conquest and achievement (Gergen,

1991). The quest for (an ultimate) truth was informed by a belief in the ability to reason. Truth could be reached by achieving or inventing the appropriate method. Modernist theories sought external legitimation by emulating scientific theories and in that way aimed to formulate universal laws (Kvale, 1992).

The development of a broad array of social sciences was thus invited. According to Russel (1956), these sciences would produce "a mathematics of human behaviour as precise as the mathematics of machines" (p.27). This machine metaphor is central to modernist thinking. Beings are connoted as having a mechanical essence and fields of study become knowledge factories.

The field of psychology gained a distinctly positivist flavour. At first it was clearly declared that this field could be best served as a science if the focus was on what Wundt (1904) called a psychology without a soul. What emerged were increasingly detailed fragmentary representations of the person. Later on, many psychologists and researchers grappled to find a concept or understanding which could account for the integration and organization of the human person. Many terms were coined, such as ego (Freud, 1954), proprium (Allport, 1950), and perhaps most widely used of all, the term personality. Many writers also started using the term self. The danger in the use of many of these phrases were that they could simply be regarded and used as a deus ex machina. In that way they would be terms invoked to reassemble the dismembered parts of the human system - a phrase simply fitted to an external set of co-ordinates. Allport most pointedly warned against the "lazy tendency to employ self or ego as a factotum to repair the ravages of positivism" (Allport, 1950, p.37).

This problem was addressed in many different ways by different authors. Adler (1927) contended that what is frequently labelled the ego, is nothing more than

the individual's life-style. In his understanding of the term life-style, it could adequately include most of the aspects and interrelations of life. This term is thus much more widely encompassing than the ego or self which seem to refer to a homonculus.

Similarly Allport drew on James's (1890) taxonomic scheme in an effort to be more respectful of the complexity inherent in any term such as ego or self which is supposed to refer to the sense of what is peculiarly ours. James distinguished between two possible orders of the self: an empirical self (the Me) and a knowing self (the I). The former also comprises the following subsidiary selves: the material, the social and the spiritual self. Allport (1950; 1961) chose to formulate the complexity of aspects of the self in terms of the variety of *functions* of the proprium, such as a bodily sense, self-identity, rational process, ego-extension, self-image, and so forth.

Whatever the difficulties inherent in this work, attention to the concept of self grew during the modernist era. By the end of the 1960's more than 2 000 publications on the self could be accounted for by psychology and sociology alone. Some studies tried to identify the basic nature and properties of the self, while others tried to link it to limited aspects of behaviour. The concept of self started featuring prominently in theory and research on areas as diverse as social control, economic behaviour, psychotherapy, social deviance, personal aspirations, and so forth (Gordon & Gergen, 1968).

Thus a great deal of modernist literature on the concept of self evolved. While a whole array of different theories on the functioning of the self can be distinguished as all fitting under modernist thinking but with content differences, central assumptions about the individual can be identified.

A main dimension of the modernist view is that a person's essence is seen to be rational and open to observation. The self is viewed as an entity that can form and function more or less independently from society, as a distinctive whole (Gergen, 1991; Kvale, 1992; Sampson, E.E., 1989).

These and other key issues that recur in various forms in the vast body of modernist literature on the self, can be differentiated as follows:

### The Self as Observable Fact

There is a persistent tendency to speak of self as an existing entity. The self is discussed as if it were part of the individual's possessions. Self-esteem is referred to as if it had substantive properties located in time and space (Gordon & Gergen, 1968).

### The Self as Structure

The self is seen as a universe of which the different dimensions can be coherently and mostly hierarchically organized.

For example, Lewin (1935, 1938) chooses to make a spatial presentation of the structure of the person. This allows him to attempt to "mathematize" his concepts. In what has come to be known as his "field theory" Lewin differentiates the person into a perceptual-motor region and an inner-personal

region. The inner-personal region is again divided into peripheral cells and central cells.

Cattell (1946, 1957) concerns himself with the empirical mapping of the personality domain. Focusing [like Allport (1950, 1961)] on the idea of "traits" as mental structures, he distinguishes between common traits and unique traits, surface traits and source traits, environmental-mold traits and constitutional traits, and so forth.

The focus on and efforts at analysing the structure of the self (or "personality" to use the modernist language), led to an ever increasing number of categories of personality structure seemingly waiting to be discovered and named. Hall and Lindzey (1970) comment on the number of neologisms and Allport (1955) refers to the hyphenated elaborations appearing out of the personality research - compare, for example, the work of Cattell (1946, 1957) and Murray (1938, 1968). Once a (mostly esoteric) name had been attached to one of the large number of constructs of personality that were emerging, the perceived entity's objective existence seemed all the clearer.

### The Self as Independent from the Environment

The first step in defining the person as a structural concept is to represent her as an entity apart from everything else in the world. In the modernist vocabulary, the person is seen as a bounded, unique universe. She is seen as the dynamic centre of awareness, emotion, judgement and action (Geertz, 1979; Hall & Lindzey, 1970; Marcuse, 1964).

This assumption puts strong emphasis on the autonomy of the self. The person as a seemingly autonomous being has ontological primacy. She is seen as the prime mover. The whole into which she is organised is set contrastively against other such wholes and against a social and natural background (Geertz, 1979; Shotter & Gergen, 1989).

Lewin (1935), for example, draws an enclosed figure, called "P", for the person. The boundary of the figure defines the limits of the entity known as person. Everything lying outside the boundary is "non-P". While he allows for the possibility that the environment may influence the person, the person still has primacy. His theory explains how different inner dynamic constructs in conjunction with structural constructs, determine the specific "locomotions" of the individual which serve to structure her environment.

Allport (1937, 1950, 1961), like many other writers, implicitly diminishes the importance of environmental factors by focusing almost exclusively on the inner regions of the person, or in his words, her psychophysical systems. His widely discussed concept of functional autonomy refers to the fact that a given behaviour, complex or simple, may be capable of sustaining itself indefinitely in the absence of *biological* reinforcement. His well-known definition of personality sees the latter as something that determines the individual's "adjustments to his environment" (Allport, 1937, p.48). This underlines once again the notion of the person as a mostly autonomous being set contrastively against her social environment.

This assumption also makes it possible to simply infer that pathology is located in the person. Slugoski and Ginsburg (1989) note that the notion of the autonomous self serves to put the blame for any problems people encounter on their personal deficits (rather than, for example, the power relations in the broader context).

## The Self as Stable and Predictable

The machine imagery that lies at the centre of the modernist conceptions about the person has as one implication that autonomous reliability should be the hallmark of the mature person. The modernist person should be trustworthy, predictable and consistent. Knowing her should mean knowing what to expect of her. Her words should be an authentic expression of who she truly is and these expressions should be the same in the future (Gergen, 1991; Rose, 1990).

This idea of a fixed personal essence is reflected by many modernist writers. Erikson (1959) sees the major achievement of normal development as the formation of a firm and fixed sense of identity. For Rogers (1951) the quest for essence takes the form of becoming the self one fully is. Allport changed his definition of personality (referred to above) in 1961 to stress that the person's psychophysical systems determine her *characteristic behaviour and thought* (Allport, 1961).

The fact of viewing the psychological system as a series of structural parts in itself has particular implications when dealing with the stability of the individual over time and circumstances. The person's internal and external actions are seen as the outcome of the interaction of all these parts. These elements constituting the system are largely considered stable and unchanging. Changes in the self or the person's tendencies are then by implication less likely and will be the result of long-term influences (Gordon & Gergen, 1968).

A powerful reinforcer and tribute to the rhetoric of personal essences, stable character traits and enduring dispositions were furnished by the personality and mental testing movements. If the person indeed possesses machinelike qualities and they lie not too far from her psychological surface, it should be

possible to measure them. And if this can be measured, these results can be used to predict the actions of persons and groups.

Gergen (1991) points out how such psychometric predictive successes sets the stage for a "rhetorical sleigh-of-hand so subtle that it remains undetected even by most investigators themselves" (p.47). He shows how predictive successes are called "evidence" that a test measures what it says it measures. "Something" is said to make the person score the way she does. If the test seemingly accurately predicts the future, then that something must actually exist and be what it says it is.

### The Self as a Unitary Entity

In the modernist metaphor, the self is most often spoken of in the singular. "The self-concept", "a person's identity", "one's cognitive style", "her self-esteem", and so forth are all common expressions. There is a strong commitment to the view of the self as a single entity or gestalt (Gordon & Gergen, 1968; Sampson, E.D., 1989).

Gergen (1991) points out how the modernist aspiration for truth required an object and how the quest to discover this necessarily led to evolving singular answers. The search for knowledge proceeded toward an essence, a "fundamental thing-in-itself" (p.32). Similarly twentieth-century physics rediscovered the atom, the seemingly irreducible particle, a metaphor for the seemingly ultimate and singular answer.

The view of the self as a singular essence easily lends itself to, as well as emanates from, a structural orientation. Many theories on the structure of

personality imply a hierarchy within which multiplicity at a baseline level gradually integrates into an ever increasingly singular dimension of selfhood.

Thus wholeness and integration come to be seen as ideal states of personhood to be attained. Compare Maslow's (1954) theory on personality and motivation. He constructs a hierarchy of needs (for example hunger, the need for affiliation, and so forth) that should be solved in order to attain the goal of identity, namely self-actualization (Maslow, 1954). This, to Maslow, simultaneously and necessarily implies autonomy, individuation and authenticity (Maslow, 1962).

An important implication of this assumption is that opposing or contradictory forces can and should be solved in order to attain a higher level of ego-functioning. Compare Erikson's (1959, 1963) and Loewinger's (1976) developmental theses. Erikson (1959, 1963), for example, sees the whole life cycle as consisting of stages of dialectical tension between different and opposing needs. These have to be integrated and synthesized to make a higher level of ego-functioning possible. The very young child has, for example, to integrate her tendency to trust and her tendency to distrust in order to be able to experience hope, as well as to move on to a new phase consisting of another dialectical tension. This human situation of moving between two seemingly opposite poles, Erikson formally connotes as psychosocial *crises*, stressing in these semantics as well as through the hierarchical nature of his theory, the undesirability of simultaneously having seemingly contradictory experiences.

### **Considering the Social Function of the Modernist Western View of Person**

Sampson (1987) suggests that all concepts and ideals of personhood are cultural constructions that are designed to serve certain social purposes and encourage certain kinds of social practices and institutions. Similarly, the modernist narrative of self simultaneously arises from the underlying structures and practices of a hegemonic patricentric Western culture, as well as operates to sustain these very features that give rise to it.

To summarize the central modernist view of self (as discussed above), it can be said that the Western world tends to emphasize a self-contained ideal. This does not only imply a strong self-other boundary, but also the ideal of self in control.

The question to be asked is: what is the social function of this modernist Western construction of self? The obvious answer is clearly that the ideal of a bounded, self-contained, autonomous person is held out as the only way to accomplish social harmony and cohesion.

Erikson (1959) explains in no uncertain terms that only after a person has managed to integrate her many prior selves into a unit that is clearly distinguishable from others, is genuine intimacy possible. Full individuation needs to occur before secure and useful bonds between people can be built. In this a major theme of the Western world-view is contained: first me, then us. As Sampson (1987) puts it: the social bond can only be built after the fully self-contained individual has been established.

In keeping with the modernist notion of ultimate truths, this notion of the building of a well-functioning social order is seen in the mainstream Western vocabulary to be the naturally ordained sequence of human growth. The

challenge to this ideal as not following the natural order of things but rather being a socially constituted version of reality, will be discussed in the next section.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE EMERGENCE OF POSTMODERN APPROACHES TO THE WORLD

The mostly unchallenged dominance of a modernist vocabulary in the sciences - as much as its self-perpetuation might have seemed to be guaranteed by the meta-narrative of ultimate truths - did not last. Different signs started to emerge of an awareness that the modernist commitment to the idea of an objective and knowable world (and to the possibility of finding singular truths about this world) might be seriously problematic.

#### **Signs of Unease with the Modernist Legacy**

The unprecedented student revolts in predominantly America and France during the 1960's and early 1970's can be considered as part of the growing unease with modernist narratives about the world and people. Some of the important trends of these revolutions were contained in the seminal Port Huron Statement which was brought out by Students for a Democratic Society in 1962. These included a revulsion against the prevailing notions of quantity and materialism; a revolt against uniformity, standardization and homogenization - especially in the technologization of the person; a struggle against different forms of rigidity, such as rigid prescriptions for institutions or for living, or a singularly defined ideal adult role; a strong protest against centralized power; and a complementary demand for participation (Bierman & Gould, 1970; Keniston, 1970).

Another example is the fact that Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind*, a work attacking the deterioration and rigidity of higher education in the United States, became a best-seller (Gergen, 1991). Gergen (1991) also refers to the prominent coverage that was given in the *New York Times* to the emerging and growing rejection in the field of literary studies of the idea that there are truly great works of English literature.

All of these examples are manifestations of an increasingly pervasive doubt in the modernist view of objective truths, rational foundations of knowledge and the grand narrative of progress. The emergence of this doubt can be traced to a steadily increasing awareness and respect of other voices, other perspectives and other points of view (Kvale, 1992).

Gergen (1991) points out how the tyranny of one dominant majority voice [see for example Mill (1970)] was diminished by the increasing ease with which other viewpoints could be accessed. Technological advances opened up the possibilities for easier travel, more and widely attended conferences and the emergence of a multitude of journals. Through all of these the communal insularity which helped to preserve the belief in theoretical truths became increasingly difficult to maintain. The coalition of subjectivities which made the belief in objectivity possible was thus seriously challenged.

The awareness of different perspectives was further enhanced by the growing emergence of minority voices. The tendency was for these voices to start organizing, use technology to be more widely heard and also to enter institutes of learning in a manner which clearly defined them as minority group members or alternative voices (Schaul, 1970).

Ironically, the structure of knowledge in the modernist ethos has done much in itself to generate competition among truths (Gergen, 1991; Kvale, 1992). From the modernist perspective the world is filled with natural kinds, each with a

character of its own and deserving a separate study. This view led to the growth of an enormous array of self-sustaining disciplines. Each of these did, however, not stay content with its own little slice of reality. As disciplinary viewpoints became accepted realities, and as seemingly opposing realities came increasingly in contact with one other, the modernist assumptions about ultimate truths helped to fuel a growing suspicion of alternatives. Modernism, then, according to Gergen (1991), served to help create the multiplication of competing perspectives.

As the different perspectives became more self-perpetuating, expansionary and hierarchical, the dilemma grew of who was to declare the ultimate truth. This impossibility laid the groundwork for serious challenges to the very form of modernist thinking which helped to create this chaos of competing voices.

### **Important Shifts in Ways of Viewing the World and the Person**

Some major shifts in thinking about the world started emerging. (There is no consensus on whether postmodernism has transcended the modernist paradigm or evolved from it (Friedman, 1993; Kvale, 1992). My suggestion is that postmodernism can be seen as a product of modernity.) These posed serious challenges to modernist presumptions about objective knowledge. Some central (but overlapping) trends in these shifts can be discerned (Gergen, 1991; Kvale, 1992; Rosenau, 1992; Stam, Rogers & Gergen, 1987).

## Moving away from Logocentrism and Mastercodes

Postmodernists moved away from systems of thought that claim legitimacy by reference to external, universally truthful propositions. Derrida (1967), for example, says that such systems are grounded in self-constituted logic. He considers them circular, self-referential and self-satisfying. According to the postmodernists no grounds exist for clear, universal and external validation (Kvale, 1992; Rosenau, 1992).

This means that severe criticism is levelled at the use of meta-narratives or global world views. Grand narratives (Hassan, 1987), meta/master narratives (Lyotard, 1984) and narratives that claim to be scientific and objective, that serve to legitimize modernity and assume justice, truth, theory and hegemony, are rejected. Such mastercodes are seen to assume the validity of their own truth claims. They are expected to make it possible to anticipate all questions and to provide predetermined answers to all of these. However, renewed relevance and meaning is attributed to the traditional, the sacred, the particular and the irrational (Lyotard, 1984; Rosenau, 1992). Mini-narratives, micro-narratives, local narratives or traditional narratives are seen as just stories that make no universal truth claim and are, therefore, more acceptable to the postmodernists.

Postmodernism also challenges the assumed metanarratives within different disciplines. For example, within the field of architecture, the challenge is to abandon the quest for efficient, pragmatic layout with an emphasis on space, bare structure and functionality [like the modern architectural traditions developed by Louis Sullivan and Frank Lloyd Wright where the clarion call is that "less is more" (discussed in Morrison, 1935)], and rather give people buildings that look the way they feel, for example, fragmented or chaotic (compare the work of Francesco Gaudi in Barcelona or of Ricardo Bofill in

France) (Cooke, 1990; Kolb, 1990; Papadakis, 1990). In the field of political science the assumption of the authority of a hierarchical, bureaucratic decision-making structure is questioned. Within the field of literature the challenge is to abandon the adherence to strict lineality of plot. Within psychology the assumption of a conscious, logical, coherent subject is questioned (Henriques, Holoway, Urwin, Venn & Walkerdine, 1984; Kvale, 1992; Rosenau, 1992).

### Moving from Facts to Perspectives

Modernists assumed - as implied in the notion of mastercodes - that there were basic "somethings" or subject matters to be known about and that it was the task of scientists and academics to produce accurate accounts and explanations of these domains. Similarly it was seen that proper research should produce true portrayals of these matters-out-there.

According to Rorty (1991), the idea of the mind as an internal and uncontaminated mirror of the external world was largely the product of seventeenth-century philosophers. According to him this idea was developed in that time to defend the purpose of philosophical inquiry from the successful sciences of the day.

Heisenberg, however, was one example of a scientist to bring a hint of trouble into this modernist world where it was understood that the requirements for subject matter to be shown to be existing (and thus "real") subject matter, were that it should be definable in terms of time and space. He showed that all units of matter cannot be defined in this way. The essential aspects of a particle can never be observed at once - the act of observation itself irretrievably distorts at least one of these aspects. For example, the very attempt to measure the position of a particle changes the position of that particle. This led to the

maverick implication that no subject matter can be observed without taking into account those who make the observation (Capra, 1996; Storig, 1979).

This conscious concern with the observer's position and perspective continued to mount in academic and scientific dialogue. It was increasingly acknowledged that people come to every situation with practised ways of perceiving, and thus in the act of perceiving, actually help to *produce* the events punctuated by consciousness. X

The move thus was from seeing so-called objective knowledge as facts-in-themselves, to viewing it as the product of perspectives.

#### Moving from Knowledge as Products of the "Real World" to Knowledge as Products of Social Negotiation

Doubt was increasingly cast on the idea of the existence of a real world independent of experience. A renewed respect for the subjective and an increased suspicion of reason and objectivity emerged. This new stance carried the implication, amongst others, that bodies of knowledge are not verbalized mirrors, reflecting the actual essences of people and the world, but products of socially negotiated perspectives, that is, a collusion of subjectivities.

This view offers an answer to the question of how it happens then that certain views are generally taken as knowledge while others are seen as erroneous. This becomes possible because scientists exist in communities which have their own rules of functioning and survival. What is connoted as truth becomes a product of the power and social negotiation within this community in contrast with other communities.

Thus it is not the world-out-there, but social processes within science and society that determine scientific description and explanation (Foucault, 1973, 1979, 1980, 1982; Gergen, 1991).

### Challenging the Knower's Position as Demagogue

Those groups to whom knowledge is attributed are usually granted the privilege of making decisions. Thus educational, mental health and other systems come to serve the interests of the existing power elite (Foucault, 1982; Gergen, 1991).

Foucault, in his work during the 1970's, focused on this relation between forms of power and forms of knowledge. He poses a serious challenge to the functioning of what he terms the regimes of truth (Foucault, 1980). Similarly, Marcuse (1964) saw the political content of modernist technical reason as domination.

This challenge to the so-called knower's powerful position was also reflected in the French student uprisings. According to Foucault (in Dews, 1987), one of the major detonators of these revolts was the view that the university had transformed from a site for the transmission of liberal culture to a self-perpetuating elite to a mass university producing the scientists and social engineers required by an advanced capitalist society.

Similarly, a spreading recognition of the heterogeneity in and between groups about the definition of reality, led to claims to knowledge and rights to power becoming points of contention (Gergen, 1991). Efforts at demystifying the singular voice of authority and at multiplying the voices in the wider social dialogue, increased.

## Challenging the Knower as (Only) Expert

The assumption that if we perceive the world correctly, and express our knowledge accurately, others will gain in objective knowledge, started floundering.

Firstly, the idea that being trained in the right method could enable the (now) expert to have a duplicating and objective inner picture of some subject matter in the external world, was seriously challenged. Secondly, the notion that her (trained) expressions of thought, that is, her (scientific) words, could furnish suitable guides and uncontaminated pictures of the world-out-there, was increasingly seen to be problematic. Postmodern thinkers try to show that it is impossible to replicate something, to replace one object/concept/person/place/time with another, without loss of content or violation of intention.

Thus, the basis for the faith in the ability of the defined knowers to furnish objective knowledge of the world, people and even ourselves, and in the higher degree of trustworthiness of this knowledge, floundered. The clear modernist hierarchy of knowers - where, for example, a scientist's expertise is seen to be more useful in understanding the act of living than the contributions of a poet - was thus challenged. This placed more emphasis on the ability of different people to have and evolve their own and often different forms of expertise, and ultimately, the ability of each person to think and feel for herself (Freire, 1972).

## Moving from Ultimate Truths to Multiple Voices

The objectivist model promises an attainable ultimate truth, a standard beyond time and place, a firm reality against which any form can be judged. This comfortable certainty was challenged by the notion that the view we might hold so dear is but one of several alternatives, neither natural nor inevitable in the larger scheme of human possibilities. Thus the move is from singular truths to groups of ideas that have been historically constructed and serve social functions; from monotheistic centres to pantheons; from concrete, dichotomous entities to co-constructed, dialectical relations (Byrne & McCarthy, 1988; Cilliers, 1995; Keeney, 1983; Sampson, E.E., 1989).

One implication of this is that questions are posed concerning the possibility of rigid disciplinary boundaries between the natural sciences, humanities, social sciences, art and literature, and so on. Postmodernism also questions the boundaries read between culture and life, fiction and theory, image and reality in nearly every field of human endeavour (Lyotard & Thebaud, 1985).

## Challenging the Social Usefulness of the Ideal of the Autonomous Integrated Individual

The Western ideal for personhood of self-contained individualism came to be widely challenged as being a very questionable idea on which to pin the hopes of social cohesion and harmony.

Geertz (1973) refers to the Western view of personhood as peculiar in that it deviates from the more embedded kind of personhood one finds worldwide. Sampson (1987) takes this point further in suggesting three thorough

contradictions in the notion that this kind of personhood is socially useful. Firstly, he points out that constructing a character who is purported to be the source rather than the product of the social order inverts the sequence that actually occurs. In this way a rather shaky foundation for the building of society is established. Secondly, he criticizes the notion that social cohesion and social order can only appear after a firmly formed individuality has been established. He suggests that this kind of adherence to the ideal of firm individuality permeates the very conditions that interfere with social harmony rather than facilitate it. Thirdly, he maintains that following the Western ideal of personhood advances conditions that facilitate domination. This ideal holds the goal of maturity to be autonomy, that is inward (rather than external) control. However, Sampson points out that autonomy masks the underlying reality of a character constructed on behalf of power, and that indeed, highly independent characters demand more external control rather than less for the social order itself to be maintained.

Foucault adopts a similar stance in viewing the Western construction of the individual as a construction of power. He considers three great forces of Western civilization - rationalization, bureaucratization and individualization - in a thorough historical analysis of key social institutions involving discipline, confession and sexuality (Foucault, 1973, 1979, 1980, 1982). It is not the aim here to go into the full details of Foucault's argument. It will suffice to focus on his conclusions of a clear connection between individualization and social control (Foucault, 1979, 1980). He points out that the social forces that disembedded persons from their contexts of living and created the individual as the so-called atom of society, also created a host of problems for the societal management and control of these newly constituted characters. In order to manage and control individuals, ways of measuring and assessing human characteristics had to be invented, thereby further extending individualization as an aspect of power. This extension of individualization and its function for governing power coincided with a growing discourse on individual autonomy.

Foucault points out that this both masked the reality that individualization is part of a process of power, management and control, and helped contribute to still further individualization (Dreyfuss & Rabinow, 1982).

Many other writers join in the argument that the idealized push for increased differentiation and individualization was part of a process seeking the growing standardization and, in that, management and control of human action, in order to increase the certainty and predictability of human action. The Western person-self-ego-individual is viewed as a character designed to desire her own domination, a character constituted to be self-defeating, who must invariably be at war with society and herself (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983; Parker, 1989; Scott, 1981). This is a process through which a person seeks to be the very thing that further enslaves her (McCulloch, 1995).

These writers view the individual as a product of a system of exploitation and see this feature as being masked in the discourse of autonomous self-control. They join the antistructuralists in emphasizing the importance of a move toward a very different kind of individual, one who is multiple, more fluidly bounded and interconnected (much like reality itself is viewed) (Sampson, 1985).

These shifts in the ideas about ideal personhood manifested in different academic discourses, some of which will be discussed in the next section.

### **Important Markers in the Emergence of Different Ideas of Selfhood**

A science of the person that emphasizes the current form of individualism is and was more likely to gain widespread acceptance because of its congruence with the rest of Western culture. However, different discernible challenges to

the discourse of autonomous self-control as an ideal has appeared (Sampson, 1987; 1989). Some of these will be reviewed.

### Systems Theory

Systems theory has presented an epistemological position in which ontological primacy is given to relations rather than individual entities. In contrast to lineal epistemology, it is attuned to interrelation, complexity and context. Bateson (1972) observes that the unit of natural survival is neither the individual nor the society. In fact, there is no homogenous unit of survival at all, only a system, termed the ecosystem which comprises both organism and environment. An organism which manages to destroy its environment, manages to destroy itself. Thus Bateson suggests that only in thinking in both/and terms can one see that the issue of living is not one of opposition (between person and environment - thereby delineating them as separate entities) but of differences. Importantly, these differences are not seen to inhere in the entity, but rather in the relations among the parts of the system (Bateson, 1972; Keeney, 1983).

Thus the focus is on connectedness, relationships and context. The essential properties of a living system are properties of the whole, which none of the parts have. These properties arise from the interactions and relations between the parts. This also implies that these properties will be lost when the system is dissected (physically or theoretically) into isolated parts. Although it is possible to discern separate parts of a system, these parts can never exist or be studied in isolation. Similarly, the nature of the whole will always be more than the sum of its parts (Bateson, 1972; Capra, 1996; Keeney, 1983).

## Cross-cultural Enquiry

Cross-cultural work has suggested significant variations in personhood around the world. Different writers (Gergen & Davis, 1985; Heelas & Lock, 1981; McCulloch, 1995; Shweder & Bourne, 1982) offer many illustrations of the rich cultural variety in personhood, lending further credence to Geertz's reference to the peculiarity of the still dominant Western form.

In general cross-cultural enquiry has brought a contextual sensitivity in its process and has - in content - uncovered several significant instances of much less individuated understandings of self (Berry, Poortinga, Segall & Dasen, 1992; Bucher, 1980; Dunham, 1984; Geertz, 1973; Miller, 1984; Sampson, E.E., 1989).

Kotze (1993), for example, discusses in great detail the way in which a collective consciousness permeates the understandings of world, others and self found amongst many black South Africans. Such collective constructions of personhood will appear almost incomprehensible if interpreted with the intellectual tools formed by an individualistic consciousness (of which traditional psychological theorizing about personality is a prime example).

Lower-class African-American families were also found to typically differ markedly from the implicit but prevailing model of the ideal nuclear family as found in mainstream psychological theories (Skolnick, 1973). Similarly, Fisek (1991) shows how proximity plays a very different role in the functioning of Turkish families than what is usually conceptualized as *good* family functioning. Tamura and Lau (1992) also show how Japanese families differ significantly from British families in their preference for connectedness. The Japanese person is seen (in that society) as a part of the embedded interconnectedness

of relationships, whereas British norms prioritize separateness and clear boundaries in relationships, as well as individuality and autonomy.

A criticism of the Western notion of a person as individually bounded being set off contrastively against other such beings, is also given by Credo Mutwa in his teachings about the universe, as contained in *Yena Lo! My Africa*. (Substantial verbatim quotes are used here in order to show to what an extent the kind of language used in this text differs from typical modernist writing in the social sciences. The different kind of discourse also serves to set completely different parameters for the way personhood is understood.) He writes (Mutwa, 1964, pp.458-459):

My son, you have been a Christian...you have been one of those who have turned their backs on the religion of their forefathers to follow the religion of the aliens, and so you will understand so much better the vast difference that exists between the beliefs of your forefathers and that of the aliens, and also that of the Hyena people, whom you know as the Arabs.

They tell you that God created Man in His image; they also tell you that God gave Man a special, separate soul... My son, the aliens are misleading our people.

Man does not possess a special soul, exclusive to himself. All souls are the same... The soul of the impala that you have seen disappearing into a thick bush while walking in the forest may once have been a tenant in the body of someone you knew. The crocodile that nearly ate you while you were

crossing the river, may have been carrying the soul of one of your ancestors...

He also expands on the nature of a soul and in that gives an account as well as judgement of what motivates people's living that contrasts strongly with rational and logical Western explanations of, and prescriptions for, personhood (Mutwa, 1964, p.460).

...The two worm-like creatures you saw in each soul were Good and Evil... The red worm stands for all the bad things in a man or a woman - dishonesty, cruelty, pride, low cunning, spiritual and corporal perversity, cowardice, low morality. The royal blue worm stands for all the good in a human being or an animal - loyalty, courage, honesty, love and charity. These worm-like components help to balance the soul. A combination of good and evil, equally balanced, is essential - for all souls that exist...must have a perfect balance between Life and Death...

This is why people who are really good, never live long. The two "worms" are always quarrelling and when the one hurts the other, the soul is temporarily unbalanced. If it happens to be the red worm that hurts the blue worm, then the man inhabited by the soul becomes evil - he becomes a thief, a murderer and even worse. The laws of our fathers say that we must kill such a man, kill him so that the soul may also be destroyed. If a man becomes very good, the highest example of virtue, then we must pray to the gods to bring this man to

an early grave, because although he is good, his body and soul have lost their balance and such a man has forfeited his right to exist in a world in which anything can happen when people are not normal and balanced. I have spoken.

In addition to a soul, a person is seen to possess a self, or *Ena*. Some understandings of the qualities of this self includes the following (Mutwa, 1964, pp.461-462):

When the person is born, it does not possess a self. The self builds up slowly of the memories and thoughts and the experiences as it grows up... The Ena is not immortal; it lives on for some time after death of the body and can often be seen... The Ena [self] rides across the lake of time on the Soul... However, both the Soul and Ena (character is a combination of the two) are always a few days ahead of the body... These go through experiences first, which afterwards overtake the body. For instance, if a man is going to fall victim of an accident in one or two days' time, the soul and the Ena are the first to fall victim of that accident. And when this happens the soul sends a warning to the body through the mind, in the form of a premonition or dream.

These widely accepted understandings illustrate conceptions of self far removed from the modernist conceptualisations and ideals of personhood. It also raises a suggestion of the limitations and arrogance inherent in modernist

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Western thinking's ascription of absolute truth to its own theories, as succinctly pointed out by Mutwa, (1969, p.148):

There is nothing more saddening than a man deliberately blinding himself to the shimmering lake of reality. There is nothing more pathetic than the sight of a man who, on beholding the frowning mountain in the purple distance yonder, still insists that the mountain is not there - a man who, though standing knee-deep in a roaring river, insists with stubborn conviction that he is standing on a sand dune in the Ka-Lahari.

Such a man is the typical scientist in Africa today.

#### Feminist Alternatives

Feminist writings (Gilligan, 1982; McGoldrick, Anderson & Walsh, 1989; Weingarten, 1991) suggest that alternative views of personhood exist within the dominant Western culture. This notion of what Gilligan (1982) calls the different voice of women is seen to strongly call into question the modernist theories of a singular ideal personhood. She writes:

The failure to see the different reality of women's lives and to hear the differences in their voices stems in part from the assumption that there is a single mode of social experience and interpretation. By positing instead two different modes, we arrive at a more complex rendition of human experience. (p.173)

Understandings of what the differentness of various women's voices entail, focus strongly on patterns of relating. Writers such as Chodorow (1978), Gilligan (1982) and McGoldrick (1989) suggest a basis for women's greater concern with relationship and connection and men's preference for separation and individuality. Thus men have difficulty with relating, females with individuation. The male identity domain holds tight boundaries for the exercise of exclusion, the female identity domain has loose boundaries for the process of interconnection. Males tend to believe that there is one right way to live and their task is to find it. Females tend to believe that there are many right ways to live and their task is to find the right one for now.

Following this notion Gilligan (1982) not only criticizes Piaget's theories for being based on male models and standards, but also revises Kohlberg's male-centred theory of moral reasoning. She points out women's greater concern with caring and with maintaining connections in grappling with moral dilemmas. Thus responsibility is understood in the context of relationships. This is in contrast with the male concept of morality which emphasizes fairness and ties moral development to the understanding of rights and rules.

The feminine alternative is thus seen as follows: because women's sense of self is defined in terms of relationship and connection rather than separation and individuality, being defined relationally is not experienced as a threat to autonomy or as a frustration to personal growth and self-development. The latter stems from the male world-view with its more egocentrically separating self-definition (Imber-Black, 1988; Lykes, 1985; McGoldrick, 1989; Sampson, 1987).

Additionally the feminists suggest that the silencing of the female voice through ignoring women's different development has resulted not just in harm to women

but is an impoverishment of our ability to understand humanity (Collier, 1987; Gilligan, 1982).

### Deconstructionism

Deconstructionists have challenged all notions that give primacy to the subject or author. Without proposing to explain the complex theories of deconstruction, brief focus will be placed on some of the challenges these writers have posed to the Western person and world-view.

They argue that persons as subjects are constructed in and through a symbolic system that fixes the subject in place while remaining beyond the subject's full mastery. In other words, the person is not at the centre, fully aware and a self-present master, but has been decentered by these relations to the symbolic order. This notion thus challenges the idea of the Western subject as one who is at the centre of awareness (Derrida, 1978, 1981; Wilden, 1980).

Deconstructionism also challenges the Western concept of self as integrated. This modernist notion is seen to be underpinned by the tendency to break reality down into paired opposites (for example central versus marginal, truth versus falsehood), one of which is seen as hierarchically higher or better than the other. The aim of deconstructionism is not to abolish such opposites or to show that the second term is in fact better than the first. Rather, it is to show that the differences between the terms mask a mutual dependency or sameness. Given these assumptions, the Derridian view proposes a subject that is multi-dimensional, decentred and without hierarchical integration. It proposes a process and a paradox, but never a beginning or an end (Derrida, 1967, 1981; Macrone, 1994; Ogilvy, 1979; Sampson, 1987).

As shown above the Western subject is built on an either/or notion and uses the logic of identity. It builds its notion of autonomous personhood on the idea of one entity being set contrastively against other entities. By contrast, Derrida's (1967) logic of the supplement (of difference, rather than of identity) is a both/and logic. He shows that the first term of the seeming dualism (for example centre/margin, presence/absence) is never self-sufficient, but always only understood in relation to the second term. This implies that what something is also thoroughly inhabited by what that something is not. Thus the Derridian subject can never be set apart from the multiple others who are its very essence (Derrida, 1967, 1978; Macrone, 1994; Sampson, 1987; Wilden, 1980).

### Social Constructionism

Social constructionists have argued that selves, persons and psychological traits are social and historical constructions, not naturally occurring phenomena (Gergen, 1971, 1985a, 1985b, 1989, 1993; Gergen, Greenberg & Willis, 1980; Hoffman, 1993; Stam et al., 1987).

The theory of social constructionism and its implications for the emergence of selfhood will be discussed in more depth in the following section. While this theoretical stance serves as epistemological basis for this study, it does not exclude many of the ideas referred to above. Systems theory, deconstructionism, and so forth, may be discernible thought systems, but their contributions, also to the topic under scrutiny here, flow usefully into the same intellectual landscape.

## CHAPTER 3

### SELF AS SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION

#### The Theory of Social Constructionism

##### A Brief Historical Perspective

The rise of the constructionist movement can best be understood against the backdrop of the continuous disputation between two very different basic epistemological orientations (Gergen, 1982, 1985b; Shotter & Gergen, 1989). These two perspectives, like all epistemology, set out to elucidate the processes by which people come to describe, explain or otherwise account for the world in which they live.

On the one hand, there is the exogenic perspective which sees knowledge as a pawn of nature. This view, as expounded by philosophers such as Locke, Hume and Mills [see for example, Locke (1979)], sees proper knowledge as mirroring the actualities of the real world. This tradition forms the basis of much of modernist thinking (for example, behaviourism) as discussed above. The exogenic perspective can also be described as forming the metatheoretical basis of the science of psychology itself (Gergen, 1982).

On the other hand, philosophers such as Spinoza, Kant and Nietzsche [see for example, Spinoza (1956) and Nietzsche (1968)] and various phenomenologists have adopted an endogenic perspective which sees knowledge as endemic to the organism. Human beings are seen to possess certain tendencies and/or abilities

to think, categorize and thus process information. Thus, according to them, it is these innate tendencies and abilities, rather than the world out there, which is of paramount importance in fashioning knowledge (Gergen 1985a, 1985b; Shotter & Gergen, 1989).

The endogenic perspective has emerged in the field of psychology in a few guises, most notably in phenomenological psychology, and cognitive and social psychology. For example, concepts such as cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957), emotions as perceived (Schachter, 1964) and the transactional model of stress (Lazarus, 1980) all carry the premise that human action is dependent on the world as processed rather than the world as it is.

Gergen (1985a), however, sees this exogenic-endogenic antimony (as witnessed not only in psychology, also in philosophy and other social sciences) as an ongoing pendulum of which the movement can be recapitulated again and again. The challenge accepted by many, such as the constructionist thinkers (Rorty, 1979), has been to rise above this subject-object dualism. Knowledge is neither something that is inherent and attainable in the world out there, nor something that individuals possess, but rather something they do. This perspective of knowledge as social achievement is what social constructionism sets out to explicate.

### The Basic Tenets of Social Constructionism

Gergen (1985a) summarizes a central theme of social constructionism succinctly when he states that it rests on a "radical doubt in the taken for granted world" (p.6). This theory challenges the objective basis of conventional knowledge. It does not accept that commonly accepted knowledge, beliefs and understandings can be clear mental representations of the world and achieve their validity through appropriate observation of the world out there (Gergen, 1971, 1982, 1985a, 1985b).

Rather, social constructionism sees the terms in which the world is understood as "social artifacts, products of historically situated interchanges between people" (Gergen, 1985a, p.6). Thus, seemingly objective criteria for identifying behaviours, traits, events or entities (which much of psychology endeavours to achieve in various specific inquiries) are always highly circumscribed by history, culture and social context.

In this way a recentering (Gergen, 1981) is achieved, a move from a concern with cognitive processes to one of social exchange. Cognition is not seen to essentially determine social activity as much as social activity is seen to determine what we believe to constitute cognitive processes. Terms of understandings within groups and societies are, therefore, the result of an active, co-operative enterprise of persons in relationships. Languages of understanding are employed by persons in their attempt to carry on mutual enterprises (Gergen, 1982, 1985a, 1989; Gergen et al., 1980).

These constructions that are socially negotiated can undergo significant changes across time. Such change is not seen to reflect alterations in the object of concern, but is once again based on other historically significant social or cultural factors.

Thus, the degree to which a given form of understanding prevails across time is not a function of its empirical or objective validity. Rather, it depends on the vicissitudes of social processes. (This view can, for example, be illustrated through the argument that the epistemology of modern science and its accompanying description of person and the ideal of individualization were developed largely as a means of social control.) Likewise, whether an act is defined (for example) content-wise as sex or violence or morality-wise as appropriate or not, rests on a myriad of social exchanges and negotiations. Thus, communities of interpreters evolve through whom reality is essentially negotiated (Gergen, 1985a, 1989; Hoffman, 1993).

These forms of negotiated understanding are critically significant in social life in that they are integrally connected to many other activities in which people engage. Specific descriptions and interpretations invite specific actions (Gergen 1985a; Hoffman, 1993; Shotter & Gergen, 1989). This also explains the concern among certain writers (such as Foucault) with the specific conventions of discourse that psychology, for example, chooses to employ around the understanding of persons and their actions. These invented categories could have broad social implications. Consider, for example, the possibly damaging and limiting effects on children of certain constructions of how a child's mind works (Walkerdine, 1984) or the effects of a now intellectualized sexism inherent in the assumed superiority and universality of patricentric principles in moral decision-making (Gilligan, 1982).

The theory of social constructionism, then, emphasizes the contextual nature of truths which abide in multiverses. Situations and interactions generate their own truths, and one cannot argue that one universe exists. Constructionism basically proposes that the world may not be the same if we do not interact or are not in it any longer - we co-construct the universe.

### The Centrality of Language

The poststructuralists, in their effort to dismantle the traditional foundations of Western thought, challenge the notion of a structure inherent to any entity in question, whether it be a text, a family, the self, or a specific understanding of the world. (There is an ongoing debate about the difference, if any, between the concepts "postmodern" and "poststructural". For the purposes of this argument, however, the two are used synonymously inasfar as they denote the challenge to any framework that posits some kind of internal structure.) This defection from the focus on structure - for example, the cybernetic view of the family as a homeostatic system or the empiricist concept of knowledge as mental representation - has made it necessary to consider alternative conceptions of what passes as

knowledge in human affairs. One major candidate that has been receiving much attention is that of the linguistic rendering (Gergen, 1985a; Hoffman, 1993). (According to Hoffman (1993), it is because postmodern and poststructural ideas were originated by people in semiotics and literary criticism, that it started becoming increasingly common in talking of social fields of study to use the analogy of a narrative or text.)

Wittgenstein's (1953, 1969) writings have contributed greatly to moving beyond a view of our vocabulary and discourse as derived through observation and representative of internal or external phenomenological givens. Instead, he sees mental predicates as semantically free-floating. In addition, he views linguistic discourse as essentially part of a social process. Words gain their meaning not in their capacity to reflect reality, but through their use in social interchange.

These tenets from Wittgenstein's (1953, 1969) thinking have been extensively used by many writers in the social sciences in their efforts to find fresh perspectives on the origins and evolution of our understandings of the world and people. In essence, language is conceptualized as the mechanism through which meaning and reality are negotiated. Furthermore, the conventions of the discourse are seen to guide the possibilities that open for people to engage in specific ways with self, each other and the world (Geertz, 1986; Gergen, 1989; Harré, 1985, 1989).

Writers like Anderson and Goolishian (1988, 1992) have done much to develop the idea of reality as constituted through language and of groups as constituted through consensual languaging (into communities of interpreters). Accordingly, the social constructionist theorists see ideas, concepts and memories as arising from social interchange and mediated through language.

It is also in this that the "social" part of social construction theory lies. The categories into which we divide the world and according to which we act and attribute meaning are not prescribed by natural law, vicariously received or

individually invented. They evolve in the space between people and are transmitted, communicated and passed on through symbolic action, such as language (Gergen, 1985a, 1989; Harré, 1984, 1985, 1989; Wittgenstein, 1953, 1969).

For example, Averill (1982) questions the assumption that common categories for classifying emotions reflect real or fundamental differences in biological functioning. Laing (1969) and many others challenge the so-called objective criteria for diagnosing schizophrenia as a genetically transmitted and biologically based mental illness. Hoffman (1993) sees the rush to define treatable mental conditions and the expanding of DSM-IV labels as due to the present economics of mental health. According to her, the diagnosis industry is at the heart of the reimbursement system in the USA, as health insurance coverage is only forthcoming if problems can be properly labelled, preferably as biological illnesses, and thereby defined as treatable. All of these writers illustrate a profound criticism of the objective criteria for identifying behaviours, events or entities, as they find these criteria to be highly circumscribed by history or social context, or altogether non-existent.

An important implication of this view is that language is not only the medium through which interpretations of the world is carried, but constitutes social action in itself. Conventions of discourse also guide social exchange.

An indeterminate array of understandings/constructions may be derived for any given situation. Some voices/understandings/categories, however, are granted superiority over others on the basis of socially derived criteria. Which voice prevails in the sea of alternatives, may be critical to the fate of the person, relationships, family life, community, or even to the future of humankind (Gergen, 1989; Harré, 1989). Gergen (1989) refers to the process through which certain linguistic constructions are granted superiority by offering certain rationales or justifications, as achieving warrant.

Gergen (1989) also argues that one of the most typical social conventions of warrant is the reference to mental events. For example, one may claim superiority of voice by virtue of your claim to possessing certain characteristics of mind yourself, or by denigrating your "opponent's" inner inferiorities. You may also claim warrant on the basis of possessing privileged mental representation of the outer world (for example, "I saw it with my own eyes"). In the battle for warrant of a certain voice that ensues from the preceding kind of positioning, claim is also made to historically supported or institutionalized warrants (such as the body of knowledge in psychology which has developed over time and which, through repeated and particular use, is regarded as "proven knowledge"). This accumulated armamentarium of centuries of debate thus become symbolic resources in the battle of linguistic constructions of world and person.

All of the above suggests that self-knowledge (for example) is not the product of in-depth probing of the inner recesses of the psyche, or adequately controlled experimentation with emotions and the like. Rather, functional self-knowledge entails a mastery of discourse - knowing how rather than knowing what. The challenge in the experience of self is to find the linguistic skills that can make the inner world come to life. Full social functioning is thus a product of the dance achieved with symbolic resources, that is, linguistic constructions that have been and are being socially negotiated.

### The Social Construction of the Self

Within social constructionist thinking, as noted in the previous section, the construct *self-concept* is removed from the head and placed within the sphere of social discourse. The locus of individual functioning is removed from the interior region of the mind to the processes and structure of human interchange. The question "why" is answered not with a psychological trait, state or process, but with consideration of people in relationships (Brighton-Cleghorn, 1987; Gergen, 1971, 1985a, 1985b, 1989; Gergen & Davis, 1985; Hoffman, 1993; Lynch, Norem-Hebeisen & Gergen,

1981).

This implies that the person is not conceptualized by herself or others in specific ways because they can (more or less correctly) through observation or other methods, approximate the way she intrinsically is. A sense of self is developed in conjunction with others. There is a constant recursive process between our defining of ourselves in interaction with others' perceived definitions of us. Furthermore, the way we perceive, describe and explain our own and others' behaviour is decisively influenced by received conceptualizations of the person in relationship to the existing and historical moral-social order(s) and the perceived natural order. In this way constructed self-concepts differ radically within different kinds of societies. [Compare, for example, the prevalence of individual goals and habits in self-descriptions in Western societies with the more communal self-conception in other societies where anything idiosyncratic is muted in favour of the person's assigned place in the continuous communal saga (as described by Geertz, 1973). It would however be a mistake to assume that the one language here (the Western one) comparatively allows "more" freedom in the construction of who you want to be. As pointed out in an earlier section, the vociferous adherence to individuality can also be seen as a very effective means of social control that is disguised in the discourse of individual freedom.] In all cases though, conceptualizations of ourselves and others is in some way presupposed by our constructed social orders and is a requisite for its functioning (Lax, 1992; Shweder, 1984; Shweder & Miller, 1985).

A sense of self not only arises through our discourse with others, but is our discourse with others. Thus we shape the realities we encounter by co- and re-constructing the communities of interpreters within which our definitions of self, other and the world are negotiated (Lax, 1992).

Thus, the person is seen, not as the autonomous foreground against a social and natural background, but as the mediated product of society who can also in her acting, reproduce or potentially transform that society. Furthermore, people can transform themselves by transforming the structures by which they are formed

(Gergen & Davis, 1985; Lax, 1992).

### **Basic Tenets Around the Construct "Self"**

As discussed above, the social constructionist perspective has far-reaching implications for understandings of the emergence and functioning of self. Some basic assumptions underlying a constructionist discourse of self can - in summarized form - be distinguished as follows.

#### **The Self as Construction Rather than Fact**

Constructionism rejects the idea of self as an entity or physical thing that can be studied scientifically. The conception of self as if it has substance is seen as the result of a reifying empirical discourse which serves the function of buying scientific respectability (Kvale, 1992).

Instead, it is proposed that ideas of self are the products of the discourse that emanates from the processes and structure of human interchange. There is no hidden self to be discovered. We reveal ourselves in every moment through the ongoing narrative that we are developing with others. Lax (1992) refers to the philosopher Levinas who states: "the I does not begin with itself in some pure moment of autonomous self-consciousness, but in relation with the other, for whom it remains forever responsible" (p.71).

In the same vein Harré (1989) states that the word "I" does not have a referent and does not reflect ontological occurrences. Rather, when people are making attributions according to a first-person epistemology, they are correctly playing a language game. This specific language game adheres to the assumptions of

modernism, for example in the extent to which agency is ascribed to the individual and the role of social processes are denied. Through these games, our intentions and private experiences are acquired and given meaning.

Similarly, the idea of will is an outcome of a language game rather than an ontological construct. Psychology, however, has given this concept scientific legitimacy and facilitated its adoption as a prerequisite for being human. The idea of will also allows people to perceive themselves as agents, responsible for the choices they make - a process that contributes to the perpetuation of a certain social order (Friedman, 1993; Harré, 1989). This view is in keeping with Sampson's perspective on personal choice as a fallacy and on people as existing within a set of symbols which they cannot fully master (Sampson, E.E., 1989).

#### The Self as Process Rather than Structure

The notion of the self as a thing also implies that it has structural properties which give it stability over time and that these should be the focus of study.

By contrast, the constructionists focus on process, that is, the principles of operation or forces at play in the ongoing social construction of self. Thus the focus is not on an ontological given, but on a multifaceted being continuously being constructed out of historically situated social relations.

In fact, it is modernist language games that enable us to understand the human interior as if it is a fragmented, isolated and static centre of being (Shotter, 1989). This understanding emanates from the idea that language does not only have a representational, but also a rhetorical function. In other words, language is used in such a way that the social order that it evolves from will necessarily be confirmed. Thus the way in which seemingly objective research questions are asked already pre-empt the answer.

Traditional research about the self reflects language patterns which adhere to the rules of positivistic, empirical science, which in turn emanates from the social order of modernity. Modernity, again, can be seen as a cultural practice that adulates hypothetical deductive reasoning as a means of understanding the world (Jordaan & Jordaan, 1994; Kitzinger, 1989; Parker, 1989). Here empirical research is posited as the advanced technique through which the real truth about the world and people can be discovered.

This kind of research is a form of communication that usurps credibility through the rhetoric devices employed. For example, in this research system, the researcher positions his subjects by asking acontextual questions about them and submitting them to what Rose (1989) calls the gaze. This kind of surveillance - the use of a third person in referring to the subjects of the research as well as the avoidance of any use of the first person - creates a context within which the perspective of all human functioning (including the research act) as social process is denied. Harré (1989) notes that this kind of language game allows us to understand the self as if it is a separate entity that exists with stable characteristics. (It is also a rhetorical device that allows for the acknowledgement of power relations to be sidestepped.)

The moment that the researcher's perspective is acknowledged and the subjective reality of the research is incorporated in the language patterns and ascriptions, all meanings are constructed as a social process. Then the *I* which evolves from being a *you in relation* is included in scientific statements on personhood (Shotter, 1989). When perspectives are included, processwise, contextual, temporal statements of self replace static universal laws of human functioning.

Then the self becomes seen as process, a contextual, co-constructed identity in continual motion. It is an *I* defined by its everchanging relation to an-other and by its position within a social and linguistic context.

## The Self as Intersubjectively and Interdependently Created

The modernist view of self proposes an autonomous being which has ontological primacy and which is set off contrastively against others and the environment as background.

This view is rejected in constructionist thinking where the reality of self is seen to be intersubjectively created through the negotiation between participants. This implies an interpenetration between person and the natural and social environment in which neither has ontological primacy.

In this vein Friedman (1993) refers to the *other* as the space within which we know how we exist. Thus to develop the experience of an *I* is wholly dependent on the experience of being addressed as a *you*.

In this view, the *I*, when posited as an independent being, becomes an empty sign with little substance, despite research and empirical construction to the contrary (Gergen, 1989). Rather, it is all the roles people are recruited into, all the *yous* people are co-opted into being, that form the matrix from which the *I* emerges (Shotter, 1989).

## The Self as Multiple and Fragmented

The details and terminology of traditional discourse about the conception or view a person can have of herself suggests a strong tendency to think of the self in the singular. Constructionism, however, replaces this notion of the self as a single, global and unified entity with a view of self-conception as fragmented and multiple.

Personhood and its ideal is seen as a multi-dimensional, decentered self rather

than the integrated, hierarchically arranged traditional conception (Derrida, 1978). Following from this, the person is conceived of as an essentially dialectical being. Thus she is not seen to display opposing forces that need to be solved in an either/or way, but rather experiences and processes that always exist in both/and counterpart. (This notion is in keeping with the general attempt to transcend dichotomies, which, according to Kvale (1992), unites all manifestations of postmodern thought.) This rests on the assumption that what something is, is always thoroughly inhabited by what that something is not.

The person's construction (or development) of a sense of self thus does not depend on the successful solving of inner conflicts. Rather, it is embedded in the tension that emanates from the simultaneous experience of a variety of counterparts. The existence of a more open manifestation of one pattern in the experience of self does not deny the presence of a number of seemingly opposite patterns. What becomes more apparent is rather the result, once again, of complex negotiations between participants and with environments.

This account of self brings with it the implication of an incoherent experience of personhood, in which it is not possible to experience a constancy of self (Young, 1989).

#### **The Relationally Constructed Self : Self Implies Participation in Community**

As noted above, the sense of a self (or selves) is intersubjectively created. Such an emphasis on the relational domain within which knowledge is constructed, directs our attention to the notion of a community of interpreters and observers. Gaining a sense of self implies participation in centralized local communities of significance.

It is within the interactions and negotiations within such a community that verification is sought and gained about the meaning of things, about what is appropriate and

inappropriate and so forth. Moving through discursive communities provides us with the opportunities for certain interpretations, explanations, descriptions and lines of action to emerge, and for others to be constrained. In this way every meaningmaking community and process necessarily contains some form of censorship. As Rushdie puts it, the telling of one story makes the telling of another impossible. Thus certain interactive patterns are created through which seemingly coherent versions of reality, that is, the world, others and self, emerge. What people do together provides not only the viability but also the sustainability of particular lines of action and interpretation. Furthermore, the patterns of certain meanings and actions that develop, again construct the dominant or interactive patterns in a given community, thereby defining what will be considered important, central, marginal, and so forth. (Gergen, 1989; McNamee, 1992).

Thus, developing a sense of self necessarily implies interaction and co-creation with (and in that membership of) specific discursive communities. / implies living in local or significant communities within which meaning or practices emerge within certain patterns. Moving within these communities also provides the opportunity of sustaining meanings. Should any of the interactive patterns change, movements in the patterns of interpretation of self and the world will result, and vice versa.

### The Role of Difference in Experiencing the Relational Self

The perception of difference serves an important function in the modernist perspective on self-conception. In this traditional view it serves to set whole beings contrastively off against each other. In this way, individuals/selves become more definable in a process that serves the ideals of autonomy and separateness. *Coupled*

In constructionist thinking, however, the perception of difference is equally if not more important, but serves a completely different function in this very alternative scheme of things.

The experience of difference (also in the form of change) is conceptualized as the points at which the relations amongst the parts of a system are described. At these points, then, a relational or contextual sense of the parts can emerge more clearly (Bateson, 1972).

To apply this idea more clearly to self, when a person experiences a punctuation of difference between herself and others or in her usual pattern of relationship, she is bumping up against a sense of her experience of the relationship itself, of the world, as well as of whom she senses herself to be as participant with the other in some kind of bigger dance.

### **The Role of Crisis in (Re)Constructing Self: Separation as Crisis, Crisis as Separation**

As noted above, the experience of difference in usual patterns of relationship becomes an important moment for the invocation of a discourse about the sense of the self. The experience of crisis can be seen as such a moment.

In folklore, as well as traditional thinking in psychology, two positions can be distinguished around the conceptualization of crisis. Firstly, crisis is seen as something that happens to the person. Circumstances are seen to bring crisis to her (Hoff, 1984). Secondly, crisis is often understood as a natural extension of who and what she is. It is something about the person that causes her to be in crisis. Both of these positions imply an individualistic focus. It also conceives of crisis as a thing we can have or possess and per implication also get rid of (McNamee, 1992; Sampson, E.E., 1989).

However, from a constructionist position crisis is not seen as an individual's problem, but a communally constructed phenomenon. Similarly, it is not something

that can be gotten rid of, but is rather a moment of reconstructing our webs of meaning (Lifschitz, 1988, 1991), for example, our sense of identity.

How we know that we are in crisis is made possible by our particular movements through our specific discursive communities. In our interactions with others and the context at that time, we can participate in either the continuation or the reconstruction of the crisis as well as our "knowing" up till that point. Even though reconstruction as such is not apparent, the experience of crisis brings us (interactively) to new ways of knowing what we thought we knew previously. In that way, our world of meanings necessarily shifts at these points.

Crisis can be conceived of as a boundary experience which simultaneously implies our usual full participation in a centralized, local discourse about ourselves and the world (McNamee, 1992).

The "boundary" quality of the constructions around this moment is manifested in typical languaging or expressions people tend to use at this time, such as "it pushed me to the edge". Other expressions that typically emerge are ones of feeling unanchored or unattached, such as "I feel lost" or "I felt that I had lost myself". These reflect to what an extent this moment challenges the meanings, identities and sense of self that we usually hold on to and find safety in.

Here it is important to remember the previously made point that it is in the evolution of patterns in our participation in centralized local communities that we manage to build a seemingly stable and sustainable web of meanings. When these seeming consistencies are shaken in an unexpected way, crisis can ensue. This conceptualization of the experience and ramifications of crisis in terms of a sense of self, deserves further explication.

## Boundaries and Identity

The word crisis is derived from the Greek term "krinein" which means "to separate". The boundary experience of crisis separates us from others in our interactive communities and in that from the sustained meanings (derived from our sustained negotiations in these communities) with which we cushion ourselves.

This idea will be explored further later on. First, it is necessary to gain some understanding of how the experience of boundary is so intrinsically important in meaningmaking and of how a sense of crisis results.

Drawing or experiencing boundaries, as in separation, is in all instances a central ingredient of the co-creation of identity and meaning. (The centrality of conceptions of boundary and separation in understandings of human functioning, can be found widely. Compare, for example, Minuchin's (1974) conceptualizations of families. He distinguishes healthy and pathological family systems in terms of the quality of their boundaries. Families are seen to be in trouble when boundaries or separation between subsystems, for example different generations, are either too diffuse or too rigid.) A boundary signifies a territory that is "ours/mine". Therefore, a sense of boundary implies a sense of identity. (See again the previous section on the importance of experiencing difference in attaining some notion of the nature and quality of the parts, as well as the relations amongst them.) A knowing of the self as well as of the other becomes possible. The constructions of and about these entities are made in terms of each other.

Boundaries also indicate distinctions between what is central and what is more marginal. In this is also implied a value judgement of what is more or less desirable, appropriate, familiar to this entity or person. The centre is seen as the position with priority. Again, these constructions are reflected in everyday language: one is supposed to be as "centered" as possible, a loved one is the "centre" of your being and so forth.

What stays hidden in this focus on the (experienced) centre, is the equal importance of centre and margin in constructing identity. It is also the periphery that allows the centre to be seen as such. This recognition implies a move from seeing identity as unified, solid and essential to understanding it as constructed and relational. Only by setting boundaries can the centre be distinguished and gain identity, and boundaries can only be set by defining another (an-other, as opposed to an I). This process of definition and redefinition plays out simultaneously from many (previously distinguished) points and, therefore, necessitates negotiation.

As noted before, the negotiations in and between discursive communities, construct the typical dominant or interactive patterns in a given community and thereby define what will be considered marginal and central.

#### Separation from Central Meanings and Others as Crisis

Being in the constructed centre of a web of meanings enables one to move in a predictable ecology and to have the sense of living out a preconceived (if as yet unknown to one) autobiography. A crisis-experience ensues when this seemingly predictable ecology moves.

In that sense it can be said that discontinuity of past meanings and/or connections in the consensual domain of the community of belonging leads to a declaration of crisis. It indicates perceived threats to the predictability and continuation of an ecology of ideas.

For example, significant moves in interactions (such as separation) can constrain one from playing out a particular preconceived story of self and necessitates a re-authoring (Epston, White & Murray, 1992) of this story. This can be constructed as

crisis. As Maturana and Varela (1987) would put it, it is a lived segment in which a person's vulnerability is languaged. In this moment the vulnerability entails an uncertainty about the sense of self and in that necessarily of one's place of belonging. The potential and necessity emerges to redesign and reconfirm one's connections and place in some discursive community(-ies) and in this to reconstruct one's talk about self and the ongoing life-story.

### Crisis as Separation from Old Identities and Moment for Reconstructing New Ones

Earlier, it was pointed out how during crisis expressions of being at some edge, as well as of being unanchored, are often elicited. This is on the one hand an indication of the fact that separation from central others and ideas (as discussed above) is intimately connected to crisis.

At the same time, in some recursive way, at points of crisis identity is questioned and the sense of being in the centre is threatened. We are separated from others in our discursive communities - for example through the absence of a sense of full-enough consensual validation. Crisis is a border experience - on the margin of what we "know" and find acceptable. Thus a crisis depends on finding yourself at that moment both in and at the borders of a language community.

In the crisis-moment the person and ecology is faced with two options. Firstly, every effort can be made to return to the centre. Secondly, the possibility emerges to move beyond perceived boundaries into another domain that has to be defined ("known") - thus reconstructing identities. In this way transformation in the web of meanings is effected, making new actions, connections, interactions, meanings possible.

Most typically, the strongest efforts are made in trying to regain previous levels of "knowing" in the particular discursive realm within which the crisis emerged. As

noted earlier, to *know* that we are in crisis, it also has to be communally defined. Thus the person is already partaking in a centralized discourse that constructs the particular situation as crisis. To define what is appropriate and inappropriate at this moment requires reference to the specific discursive context. Consequently the means are ready for "working through" whatever deviations have emerged in relation to the constructed common practices. Therapy can be seen as one of these readily available social institutions or formations, as can be the law, education and so forth (McNamee, 1992).

Thus the communal defining of crisis embodies a simultaneous tendency for trying to realign as close as possible to previous positions. This is, however, not necessarily possible, for example when separation from others changes the construction of the local community of significance within which meaning is negotiated. Then the boundaries which define the centres are altered, necessitating reconstruction of identities, relationships and meanings.

Thus, separation from usual patterns with others and ideas brings about a move in what is experienced as a predictable ecology and leads to the communally constructed declaration of crisis. Similarly, the experience of crisis brings about separation from previously available interactive, discursive communities and levels of knowing, bringing about a move in the constructions of self, other and the world. This does not only entail the reconstruction of content of meaning and in that of sense of self, but also (even if the content does seemingly not change) a move in the way of knowing your knowledge of self.

### **Foundations for a Textual Analysis of Selfhood**

*How to find a frame that would facilitate the interpretation of a person's sense of self and experiences in general, is a central question for scientists. Inheritants of the positivist tradition have been able to reify and call on ways of speaking and*

writing that are considered neutral, rational and respectable by emphasizing notions of the authoritative account and the impersonal expert view. These establish accounts of knowledge or information that are considered to be global and unitary (Foucault, 1980) and linguistically carry built-in injunctions against considerations of the social contexts of their construction (White, 1991; White & Epston, 1990).

Acknowledgement (as from the social constructionists) that it is the meanings - interpersonally and historically constructed in a social domain - which people attribute to their experiences, that constitute their sense of self, the world and their living, however, calls for another frame of interpretation (Barton, 1988; Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Reason, 1981; Reason & Rowan, 1981; Rowan, 1981). White (1991; 1992) and Bruner (1991), amongst others (Freeman, 1993; Hoffman, 1993; Pare, 1995; Parry, 1991; Shotter, 1993), proposes that it is the narrative or story that provides the primary frame for the interpretation of the activity of meaning-making. It is through the stories people have about their own and other's lives that they make sense of their own experience. In this vein Ricoeur (1991) asserts that "an examined life is a life recounted" (p.31).

For people to make sense of their own lives and to express themselves, experiences have to be storied, and it is this storying process that determines which meanings will be attributed to experiences (Novak, 1975; Pare, 1995; White & Epston, 1990). People's lives are formed by the stories that they live, and conversely, their identities by the stories that they are and become. The quality of their experiences attains texture through the stories that they tell and the way in which these stories are allowed or not allowed. Mair (1990, p.127) says that

[s]tories are habitations. We live in and through stories. They conjure worlds. We do not know the world other than as a story world. Stories inform life. They hold us together and keep us apart. We inhabit the great stories of our culture. We live through stories. We are lived by the stories of our race

and place. We are, each of us, locations where the stories of our place and time become partially tellable.

This idea of Mair's (1990) also points to the important consideration that stories do not develop or endure simply around an individual or in isolation. Stories emerge from a reciprocal meaningmaking process. A storyteller finds a voice rooted in her own experience *and* in the connection of her story to those of others, and to larger stories of culture and humanity. Also, the realization that we are all characters in each other's stories as well as our own, serves as reminder that the value and progress of our own stories also depend on the way they impact on and are impacted upon, by the value and progress of other's stories (Gergen & Kaye, 1992; Hare-Mustin, 1994; Kazdin-Schnitzer, 1993; Parry, 1991; White & Epston, 1990; Zimmerman & Dickerson, 1994).

Most people have a multiplicity of stories about themselves, others and their relationships. Some of these stories or narratives are, however, contextually more accessible than others. The specific story that prevails within a given context determines to a large degree the nature of our lived experiences and our patterns of behaviour (Eron & Lund, 1993; White & Epston, 1990).

A story or narrative can, however, never contain the full extent of our lived experience. The structuring of a narrative requires a selective process within which those aspects which do not fit the dominant narrative are left out. (It is these parts of experience that fall outside of reigning stories about our lives and relationships, and their potential narratives, that offer a rich and fertile source for the generation or regeneration of alternative stories. Such shifts in the stories that are being told can, for example, come about when crisis is encountered, as discussed in the previous section.)

Thus stories do not only determine meaning, but also largely determine which aspects of experience people select for expression. Thus stories or narratives are not only reflective of people's experiences, but have real effects in shaping their

lives, in providing the structure of living.

Thus, in using narratives as a frame for interpretation of experiences of self, one not only has access to a medium in which the person's experiences are mirrored, but also to the process through which it is organized, framed and given pattern to, and which will shape further experience as well (Fellner, 1983; Freeman, 1993; Gergen, 1985a; Harré, 1985; Hattingh & Van Veuren, 1995; White, 1991).

This is because narrative is a discourse tool which people use to elaborate the scope of the self (Gergen, 1989). They are the tools of interaction which people use to get their version of reality warranted, and through which they can make epistemological claims about themselves. Dialogue itself can be seen as the competing of opponents via opposing narratives (Kvale, 1992). Narratives themselves and their expression follow certain rules of discourse and emerge through interaction styles. These styles that are encountered in the process of social exchange can be internalized or opposed. Through all of this, a sense of / is established (Harré, 1989; Parker, 1989).

*Bruner "narrative way of knowing"*

Lyotard (1984), in his incredulity towards metanarratives, tries to assert the value of what he calls "narrative knowledge" (p.27) (as opposed to positivistic scientific knowledge). One important assumption underlying his argument is that the search for universalism or universalistic criteria is of little importance and can be abandoned in considering communicative competence. He joins other sceptics in describing truth claims as a form of terrorism. The assumption of truth eliminates the argument of the other, another's point of view that threatens to upset what we have come to see as the truth, even though it is only what we have come to take for granted.

Thus the legitimation of narrative knowledge, or understandings that emanate from the study of people's narratives, do not rely on the ascription of truth. Rather, it rests on the assumption [as discussed by Crites (1975)] that the formal quality of experience through time is inherently narrative. Thus only narrative form is seen to

be able to contain the tensions, the surprises, the disappointments and reversals and achievements of lived experience.

This implies that narratives can determine their own criteria of competence, as well as illustrate how they are to be applied. In this way they need not get stuck in what Lyotard (1984) calls the language game known as the question of legitimacy. Narratives can thus define what has the right to be said and done in the context in question, and since they are part of this social order themselves, they are legitimated by the simple fact that they do what they do (Lyotard, 1984; Rorty, 1991; Rosenau, 1992).

This is echoed by Bruner (in White & Epston, 1990), when he makes a distinction between two types of thinking, that is logico-scientific and narrative thinking:

each providing distinctive ways of ordering experience, of constructing reality... A good story and a well-formed argument are different natural kinds. Both can be used as a means of convincing another. Yet what they convince of is fundamentally different: arguments convince one of their truth, stories of their lifelikeness. The one verifies by eventual appeal to procedures for establishing formal and empirical truth. The other establishes not truth but verisimilitude. (p.45)

*Waarlijkheid*

### **A Brief Summary and a Moment's Reflection**

In this chapter the background to and the content of the move towards a social constructionist view of the self as an ever-changing and historically influenced co-construction was described. The tenets underlying and supporting this view will be the assumptions underpinning this study. This does not imply that a postmodern

position is presented uncritically as a new kind of truth. In Derridian fashion the ideas in this study are presented as provisional.

A few problematic issues around a description of postmodern thinking also deserve special mention here.

Firstly, postmodern thinking may appear as completely new in the way it constitutes one of the greatest intellectual challenges to established knowledge of the twentieth century. However, postmodern arguments weave in and out of more traditional criticisms of the social sciences. Mention of the perspective of the observer and of power issues can be found in many such criticisms which are certainly not labelled postmodern. In that way postmodernism is not as entirely original as it may appear. It can be stated that instead of signalling a genuine break with modernity, postmodernism is simply its logical continuation.

Rosenau (1992), amongst others, notes in this vein that the emergence of postmodernism may simply reflect intellectual and social currents in the larger society. For example, the move away from seeing the modernist knower as expert, may have been the product of a broad change in the position of intellectuals in the West. A poor job market contributed to unemployment amongst many social scientists, increasingly poor salaries for academics and an accompanying increase in ineffectiveness and loss of credibility. Thus, what was economically initiated may then have taken on paradigmatic proportions.

Furthermore it may appear that postmodernism is a clear and (again) unitary way of thinking. This is certainly not the case. A myriad of positions and perspectives can all be deemed postmodern. Indeed, many different voices question not only the definition of the term, but the very existence of the concept itself. It is a measure of the nature of postmodernism that it generates such intense controversy.

In its more extreme formulations, postmodernism is revolutionary. It goes to the very core of what constitutes the social sciences and radically dismisses it. In its

more moderate proclamations, postmodernism encourages far-reaching redefinition and innovation.

It is in its (at times) solipsistic character that postmodernism is sometimes made out to be morally noxious or excessively dispassionate and remote (see, for example, Glass, 1993). Rorty (1991) himself criticizes Foucault and Lyotard as being so "afraid of being caught up in one or more metanarratives about the nature of 'the subject' that they cannot bring themselves to say 'we' long enough to identify with the culture of the generation to which they belong" (p.174).

The aim in this study is not to evolve a further solipsistic view of self. Rather, a specific postmodern position is assumed because, in its move from truth to tentativeness, it seems to carry more promise of enabling the writer to enter and transmit an experience of being human than a mechanistic and clear explication.

In the following section the investigation of the trails of the construct self moves into the domain of therapy. Most specifically, the issue of the therapist's sense of her own self will be explored.

## SECTION II

### TOWARDS HEALING THROUGH THE USE OF SELF - THE THERAPIST'S JOURNEY

The issue of self is of central importance and enduring fascination in the field of psychology. The debates it has fuelled permeate all of the theorizing that can be found in this field - some of which was discussed in the previous section. More comprehensively, it can be said that the discipline of psychology has to a large degree been built through conceptual and pragmatic developments concerning themselves with a *triad* of concepts: self - problem - change. The field of psychotherapy grew from this as one of the domains within which these issues could be thrashed out (and about..) in a more pragmatic fashion. Thus the concept of self (especially in connection with problem and change) has always been one of the most important concerns in therapy as well. Initially it was possible to grapple mainly with these as obviously important issues for the patient/client. Paradigmatic developments in psychotherapy as well have, however, created discursive domains within which it became possible to legitimately acknowledge and struggle with the fact of the therapist, even in her professional personhood, being intensely human.

Thus a fundamental issue in psychotherapy became: who is the therapist in relation to her work and how should she use herself in the therapeutic process? These questions give rise to strongly opposing answers. One stance regards the conscious acknowledgement of personal issues to be contaminating to the development of a respectable science. This position contributes to the flourishing of new forms of therapy and especially new techniques. Another stance pertinently stresses the importance of more fully exploring the role of the personhood of the therapist. From this perspective therapy is seen as a deeply

intimate and vulnerable experience (to all involved) that requires sensitivity from the therapist to her own state of being, as well as to that of the other. The divergent beliefs which different exponents hold about the use of self in psychotherapy are obviously influenced by different traditions - not only in the field of psychotherapy, but in psychology and in the human sciences in general.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE JOURNEY TOWARDS ACKNOWLEDGING THE IMPORTANCE OF THE THERAPIST'S SENSE OF SELF

The importance of the therapist's personhood in her work is not and has not been positively acknowledged by all proponents in the field of psychotherapy. Different positions around this issue, as well as contributions to the evolution of this acknowledgement will be discussed in this chapter.

#### **Different Views on the Importance of the Therapist's Self**

Considerations of the use of the self of the psychotherapist are much more scarce in the literature than the overwhelming variety of scripts expounding on skills and techniques for the therapist. In this focus on technique the therapist is mostly seen as a craftsman whose aim should be to expand and hone her necessary bag of tricks.

This can be contrasted to later moves to a very different approach - a view of the therapist as an artist, for whom the practice of a skill has importance in terms of the way it becomes part of a whole ecology.

Somewhere inbetween on this continuum other efforts at dealing with the non-issue/problem/resource of the therapist's sense of self can be distinguished. For example, the non-negatable influence of this force in therapy may be acknowledged, but still regarded as problematic. This can lead to suggestions such as those advocated by Freud that for the protection of the patient the self

of the analyst should remain neutral. To achieve this goal, it is mandated that the analyst should submit to a training analysis.

The epistemological roots and some manifestations of these different stances can briefly be explored. This will serve to elucidate the way in which these discussions fit into different epistemological traditions in the social sciences (as discussed in Section 1).

### The Therapist's Personhood as a Non-Issue

A view of therapy as a technical battlefield sees the issue of self to be an irritant, a contaminating factor which can successfully be ruled out of the (effectively controlled) picture. This view and such efforts at control are inextricably linked to an ongoing dream for the field of psychotherapy, namely that it will increasingly be recognized as a respectable science in accordance with the criteria traditionally spelled out for the natural sciences.

This positivistic stance obviously stems from the same roots that inform all of modernist thinking. Most specifically, it refers back to Descartes' famous maxim "cogito, ergo sum" (I think, therefore I am) and the subsequent spelling out of the dualism of body and mind with which he is identified (Storig, 1979). This view, of course, serves to draw the battlelines between a concern with the objective, external world of seemingly natural objects and an inner world, less accessible and filled with subjective experience.

As demonstrated in Chapter 1, the so-called objective and materialistic side of life achieved in modernist thinking a commanding lead over the subjective and less-demonstrable. This epistemological bias informed not only most of the initial development in the field of psychology in general, but also in the realm of psychotherapy specifically. Thus the efficacy of therapy came to be measured

through demonstrable outcomes, that is, obvious changes in the occurrence of demonstrable symptoms. This operationalization of the machine metaphor for the person thus also adheres to the (modernist) notion that for something to be real and valid, it has to be observable and measurable.

From this perspective the therapeutic relationship is conceptualized as an authoritarian doctor-patient, expert-helper-helpless-sufferer one. Identity and entrance is gained in(to) this context by the therapist through her accumulation of learned techniques, and by the patient through her having an identifiable problem which she cannot solve herself. The therapist remains in the professional role and the patient is unable to leave the complementary role. Keith (1987) sees the model for the role-dominated patient to be the good child, socially adapted, but without imagination.

Thus, the basic elements of therapy are seen to be: an expert therapist, a compliant patient, a problem that needs to be changed or eradicated, a model for appropriate treatment, a reliance on scientifically replicable techniques and a context that confirms the therapist's expertise. The often demonstrated tendency for two people using the same approach in the same situation to produce different results is attributed to one therapist being more *au fait* with the specific techniques than the other. Thus the therapist herself enters into a world where she is to be and become an increasingly effective scientific intervenor. The success of this process is seen to depend on her ability to silence the effect of her interfering personal variables by increasing her expertise through for example honing her skills (Albee, 1982; Baldwin, M., 1987a).

(The extent to which the construction of the therapist as expert can, in itself, be a most interfering (even noxious) construction of self in therapy, is acknowledged by many and will be discussed later. For the proponents of this non-issue stance towards the idea of the therapist's self, the expert role is never seen as a possible problem in the therapeutic process. Rather, it is an axiom, a *sine qua non*, in the process of successful treatment.)

The written legacy of the proponents of this view (well demonstrated in the field of behaviour therapy, but also in many other examples, such as multimodal therapy) is mostly marked by a focus on skills and diagnosis-specific treatment packages, as well as a complete absence of any reference to the personhood of the therapist. Compare, for example, Carnwath and Miller (1986) and Lazarus (1981). These are clear examples of psychotherapy patterns turning into "schools" which escape passivity by turning into models with prescribed behavioural sequences, or by seeking validation in science with a database from which inevitable conclusions may be derived (Keith & Whitaker, 1978). [Keith (1987) conceptualizes such models as "myths without divine characters" (p.61).]

Thus an emerging field of psychotherapy seeking to establish itself as a (traditional) scientific discipline had a vested interest in maintaining the Cartesian dualism. This paradigmatic position made it possible to ignore the elusiveness and complexity of the concept of a self (of the therapist specifically), complete with philosophical, social and spiritual connotations.

### The Therapist's Personhood as Problematic

In contrast to the above, many writers have recognized that therapy is a relationship between people and not just a context for the implementation of skills. This view acknowledges that techniques and approaches are tools that come out differently in different hands. Thus the therapist's self is involved in the therapeutic process regardless of, or in addition to, the treatment approach.

This recognition of the power of the therapist's personhood led primarily to concern for these writers. It was seen that the way the therapist deals with her own inner and outer life could become detrimentally entangled in the therapeutic process and thus had to be effectively controlled. This idea clearly

rests on two principles: firstly, that therapists have the power to damage patients and secondly, that therapists are there to serve patients, not the other way around (Langs, 1985; Satir, 1987).

Freud (1934) is an important proponent of this approach to the issue of what to do with the therapist's personhood. Firstly, his theory in general represented a strong attack on the established lines of Cartesian dualism by adding the elusive concept of the unconscious to a domain that kept the study of human functioning within the comfortable realm of the demonstrable and accessible. His thesis of humans carrying the seeds for their own and other's construction as well as destruction within themselves, in addition to his notion of psychic determinism, served to stimulate a strong and useful debate on the concept of self. Secondly, his acknowledgement of the therapist's personal issues was infused with a concern about the potential damage this could cause in therapy. His idea was that unconsciously, without malice, therapists can cause a great deal of harm to their patients through their own unresolved problems (Freud, 1934; Langs, 1985; Satir, 1987).

In this vein Freud (1934) used the term countertransference in referring to how therapists can mistakenly and unconsciously see their clients as mothers, fathers, sons, daughters or lovers, thereby projecting something onto them which does not belong. In this way the unaware therapist can let her personal life become dangerously entangled with the personal life of the patient (Bassen, 1989; Feiner, 1983; Giovacchini, 1989; Jacobs, 1990; Scharff, 1992; Slakter, 1987).

For the protection of the patient, Freud then advocates that the self of the analyst should remain as neutral as possible. Doubting the ability of therapists consciously not negatively influence their clients, he develops the idea of mandatory psychoanalysis for all analysts themselves - especially during training. The goal of this analysis is to help the analyst know of and master her

own conflicts - thereby enabling her to effectively minimize the effect of her own self in therapy (Yalom, 1980).

For the same reasons, Freud also advocated the neutral and non-personal format of the psychoanalytic couch with the therapist out of sight and as non-active as possible (Yalom, 1980). (This strong emphasis that Freud places in the development of his theory on the necessity to rule out the impact of self and to achieve neutrality, might indicate how difficult a goal this was for himself. Needleman (1985), for example, conjectures that the secret of Freud's great therapeutic success was the great force of personal attention he paid to his patients. This helped him to create a context of compassion and insight within which healing became possible. Similarly Satir (1987) notes that his neutral idea of the couch may be ironic since he was also reported to have frequently massaged his patients and to have become actively involved in their lives. Scharff (1992) notes that Freud's early experience with hysterical patients - the work through which he developed psychoanalysis - left him "uncomfortably exposed, altogether too close to his patients" (p.10). The theory which Freud subsequently elaborated helped him - and others, such as his collaborator Josef Breuer - to keep an intellectual and emotional distance from patients such as Anna O. who attempted to live out her erotic transference with her therapists.)

A number of other studies on the self of the therapist, while mostly lacking the sophisticated paradigmatic intricacy of the psychoanalytic studies, also in general acknowledge the importance of the therapist's personhood, but deal with it by simply stressing the importance of therapy for the therapist. [Compare, for example, Balsam and Balsam (1984)]. This therapy is prescribed to therapists for, amongst other things, dealing with anxiety and indecision in the therapist.

Other writers also offer intricate considerations about the role of the active self in therapy, but eventually mainly apply this to the client. Andrews (1991), for

example, considers how people maintain self-consistency by defining and reaffirming their self-images through social interaction and internalized self-dialogues. While briefly acknowledging that this applies to all of us and that this is also the territory of therapeutic intervention, he proceeds to focus on this process as something the client has to grapple with experientially. For the therapist, it is only necessary to use it as an intellectual template for the comparing and integrating of therapeutic styles. The goal of this is to facilitate useful self-confirmational processes for the client (who, by implication, is the one really in need of it).

Writers such as these mentioned above move away from assumptions about the therapist as (only) master craftsman or purveyor of wisdom. They still, however, see the personhood of the therapist as something that is primarily potentially damaging (in therapy). It is something that needs to be dealt with, contained and even solved as far as possible, rather than being an indispensable part in the construction of the therapeutic relationship as transformational context. This approach can be compared to the ways in which modernist writers tried to account for the idea of self/ego/personality in their theories of human functioning, while still adhering to a mainly mechanistic approach and an ideal of predictability in people and their interactions.

### The Therapist's Personhood as Resource

In contrast to the above two positions, writers who fully acknowledge therapy as an aesthetic rather than a technical ecology, focus on aspects of the use of self in therapy as the most advanced dimension of the therapist's growth.

Keeney (1983) points out that while therapists as artists and craftspeople utilize the same techniques and skills, there is a difference to the artist that extends beyond the conscious working out of a means to a preconceived end. Drawing

on Bateson's (1972) understanding of art as "the relation between levels of mental process" (p.464), Keeney (1983) sees art as concerned with the recursive relation between unconscious and conscious orders of mental process.

These views of the therapist as an artist (also see Hattingh, 1996) thus move away from notions about the world and people that are informed by all-encompassing meta-narratives that contribute to predictability and control and that adhere to accessibility and measurability as a measure of reality.

The literature emanating from these proponents is no longer in the form of "how-to" manuals focusing mainly or exclusively on technique, but concerns itself with discussions of the therapist's use of self as something that she *does* in therapy. These ideas are acknowledged to be strongly connected to the writers's emotions, life experiences and belief systems - as is the work of the therapist herself. Thus, in true postmodern tradition, the value of the interconnection of human uniquenesses, of the weaving together of local narratives, becomes the focus for the process and context within which meaning and healing can be achieved.

This is demonstrated by Yalom (1980) who holds that "when technique is made paramount, everything is lost because the very essence of the authentic relationship is that one does not manipulate but turns towards another with one's whole being" (p.410). Similarly, Satir (1987) views therapy as providing the context for empowering clients and opening up their healing potential. According to her, this goal can be obtained through the meeting of the deepest self of the therapist with the deepest self of the client. She pleads accordingly that the self of the therapist be considered an essential factor in the therapeutic process.

Thus, within this perspective, technique is not rejected or abandoned, but gains usefulness in the way it becomes part of a whole ecology - a process in which

the patterns are more dependent on the therapist as a person than the inherent effectiveness of the technique itself. This non-negatable influence of the therapist's self is seen to happen in any therapy, regardless of the specific approach, regardless of whether the focus explicitly only falls on the person of the client and regardless of whether therapeutic success is seen to depend on technical skillfulness. According to Yalom (1980), it is easy to think that the client is responding to some technique, when the crucial variable might have to do with our humanness. Thus differences in personal characteristics may be more important to effectiveness of therapy than differences in technique.

This focus on humanness and personhood, which in many ways can be construed as reacting to cold mechanistic ways of approaching human relationships, and to the way in which we have "grown strangely distant from the struggle of individuals to find purposes in their lives" (Simon, 1986, p.34), will be discussed in more detail in the rest of the chapter. As Satir (1987) puts it:

We started out knowing that the person of the therapist could be harmful to the patient. We concentrated on ways to avoid that. Now we need to concentrate on ways in which the use of self can be of positive value in treatment. (p.25)

### **Acknowledging the Importance of the Therapist's Self - Contextual and Conceptual Contributors**

#### **A brief historical perspective**

During the years following World War II, after a period of immense destruction brought about by conflict between imposed collective group identities, a

renewed appreciation of people's uniqueness and of the value of human suffering for growth, appeared. [See, for example, the work of Frankl (1963, 1966, 1985)]. Duhi (1983) suggests that the realization of people's inherent capacity to destroy, not only others through genocide, but also themselves in the process, might have brought forth the corrective humanistic psychology termed a revolution by Maslow (1962). This Third Force in psychology rested on a view of person as a social, interactive being and openly sanctioned values and processes that contributed to the self-actualization of people. Similarly, the movement towards a more humanistic psychology was accepted by many therapists who also found the reductionism and determinism offered by the Freudian view unsatisfactory. The authenticity of human experience became paramount. Belief in the self-actualizing potential of people led to the formation of the human potential movement during the 1960's and 1970's (Graham, 1990; Maslow, 1962). A centre point for this was the Esalen Institute in California where the development of human potential and the promotion of qualitative changes in being were emphasized through a focus on concepts such as awareness, self-actualization and peak experience, and a synthesis of Eastern and Western practices. Proponents of this movement are, however, criticized (Baldwin, D.C., 1987; Baldwin, M. 1987a) for carrying the idea of personal growth to the limits of personal license without developing a systematic and disciplined examination of its assumptions and implications. Each person's experience was regarded as valid in itself - a solipsistic approach that did not deliberate on social patterns.

Within therapy, the self of the therapist became an active ingredient, but was sometimes seen to be carried to a level of unrestrained self-expression and gratification. In the place of the rigidities of traditional psychology, there emerged a plethora of therapeutic philosophies, each based on individual style, inclination and popularity. Thus there was a move from an excessive dependency on rigid technique and theory to an excessive emphasis on idiosyncratic technique and philosophy. According to D.C. Baldwin (1987),

these were often more artificial and manipulative than the traditional approaches.

More recent attempts to bring order out of this chaos can be attributed to different sources and findings. Systems theory (in general) and a second-order cybernetic perspective (in particular) started offering more systematic ways of accounting for many of the facets recognized to be important in the therapeutic process (Keeney, 1983). The differences in outcome between clients treated with different approaches and techniques have been found to be rather minimal (Strupp, 1963, 1973) - throwing doubt on the usefulness of inventing more and more alternative techniques as a way of finding the answer as to what is healing. What the therapist and the client perceive to be critical or insightful moments in therapy, often differ dramatically (Standal & Corsini, 1959). This contributes to increasing numbers of therapists from all persuasions acknowledging that it is the unique nature of the therapeutic relationship and the personhood of the therapist which plays a critical role in the process of therapy (Baldwin, D.C., 1987; Rogers, 1951, 1961a, 1961b; Truax & Carkhuff, 1967; Truax et al., 1966). This awareness is seen by Baldwin, D.C. (1987) as coming close to what Buber referred to as the I-Thou relationship. Since many writers on the use of self in therapy [such as Baldwin, D.C. (1987) and Satir (1987)] draw on existential philosophy, as well as Buber's work early in this century, the basic tenets of these and a few other important influential theories and/or debates deserve special mention here.

### The Influence of Existential Philosophy

It is amongst other things through the attention that existential philosophers such as Kierkegaard (1959) drew to the world of subjective experience that the concept of the human being as both subject and object - as a self - emerged. Conceptualizations of self excited the attention of thinkers in different

disciplines, for example philosophers such as Heidegger (1962), sociologists such as Mead (1934), psychologists (clinicians) such as Rogers (1951), and theologians such as Tillich (1952, 1961).

In his seminal work, Kierkegaard (1959) objected to Hegel's efforts at uniting the ambiguities of life through positing a higher synthesis. He (Kierkegaard) insisted that life's polarities (such as good and evil) could not be solved or mediated, but that the person has to make a choice between them. In order to do this, the person has to turn from the world of thought to the realm of life as it is actually lived, believing that the examination of human experience in all its complexity is the only way to approach the question "What is the meaning of life?" Thus the safety of the authority of theory and abstract concepts have to be abandoned, which leaves the person faced with the full realization of the importance of the examination of own subjective experience (and thus of self).

Similarly, Husserl (1965) introduced the phenomenological method in philosophy, calling upon the person to examine her own experience. He saw the person's subjective consciousness or the consensual subjective (social) consciousness to be the deepest creative force of all that is (Storig, 1979). Heidegger (1962) (one of Husserl's pupils who declined the existentialist label) believed that we can learn something about the fundamental nature of the person through an analysis of her anxieties, in particular her fear of death. According to him, the person, in facing the idea of her own death as the absolute boundary, also encounters the importance and urgency of what he termed the *Dasein*, that is, to be in the world. He accepted life as fundamentally contingent, stating that the only way to live authentically is to accept our own finitude and to develop a capacity to care (*Sorge*) (Baldwin, D.C., 1987; Storig, 1979).

In general, the existential philosophers maintained that the only true absolute is that there are no true absolutes. This poses a fundamental question: "How does a person who needs meaning find meaning in a universe that has none?"

For centuries this question has been answered by simply positing a God-centered universe, but the influence of existentialist ideas on philosophers, theologians and psychologists has led to an increasing emphasis on the role of the person's own experience in her meaning making. One view is that each individual, in joining in the cosmic union, is provided with a personal sense of meaning (as exemplified in the work of De Chardin, 1955). Camus (1942), in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, starts this philosophical treatise with the question: what is the point in continuing to live? He considers how each person needs to contemplate her own living in trying to understand why she does not commit suicide. Even the radical existentialist Sartre (1950; 1956) maintains that the development of a sense of self-worth enables one to tolerate the irony created by the tension between human aspiration for meaning and feeling that the world is indifferent to you.

Different psychological theorists clearly acknowledge their existential roots. Frankl (1963, 1985), drawing on these ideas as well as his personal experience, coined the word logotherapy ("logos" = meaning) to indicate his central concern with the problem of meaning. He posited that what the person desires is not a tensionless state (as suggested by Freud's homeostatic principle), but rather a struggle for a goal that is worthy of her. He did not see the therapist as a teacher. It is not up to the therapist to get the client to see the world as she herself does. Rather, she should enable the client to see the world, as he put it, as it is (Frankl, 1963, 1966, 1985).

Laing (1965, 1969) postulated a real and a false self. He believed that the failure to successfully identify each and to distinguish between them is characteristic of patients with schizophrenia. He was deeply concerned with the act of confirmation or disconfirmation from both self and others in gaining a sense of self. He saw a sense of identity as requiring the existence of another by whom one is known, and a conjunction of this other person's recognition of one's self with self-recognition.

This is also the task of therapy: to make contact with the true self of the patient through understanding the existential world of the false self. The role of the therapist is to, from her own true self, affirm both the client's being and becoming, as well as the validity of her own unique experience.

Rogers (1951, 1961a, 1961b), in an effort to underscore his perception of the person seeking help as basically self-directing, started using the word "client" rather than "patient". His client-centered therapy, born from existential grounds, stresses the ability of and goal for the person of self-actualization and focuses on the inner phenomenological world of the client. Therapy is seen as one specialized example of constructive interpersonal relationships. The key elements of therapy are seen as the immediacy of the therapist's presence and her attitudes, rather than as skills and techniques. Rogers, in his well-known specifications of the basic ingredients critical to the success of therapy, focused pointedly on the way the therapist is available as a human being in relating to the client. These ingredients or conditions are: the therapist's authenticity, genuineness and congruence, her complete acceptance and unconditional positive regard for the client, and her sensitive and empathic understanding.

In brief then, the contribution of existentialist ideas to the field of psychotherapy can be seen to be the positing of the therapist as a fully available person in a meaningful encounter with another. Most of the ideas referred to here contain in some way or another the notion that people find meaning in their own living and in themselves through encountering their own struggles (and through that themselves) within connection/disconnection, or, to put it differently, through their participation in community. As Tillich (1961) puts it:

a person becomes a person in the encounter with other persons, and in no other way... This interdependence of man and man in the process of becoming human is a judgement against a

psychotherapeutic method in which the patient is a mere object for the analyst as subject. (p.15)

### The Influence of Buber's Ideas

Buber (1955, 1965) was concerned with the person's three vital relationships, that is, those between God and person, person and person, and person and nature. He held that the person's relationship with the Great Thou, or God, enabled her to participate in I-Thou relationships with other human beings. It is specifically his conceptualization of the I-Thou relationship that often informs the writing on the use of self in therapy. For Buber, the I-Thou establishes the world of relation into which both parties enter in the fullness of their being, with a sense of and appreciation for the subject and object in both. It is a relationship characterized by mutuality, presentness, immediateness and intensity (Friedman, 1965).

This relationship is contrasted with the I-It relationship in which others are regarded as mere tools or conveniences. A positivistic scientific method that rests on the machine metaphor as person, is the most highly perfected development of the I-It relationship and way of knowing. It is a process through which preconceived ends can be met, but through which the person's wholeness or uniqueness can never emerge or be known of.

The I-Thou relationship, however, is not a means to an end. It is not fixed in time and space. It is immediate and enduring, always there in potentiality, waiting to be released. This relationship is also seen by Buber (1970) to be responsibility - a reciprocal process of giving yourself by saying You to the other. Self-realization, then, is the by-product and not the goal of this process: The person becomes an I through a You.

Buber (1970) holds the highest expression of the I-Thou relationship to be the confirmation of the other. Mutual confirmation becomes the key element in the definition of the self. The person is seen to be so in need of definition and confirmation of her self that she will be willing to be falsely confirmed (instead of in her true, present, authentic self) than not confirmed at all. Buber calls this an act of seeming rather than being. True confirmation, however, is mutual, and involves making the other fully present in her fullness and uniqueness.

Friedman (1965) refers to a conversation between Buber and Rogers in 1957 in which he (Buber) showed that although many of his ideas usefully inform the realm of psychotherapy, they also go beyond some comparable concepts from that world. His conceptualization of confirmation, for example, goes beyond Rogers' idea of unconditional positive regard (or even Heidegger's notion of *Sorge*). He also pointed out that genuine dialogue can not be arranged in advance, and is granted rather than created. For him the essential quality of therapy is authentic presence, in other words being totally present, in tune with the other, without boundary.

He affirmed that the deciding quality in therapy is the therapist and not the technique. Friedman (1965) quotes him as saying:

There are two kinds of therapists: One who knows more or less consciously the kind of interpretation of dreams he will get; and the other...who does not know. I am entirely on the side of the latter, who does not want something precise. He is ready to receive what he will receive. He cannot know what method he will use beforehand. He is, so to speak, in the hands of his patient. (p.37)

## The Influence of Acknowledging the Observer as Participant

Postmodern traditions that shifted the observer's/ researcher's/knower's position away from one of being a demagogue or the only expert (as described in Chapter 1), contributed a great deal to the acknowledgement of the importance of the self of the therapist.

Firstly, different views, such as the second-order cybernetic perspective (Keeney, 1983), as well as other less structural accounts (Gergen, 1991; Sampson, E.E., 1989), gave clear theoretical renderings of how the act of observation shifts what is being observed. Thus, the observer (therapist) always influences what is being observed and the meaning(s) that are being construed. Most specifically, the observer's (therapist's) own qualities are of paramount importance in this process. Following this, the therapist can only be seen as unavoidably part of the treatment situation, both as change agent and as herself. She cannot choose to be in or out, only to be aware of her self or not.

Secondly, the assumed hierarchical nature (in modernist thinking) of the relationship between observer-observed, intervenor-intervenee, therapist-patient, shifted. Different views of their (changing) roles are often conceptualized along continuums of authority and submission, as well as activity and passivity (Baldwin, D.C., 1987; Foucault, 1973, 1982; Hollender & Szasz, 1956). The major development has been in the increasingly active and participatory role afforded to both parties. Compare, for example, Rogers' (1951, 1961a, 1961b) contribution of referring to self-responsible "clients" rather than helpless "patients" and seeing the therapist's role as one of assisting rather than pushing growth.

Thus, new models of treatment could emerge within which the therapist could begin to form a partnership with the client. Within this context the therapist's use of self can become the main tool for change. It helps her to build trust and

rapport so that more risks can be taken. The therapist as participant also interacts personally and humanly, and becomes a self interacting with another self. In this the client participates in a real and life-giving context (Andolfi, Angelo & De Nichilo, 1989; Satir, 1987).

#### The Influence of a Concern about Power Issues in the Therapeutic Relationship

Views on the importance of taking into account the self of the therapist when considering the usefulness of the therapeutic process also stemmed from a concern about the use of power in therapy. Many voices have warned about the potential danger inherent in a context such as therapy which can be seen to afford one party far-reaching powers of impacting very intimately on the other (Flaskas & Humphreys, 1993; Foucault, 1979, 1980, 1982; Goldner, 1993; Langs, 1985; Satir, 1987; Szasz, 1961). When the authoritarian doctor-patient relationship is experienced as one of dominance and submission, it can become tempting for the therapist to live out her own needs for control. In this way the therapist can, for example, replicate negative childhood experiences of the client. The misuse of power can appear to be benevolent, such as "I know what is best for your own good" or "Since I am the one who is helping you, you should be grateful" (Satir, 1987). This, of course, is a classic abusive pattern. When it appears in the therapeutic relationship, it can mirror other problematic experiences for the client and be severely destructive. (For more detail on the debate on the problem of power in treatment, refer back to the discussion in Chapter 1 of Foucault's work.)

It is easy for the therapist to negate power issues or certain influences her personal functioning may be having in therapy. It is tempting, for example, to blame the client for feeling stuck in therapy. Power issues can also easily be disguised as rescuing, taking sides, rejection and so forth, always putting the responsibility for these problematic processes on the shoulders of the client. A

therapist who has not sufficiently faced the difficulties of her own past, as for example experienced in her own family, can have something activated in herself by the client(s) while continuing to be unaware of this. She can thus make the client into someone from her own past, while denying this pattern or distortion of needs. In order to deal with the danger of misusing power, it is seen as important that the therapist always find ways of finding a reasonable measure of awareness of her own functioning as a person in therapy.

Pointing out the danger that can be done by a therapist who is not aware of how she uses herself, Satir (1987) focuses on specific aspects of the therapist's functioning, such as how she uses power, how she deals with her vulnerability and how congruently she acts. She continues to explicate the processes through which power can be used and abused. In general she conceives of the use of power as a function of the therapist's self. It is related to her self-worth, which governs the way in which she handles her ego needs. According to Satir, power issues in therapy are not purely contingent on the specific formal approach (although she does note Dreikurs (1960), who confirms that some therapeutic models more openly conceive of the patient in a submissive role). Therapists themselves should thus acknowledge that they are just as vulnerable as clients are.

The importance of the therapist becoming aware of self, is not reduced by Satir (1987) to efforts at controlling her own reactions and needs. She notes that power has two faces: the first encompasses controlling the other, the second, empowering the other.

The implication of this is that if power is contingent on the therapist's use of self, then she has to find a way of being personally present in the therapy situation in such a way that her own self and experience can become part of building a (mutually) empowering and healing context. Thus the importance for the therapist is to also openly acknowledge and pursue her own needs and ability to grow within the therapy context (similar to the client's process). [Satir (1987)]

also sees this as one way of avoiding burn-out]. For people to be able to grow and be healed they need a context of trust, openness and emotional honesty, within which they can make themselves vulnerable. It is the therapist's responsibility to start creating this context. This she can do by modelling a willingness to enter into such a context herself, by daring to be congruent. This, more than anything else, requires a sensitivity not just to the other, but to her own state. Thus her awareness of, and way of using her own experiences and feelings, become the most important key to building a healing place.

This requires a moment in which the therapist and client both become vulnerable, and not a context within which the client becomes an opportunity for the therapist to confirm her own expertise. By focusing primarily on a technique or theoretical construct, the therapist can be unaware of what she is transmitting. This can easily put the client in a one-down position from which she develops even more defenses, this time against the therapist. The therapist can then conceptualize this reaction as resistance in such a way that she once again does not have to examine her own contribution of personal unavailability to this vicious circle (Satir, 1987).

In the therapist using herself in such a way that honesty and trust is built, a deeper level of communication with the other and self becomes possible. The therapist herself thus also enters into an intimate experience where not only the other, but also the self is encountered in a useful way. This can be compared to what Buber (1970) called the I-Thou relationship, as discussed previously.

All of the influences discussed above can be seen as contextual, philosophical and epistemological antecedents to the emergence of the concept of the importance of the use of self in therapy. This valuing of subjective experience (amongst all participants) has found increasingly detailed expressions in different domains of the therapy process. One example is the way in which this focus is accounted for during the training of therapists. This process will be

discussed in more detail as example of how abstract ideas about the use of self are operationalized in the realm of therapy.

## CHAPTER 5

### ACKNOWLEDGING THE IMPORTANCE OF THE THERAPIST'S SELFHOOD: IMPLICATIONS FOR TRAINING AND THERAPY

A valuing of subjective experience and of the personhood of the therapist has implications not only for the therapy context, but also for training as such.

#### **Acknowledging the Importance of the Use of Self During Training**

The importance of the self is stressed by some trainers already during the formal initial training of the psychotherapist (Andolfi, Angelo, Menghi & Nicolò-Corigliano, 1983; Duhi, 1983, 1987; McDaniel & Landau-Stanton, 1991; Snyders, 1986). This focus implies an acknowledgement of the personhood of both the trainer and trainee as the major instruments of change (during training as it would be during therapy). It is suggested that trainers, through their use of self, find a way of using the strengths and personal idiosyncrasies of the trainees to push them towards creativity in the training context (Andolfi & Menghi, 1980, 1982). This is seen as the beginning of a never-ending process of growing into more of an improvisational artist (Keeney, 1990).

A more detailed view of this process will be given in this section. As mentioned before, within the field of psychotherapy a plethora of models of human behaviour, intervention and change exist. Likewise, an abundance of training interventions and strategies have been developed. The aim here is not to give a full overview of these, but rather to render an account of the principles typically

involved, as well as some examples of how these are translated into practice. Similarly, the full theory underpinning therapy and training (especially the versions that openly acknowledge the importance of the therapist's self) is not in focus here. A deliberate preference is given to discussions of the ways in which self is thought about and accounted for in the training of psychotherapists. For the sake of coherence, a brief discussion of epistemological assumptions in different versions of systems thinking, especially as it underpins training, will be given. The choice of this paradigm (apart from being in keeping with the author's epistemology of choice) rests on the fact that it is within this field of thinking that, firstly, an explicit move to the inclusion of the observer was made, and secondly, ideas of how to account for self during training, often emanate.

#### Paradigmatic Stances Within Systems Thinking and Implications for Training - Encountering Interconnection

According to Duhl (1983), how we think is always a combination of what is around us in all our contexts and what can be imagined. The way in which the self of the therapist is addressed in this study, is heavily influenced by many historical emanations. These especially emerged during growing efforts (mostly since the middle of this century) at finding a language to accommodate a recognition of context, as well as the interrelatedness between everything. The following brief rendering of some important parts of this journey also serves to illustrate how the content that was being studied was mirrored in the process of the inquiry. This pattern, which recognizes the observer's/researcher's role in what emerges, is also central to the epistemology that was being generated here - one that would eventually similarly recognize the therapist's personal impact on her professional functioning.

### A Condensed Historical View

The gradual realization that life takes place in context, once acknowledged, had startling effects in the mental health arena, amongst other fields. During the 1950's researching and working with schizophrenic patients became the cutting edge for much of the new paradigmatic development that was in store. For example, Bowen (1965) and his colleagues noted that those patients who had progressed under psychoanalytic therapy (the prominent treatment of the day), regressed again once they had met with their families. Other researchers and clinicians [such as Jackson, Whitaker and Wynne (see, for example, Jackson, 1959)] also met with such contextually shifting behaviour. They started asking questions about the switches in behaviour and meanings of language when contexts shifted. Work with the families of schizophrenics started being done actively and in depth during this time (compare, for example, the work done during the 1950's by Bowen, Satir, Wynne and Whitaker [see, for example, Wynne, Ryckoff, Day & Hirsch, 1958]). (The exception here is Ackerman who had been seeing non-hospitalized neurotic families since the mid-1930's while working at the Jewish Family Service in New York.)

Recognition of the effects of context also spread beyond the world of schizophrenia. Bowen (1978) started noting that ordinary people (somewhat similar to his schizophrenic patients) tend to revert to less individuated and less autonomous behaviours when with their families of origin for any period of time (see also Anonymous, 1972). Wynne (Wynne et al., 1958) started including a noting of his own reactions in his studies. For example, he spoke of the feeling of going crazy himself while working with schizophrenic families (Duhl, 1983).

These early explorers found themselves in strange territory. The questions that were emerging could not be dealt with through any of the then conceptual artefacts offered by the positivistic worlds of psychology and psychiatry. They had to turn to other disciplines. Within some other fields, researchers were

struggling with similar issues, such as Ackoff (1959), a leading figure in the development of operations research, and the mathematician Wiener (1948, 1954), who was working in information cybernetics. An important and most influential example of the collaboration across the boundaries of disciplines was offered by the team that came together at the Palo Alto Hospital in California between 1954 and 1956. The communication patterns of schizophrenic families were being studied by a group consisting of Jackson (a psychiatrist and the only clinician in the group), Bateson (an anthropologist), Haley (from the field of mass communication) and Weakland (a chemical engineer and anthropologist). Through this interdisciplinary collaboration these researchers were living out the principle that they were encountering: that the interrelations between different systems as well as the parts of a system cannot be denied.

Another example of such an interdisciplinary group was the collection of people brought together by Grinker to participate in four conferences, beginning in 1951, with the purpose of developing leads toward the unification of behaviour theory (Gray & Rizzo, 1969). They consisted of, amongst others, Ruesch, Spiegel and Frank - figures representing many disciplines, all within which the chief concern was to understand human behaviour. The report of these symposia were published in 1956 under the title *Toward a Unified Theory of Human Behavior* (Grinker, 1956). These collections of people illustrated vividly, through their successful collaboration, the integrative potential of general systems theory. Furthermore, they became examples of how the act of inquiry can change the inquirer, implying, once again, that the researcher (therapist) is part of and affected by her professional endeavours, and vice versa, in ways which she cannot foresee.

Auerswald (1969) points this out in drawing a distinction between interdisciplinary and ecological approaches. He maintains mainly that, in the former, each contributor can maintain the vantage point from within her own (original) discipline - thus pre-empting, as well as fragmenting, the answers to emerge. In the ecological or systems approach (within which the

abovementioned groups fit), however, the vantage point of the data collector is changed.

Auerswald (1969) proceeds to comment on how the systems thinker thus does not work in a context of safety. Her fuller participation and openness could land her in a crisis of uncertainty and not knowing, but through this, she can attain new and empowering (to all) levels of thinking. This is in contrast with the clinical scientists who are the products of the specialized fragmentation of the modernist world of science. They can get caught up in the highly specialized sequence prescribed by their own content-based training and intradisciplinary experience, upon which they seem to depend for the very definition of their personal identity. Acknowledgement of the notion of relative and context-bound truth would challenge them to rearrange not only their cognitive styles and professional ways of living, but also their total lifestyles if they were to maintain any sense of integrity. It would mean a turbulent period of disintegration and reintegration, of being willing and able to tolerate the fragmentation of identity boundaries.

Instead, the safety of seeming truths enables you not to have to face yourself, your own not-knowing and thereby to risk transition. It enables you to maintain the sense of being in the right, of self-esteem, of values and of status in the vertical hierarchies of society. Constructing a world that is sufficiently fragmented to enable you to deny your full participation in what emerges and can emerge, is, according to Auerswald (1969), abdicating responsibility. A system that does this epistemologically and/or practically, is the one, he says, really deserving of the prefix *schizo-*.

This description is not applicable to the Palo Alto group. Through their full and open collaboration, venturing into unknown territories, they did groundbreaking work on communication in systems, tracking it through logical types and self-regulating feedback loops of cybernetic theory (Bateson, Jackson, Haley & Weakland, 1956) and adding the concept of homeostasis from the world of

medicine (Watzlawick, Beavin & Jackson, 1967). Their work is an example of much of the investigations done that contributed to a major epistemological shift, away from the metaphor of the machine studied in isolation, to a consideration of how all parts flow into the generation and perpetuation of patterns in systems. Additionally, their work is typical of much of the development done in various places, in that it started with efforts at explaining systems that contained at least one societally wayward character, and through these investigative findings (typically from extreme families) started developing guidelines, parameters and rules for the functioning (for example, the clear communication) of any system in interaction.

In this way Bateson and his colleagues (Bateson et al., 1956) managed to synthesize the ideas found in new science (as developed by physicists such as Planck and Einstein) with Wiener's (1948, 1954) work on information cybernetics, as well as Von Bertalanffy's (1969) contributions on general systems theory into an evolutionary paradigm. It contributed to the development of a new epistemology, a new set of rules that govern thinking - rules that challenged the predominant modernist thought system of the Western world.

The main themes in the shifts of thinking embodied in such postmodern approaches to the world were discussed in Section 1. The following scheme of Auerswald's (1985) presenting the main differences (in and) between the old Western epistemology and (what is generally termed) the new epistemology, can serve here as a brief reminder of these shifts.

New Physics and Batesonian  
Evolution

1. A monistic universe is assumed.
2. The concept of fourdimensional timespace

Newtonian Physics and Darwinian  
Evolution

1. A dualistic universe is assumed.
2. Time and space are treated separately by both.

is used by both.

- |                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                              |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>3. Linear clocktime is viewed as a heuristically useful concept which does not, however, establish causative relationships between events.</p> | <p>3. Linear clocktime is viewed as real time in which one event is causative in relation to the next event.</p>             |
| <p>4. "Mind" or abstract ideas are included as part of the field of study by both.</p>                                                            | <p>4. The field of study is perceived as mechanistic and separate from the studying of mind by both.</p>                     |
| <p>5. Both focus primarily on patterned events in four-dimensional context.</p>                                                                   | <p>5. Both focus primarily on atomistic examination of entities in space and progression of events in linear clock-time.</p> |
| <p>6. Certainty is discarded by both, truth is viewed as heuristic.</p>                                                                           | <p>6. Certainty is accepted by both, truth is viewed as absolute.</p>                                                        |

During the years to follow the contributions referred to above, the acknowledgement of context and interrelatedness were operationalized into therapeutic ideas and models in many places, specifically in the USA and Europe. In the USA new developments emerged - for example, from the Mental Research Institute (with Jackson and his colleagues), the Boston Family Institute (with Duhl, Kantor and others) and so forth (Duhl, 1983). Some of the most important work in Europe emanated from Italy (compare, for example, the work of Selvini-Palazzoli and her colleagues) where the closing of mental

hospitals and the consequent accommodation of mental patients within families and society, urgently necessitated a focus by the mental health practitioners on families. This once again illustrated the effect of context - here the role played by society and national mental health policy in the development of the fields of psychology and psychiatry.

The abundance of theoretical maps that emerged, expounding on human systems and fitting generally under systems thinking, can be seen as part of the move away from Newtonian and positivistic understandings of the world. Apart from the shared basic epistemology, they did, however also demonstrate a significant number of differences. Three different paradigmatic stances, each contributing to different models, will briefly be discussed here. The differing propositions on the definition of the interpersonal context of therapy training inherent in each of these paradigms will also be mentioned.

A number of views developed as to how the elements of a system relate (Sluzki, 1983). One is that the operation of a system can still be described as quite mechanistic in nature. In the family therapy field this view became known as "first-order cybernetics" (Hoffman, 1981; Keeney, 1983).

#### First-Order Cybernetics - Viewing Systems From the Outside

The cybernetic model suggests that the elements of a system are related through processes of recursive feedback activity. Recursiveness, through negative and positive feedback, explains how systems maintain *and* change their organization. Thus cybernetics capture the interrelation of stability and change and describe the mechanics of these through the use of concepts such as morphogenesis, morphostasis and homeostasis (Bateson, 1972; Jackson, 1968; Keeney, 1983; Keeney & Ross, 1985; Maruyama, 1963). The work of

Jackson (1968) and his colleagues represents important developments in this field.

This view of human activity has a distinct technological and mechanistic character (Hoffman, 1981). It is also selective in its focus. The observer is not included as part of the complex interrelated systems through which information is seen to be processed in systems.

Models resting on these paradigmatic assumptions typically focus on understanding the nature of the system in focus (usually families). Compare, for example, the structural approach to families propagated by Minuchin (1974) or the Milan model of family therapy developed by Selvini-Palazzoli and her colleagues (Selvini-Palazzoli, Boscolo, Cecchin & Prata, 1978).

Training seen from this paradigmatic stance would most typically consist of becoming au fait with complex ways of conceptualizing systems. The self of the trainee, like the therapist herself, would not explicitly be seen as part of the integrative system. The functioning of human systems would be studied from the outside.

Proponents emphasizing the training of impersonal, technical skills include Haley (1976) and the earlier work of Minuchin (1974, 1978, 1980). They declared that the trainer or supervisor should focus on the actual therapy behaviours displayed by the practitioner and help her acquire the necessary therapeutic skills. The practitioner or trainee's life or personal experiences is not the object of either change or discussion in training. Haley (1976) especially advocated that training should be confined to helping the trainee evaluate the metaphor and function of the family's symptom, and then devise an intervention strategy. He asserted that the therapist's problems and personal life were not appropriate for the teaching context. The external focus in this training context was so strong that Haley reported that his clinical students were drafting a bill of rights generally precluding any trainer from inquiring into the personal life of a

therapy student, no matter how benevolently (Aponte & Winter, 1987; Haley, 1976; Minuchin, 1984; Minuchin & Fishman, 1981).

There were, of course, exceptions to this principle of training from the outside, like the training done from early on by Satir. Although her early contributions can be fitted under the first-order cybernetic paradigm, her training acknowledged another side. She, Bowen and Ackerman were some of the first people to start formal training programs in family dynamics during the 1950's. However, of these three generative approaches, hers was the only to include the trainee's personal issues in some way. She focused explicitly on trainees' researching of their own families for a three-generational factual and chronological history, as the matrix of family influences by which the trainees were themselves shaped. Later on Bowen had trainees explore their own family histories as well (Duhl, 1983).

These were antecedental to later paradigmatic moves to formally include the observer as part of the observed system. This became known as second order-cybernetics in the field of family therapy (Hoffman, 1993; Keeney, 1983).

### Second-Order Cybernetics and Self-Referentiality

Whereas first-order cybernetics can be seen as the cybernetics of observed systems, second-order cybernetics, in including the observer in the focus, can be seen as the cybernetics of observing systems (Maruyama, 1963; Von Foerster, 1981). An emphasis on the observer's role in constructing what is being observed, contributed to the development of approaches that came to be termed constructivist (Efran & Lukens, 1985; Keeney & Ross, 1985).

Thus the observer/therapist steps out of her outside position into a reflexive or self-referential stance (Keeney, 1983). She has to acknowledge that who she is

in a context and what else emerges from that context, mutually determine each other.

This emphasis connects with Maturana and Varela's (1987) idea of structural self-determinism. This theory emphasizes both the self-creating nature of living systems and the central role that language plays in shaping human activity. Human systems are seen to be organized in such a way that they maintain themselves through constant self-referral processes. This implies that their functioning is dependent on their own structure and organisation, and not on external perturbation. Thus the system, in determining its own responses, is informationally closed and autonomous.

Two important conclusions follow from this view (Maturana & Varela, 1987). Firstly, what the observer perceives is determined by her own organization rather than the qualities of the observed. Secondly, instructive interaction as a concept is viewed as questionable. Living systems cannot be changed in an instructive way.

This also implies that systems cannot change to fit the environment. Rather, the challenge for structure-determined systems is to find a mutually satisfying fit - termed a structural coupling - with other systems and the environment (termed the medium) (Maturana & Varela, 1987).

Structural coupling in interpersonal contexts is facilitated and attained through the use of language. Mutually satisfying interactions generate a consensual domain, which creates the illusion of a single reality, whilst we actually function amidst a multiverse of realities (Maturana, 1988; Maturana & Varela, 1987).

The implications for training of a second-order cybernetic perspective very clearly implies an overt inclusion of the role of the trainee/therapist in constructing what is being understood, as well as what happens. This

participation is not only on a controlled and intellectual level, but also touches on the full personhood of the trainee/therapist.

Satir and Bowen, as mentioned in the previous section, were some of the earliest proponents of stressing internal, personal skills. They saw the basic task of the training program to lie in assisting trainees to become more personally integrated, thereby becoming more able to intervene in the lives of clients with a greater range of choice, insight and creativity. By being able to recognize their own selective psychological blindness better, trainees will have increased access to their own wisdom in therapy (Bowen, 1972; Satir, 1987; Satir & Baldwin, 1983). Bowen (1972) (although repeatedly emphasizing the need for, and development of, theory) is unequivocal in his focus on the development of the person of the therapist/trainee. Aponte and Winter (1987) quote him as saying "I am not training people to utilize techniques or telling them how to say hello" (p.88).

Minuchin (1980, 1984), in more recent statements, also reveals a dissatisfaction with his earlier training approaches, acknowledging the limitations of a narrow focus on techniques. Gurman and Kniskern (1981), in a comprehensive review of family therapy outcomes, asserted that therapist relationship skills have increasingly revealed a relationship to treatment outcome.

Allowing for the central importance of the self of the trainee does not, however, imply a complete rejection of an external focus. Aponte and Winter (1987) propose a person-practice training model that stresses both external, technical and internal, collaborative skills. Their training utilizes the various contexts of a trainee/therapist's life, including her clinical, collegial and family relationships. This emerges from an ecological framework with the trainee/therapist's clinical practice as the central context or setting for training the person of the therapist. Andolfi and his colleagues (1983) suggested that trainers use the personal strengths and idiosyncrasies of trainees in pushing them towards creativity in the training context. Whitaker (1991) stresses the importance of training therapists to be present in the therapy circumstance in a personal way - not

vicariously, but so that it would be conducive to the construction of a transformation context. Duhl (1983) stresses the importance of the trainee/therapists becoming grounded in their own lives in such a way that they can learn to think about systems and change "from the inside out" (the title of her seminal work on training). All of these approaches imply the possibilities for growth and evolution inherent in accessing the social and personal processes of self, rather than trying to find the (externally) general way in training and therapy.

Second-order cybernetics, likewise, is critical of the principle of human systems working to maintain equilibrium, stating that this was not so much a generic quality of systems, than something attributed to it by observers (Dell, 1982; Dell & Goolishian, 1981). Instead of using the concept of equilibrium in some way to describe systems, conceptualizations can centre around systems' evolution.

### Evolutionary Systems - The Transformational Role of Crisis

Using nature as referent (Hoffman, 1981), a perspective developed that saw the development of patterns in systems not so much as a byproduct of their striving for return to a presumed steady state (equilibrium), than as the result of instability. Living systems are seen as permanent instabilities in constant evolution. →

Much of the acknowledgement within the field of therapy of systems as being evolutionary (Dell & Goolishian, 1981; Elkaim, 1981, 1985; Hoffman, 1981) is based on the work of the physicist Prigogine (Prigogine, 1980; Prigogine & Stengers, 1984). Prigogine and Stengers (1984) note that modern science's fascination with the discovery of eternal laws at the core of nature's transformations exorcises the idea of time and becoming. They comment on how people, however, in seeking general all-embracing schemes that could be

expressed in terms of eternal laws, have instead found time, events and evolving particles. They searched for symmetry and instead found symmetry breaking processes on all levels, from elementary particles up to biology and ecology. Thus Prigogine and his colleagues started formulating complex understandings of how all systems are constantly becoming, finding order through chaos in a non-equilibrium ordering process, without the effort of an external force.

In short, Prigogine (Prigogine, 1980; Prigogine & Stengers, 1984) explained the phenomenon of systems evolving via discontinuous, self-transcendent leaps by introducing the concept of dissipative structures. These structures draw energy from outside the system to enhance growth, but attain the conditions necessary for discontinuous change into new formations from the fluctuations within the system. Dissipative structures occur only when the system is away from equilibrium and when a discontinuous supply of energy or matter is present. When a critical value of the system's parameters is reached, a discontinuous shift or "bifurcation" (Prigogine & Stengers, 1984, p.160) occurs. At the point of bifurcation, however, transformation becomes inevitable but unpredictable (for example, in which direction the system will change, as well as which of the system's own fluctuations will affect the transformation). It is stated, though, that the further the system is away from equilibrium, the greater the number of possible states there are into which the system can settle following a critical perturbation (Elkaim, 1981; Lazlo, 1972, 1986; Nicolis & Prigogine, 1977; Prigogine, 1980; Prigogine & Stengers, 1984).

Furthermore, the establishment of a dissipative structure is accompanied by the appearance of a new function related to this structure. This brings about a higher level of interaction between the system and the structure. Prigogine described this pattern as evolutionary feedback. He also maintained that with increased dissipation, the class of fluctuations leading to instability is extended. Thus increased entropy production is brought about, which in turn leads to more instabilities appearing. In essence then, living systems can be seen to

evolve towards the maximal complexity attainable given the energy available from the environment. This implies greater variability, flexibility and a higher order of process - eventually becoming metastable and able to shift easily from one dynamic order to another (Dell & Goolishian, 1981; Lazlo, 1972; Prigogine, 1980; Prigogine & Stengers, 1984).

This evolutionary perspective has some important implications for the training of psychotherapists. To start off with it recognizes the possibility for trainees of evolving as therapists. However, it also acknowledges that the impetus for change does not necessarily emanate primarily from the trainer's external input. Constructivist and constructionist approaches to intuition foster intuitive understanding of academic disciplines by treating them as conceptual territories that can be imaginatively entered. The art of instruction lies in the evocative presentation of ideas that point beyond themselves (Stuewe-Portnoff & Stuewe-Portnoff, 1995).

Furthermore, the importance for the trainee of crises in her own living as points of bifurcation, is strongly implied. The importance of the trainee's personal experiences as transformational in her growth as a therapist is thereby undeniably acknowledged. The challenge for training then becomes one of co-creating a context for evolution as a therapist through personal transformations. This does not imply a push for the trainee to become increasingly familiar with the how-to's of the job, but rather for the trainee to become increasingly able to access, evolve and move within the multiplicity of her selves within different forms of interaction, by learning to live (that is, to find a metastable position) within her own and the world's uncertainties.

This necessitates an understanding of the seemingly external and internal world, as well as of scientific and ethical values, not as mutually exclusive or orthogonal, but as part of the same constructions we make of time and space. This implies an ethical responsibility in the way we join with the constant transformations that make up living.

Realizing the potentially enormous number of bifurcations involved in complex systems such as people and societies, leads, according to Prigogine and Stengers (1984), both to hope and despair. The hope lies in the potential of even small fluctuations to grow and change overall structures. The despair is embodied in the way the security of stable permanent rules in the universe seems to be gone forever. To the trainee and therapist, this means not being able to live and work with a sense of blind and secure confidence. Rather, what is needed is a feeling of qualified hope. Prigogine and Stengers (1984, p.313) illustrate this kind of position with the kind of hope attributed to the God of Genesis by the Talmudic writer Neher:

Twenty-six attempts preceded the present genesis, all of which were destined to fail. The world of man has arisen out of the chaotic heart of the preceding debris; he too is exposed to the risk of failure, and the return to nothing. "Let's hope it works" (*Halway Sheyaamod*) exclaimed God as he created the World, and this hope, which has accompanied all the subsequent history of the world and mankind, has emphasized right from the outset that this history is branded with the mark of radical uncertainty.

The paradigmatic stances as outlined above provide one reality map of the evolving contexts of psychotherapy training as far as a focus on the self of the trainee/therapist is concerned. Not denying the multitude of realities around this content as around any other, an effort can be made at spelling out some central themes that emerge from this kind of focus on self in training.

## Training as a Catalyst for the Personal Development of the Trainee - Some General Themes

### Training as Treatment - Training as Impetus for Personal Development



Engaging in therapeutic work with clients is a social context which jostles a therapist's personal issues in ways that few other encounters do. Similarly, engaging in a training process that focuses on the use of self with clients leaves little of the trainee's internal life and patterns of relating untouched. Thus, training for the person of the therapist creates a circumstance within which the trainee/therapist can obtain an intervention for herself in the context of her training and work (Liddle & Saba, 1983).

Training can explicitly address the trainee's personal issues and struggles (as dilemmas brought to the foreground by the activity of providing treatment) and thereby become a potent stimulus to personal growth, fostering a variety of possibilities for change in the therapist herself.

Using oneself as a therapist means first to know one's self, to know the meanings one harbours, and where and when they come from. Thus an important aim of training is to heighten the trainee's awareness of her own thinking and believing at each stage of her life in order to rekindle that which has been dormant. The more trainees/therapists know about themselves and the others with whom they learn, the more they can move and learn with that which is generic in all people. Use of self requires that the trainee/therapist continually updates her life, while examining herself as an actor in the systems she is in (Anonymous, 1972; Duhi, 1983, 1987; Liddle & Saba, 1983; Satir, 1972, 1987).

Aponte and Winter (1987) point out that training (and therapy) is often a useful context for personal transformation as the trainee/therapist is not so locked in the same person-specific struggles as is typical of her interactions with her own family. They point out certain components of the training and therapeutic process that can be catalytic in the trainee's transformational process. One of these is that training/therapeutic circumstances can enhance the trainee/therapist's motivation and courage to face difficult struggles, as the forceful drive towards both professional achievement and a sense of fulfillment in her own living are served.

Duhl (1987) points out that using oneself as a trainee/therapist means being involved in an ongoing research project. This entails being curious about one's own reactions and intentions in varying contexts, and to locate the source of reactivity in one's learned-to-learn patterns. These patterns, developed in earlier contexts, give clues to the current context as well as the context of clients.

As much as training can provide treatment, an important challenge for the trainee is to learn how to construct all subsequent therapies into a similar training context that is also self-beneficial.

### Mutuality and Metamorphosis - Training the Person of the Therapist so that the Therapy Can Work for Her as Well

Therapy can be seen as a personal relationship operating within the parameters of a professional structure. Clients and therapists join together to create a new actively evolving entity, each participant bringing her distinctive life experiences, world views and personal issues to the process. The therapeutic circumstance creates yet another set of life experiences, impacting, due to the interrelatedness of all participants, on everyone in a non-reversible

way. The therapist's needs are typically subordinated to the client's. However, the treatment relationship, in affecting everyone, should also be beneficial to all participants.

From this perspective, therapists should and can actively utilize all that the therapist is as a person. Learning how to employ the therapeutic circumstance in such a comprehensive manner is training the person of the therapist.

The trainee/therapist must be aware of what she brings into the relationship and learn to manage herself and her personal dynamics firstly for the welfare of her clients. Moreover, she needs to be aware of how the therapy is affecting her personally. Learning to make the therapy she conducts with other systems work for herself as well is also part of the training of the person of the therapist.

The positive outcome of treatment (for all participants) is dependent on the trainee/therapist's successful harnessing of herself and also her own needs for healing within the social negotiation of the therapy. (The importance of the therapist's own vulnerabilities will be discussed in more depth later in this chapter.)

Aponte and Winter (1987) confirm the extent to which the therapeutic situation can act as a catalyst for the trainee/therapist's own growth through vicarious change. By guiding a client in certain ways through a process of change, the trainee/therapist can also be addressing a complex, difficult problem for herself. The same understandings, directions and suggestions that she is giving to the client, she might unwittingly be giving to herself.

This personal shifting of the trainee/therapist can evolve through many different nuances of the therapeutic process. Partaking in this process, even in the role of the professional(-to-be), means entering a domain different from the typical dances of daily interaction. It becomes a domain within which risking and revealing is dared, where people find the courage to travel to unknown

territories. The therapist becomes personally part of this space. Paradoxically, being in the seemingly protective role of the therapist can also serve to lower the self-protective shields of the therapist since she is not the overt target of change. Thus, in guiding the client through unknown places where certainties about self are left behind, can also bring a new awareness to the trainee/therapist of pain and issues of her own living which until that point had remained buried.

Thus, due to these catalytic forces, the conduct of therapy can create unique opportunities for transformational shifts for both the client(s) and the therapist. Guiding a trainee to be able to conduct therapy in this way is one of the most important tasks of training.

### Training for Improvisation

As already mentioned repeatedly, many proponents point out the importance of trainers and trainees using themselves and not their techniques as the major instruments of change (Andolfi & Menghi, 1980, 1982; Duhi, 1983; Keeney, 1990; Snyders, 1986).

This implies that the implementation of a single training package that all trainees are exposed to, is inappropriate. A training context has to evolve within which increasing attention can be paid (during training as well as evaluation) to individual differences and resources amongst trainees and the development of such personal skills (Perlesz, Stolk & Firestone, 1990).

Furthermore, given the unpredictable nature of human interaction and communication, trainees need to learn to move away from impersonating others or following rigid ideas of how to conduct themselves in therapy. Such positions would only block their full participation in the therapeutic circumstance. Instead,

they have to develop their own improvisational style, fully informed by both their own limitations and resources, in order to step into the full aesthetics of themselves-in-context. The continual development of the trainee/therapist's capacity to respond creatively in life situations, as well as in therapy, and to be in touch with her existential core in relation to her life in context at each period in time, becomes important. Through this she learns to play with options for herself to be able to access a wide range of stances and roles from which to choose. Then she has many ways to invent metaphor, humour and ways of making the familiar strange and the strange familiar (Duhl, 1983, 1987; Gordon & Poze, 1973; Keeney, 1990).

Similarly, the training context needs to create situations in which the trainee is invited to improvise. Such situations would make it impossible for the trainee to rely on previously (externally) attained lines, scripts, ways or habits, facilitating the necessity for the trainee to rely on her own resourcefulness in context (Keeney, 1990).

This kind of training demands most essentially of the trainer to be resourceful and improvisatory herself. She needs to diversify her own use of self in the training by, for example, relinquishing the role of expert and instructor. This could take the form of finding different ways of putting the trainees in charge of their own training, of getting beyond recipe and prescription by seeing the specific training situation as another chance for her own ongoing training, and moving beyond constant evaluation to an appreciation of creativity.

### Attachment Theory as Metaphor for the Training Process

General metamodels for the training of psychotherapists typically propose ways in which trainees and their environment (including trainers) should and can change over the course of the training process. Such developmental models do

not necessarily imply a reintroduction of a dependence on linearly causal time. Rather, these models can embody a diachronic aspect of the training system. A struggle with certain themes as part of the evolutionary process of training can be identified. These themes can contribute to the amplification of certain fluctuations that can again result in a complexity of bifurcations - embodying transformation through training.

Such models typically focus on themes or facets such as dependency-autonomy, separation-belonging, differentiation-imitation, and so forth (Andolfi & Menghi, 1980; Snyders, 1986; Stoltenberg, 1981; Worthington, 1987). These different languagings all contain some effort at addressing the way a person is herself with others. Stoltenberg (1981), for example, in his counsellor complexity model, proposed training to be a process consisting of four identifiable stages. At each of these stages he identifies trainee patterns as: Stage 1: dependency on the supervisor, imitating the trainer and subscribing to techniques; Stage 2: struggling between dependency and autonomy and fluctuating motivation; Stage 3: showing conditional dependency with increased empathy; Stage 4: adequate self- and other awareness. For each of these stages he prescribes optimal environments, which in essence entails the trainer's varying use of availability (for dependency, for the sake of, for example, support) and unavailability (for example, through the use of ambivalence, to push for the trainee's autonomy). The trainer aims for a more shared, mutual relationship, entailing the trainee's differentiation from a dependency relationship. Similarly Snyders (1986) noted that the trainer has to facilitate the unfolding of a learning context in such a way that the increased differentiation of all participants is encouraged. More specifically, the trainer has to promote the progressive emancipation of the trainee in order for her to eventually successfully separate from the training system.

These views illustrate important facets of the process of coming to be with your self/selves in a way that could also be healing for others. These facets, as

illustrated above, often deal with issues of connecting and disconnecting with others.

Training typically happens within a series of interrelated contexts, involving mainly the trainer(s), the individual trainees, the training group, punctuated client systems and the related systems which each trainer and trainee implicitly contribute to the complexity of context. Within these contexts circumstances that are appropriate for the encountering of issues of connection-disconnection are co-created. Through provocation (messages transmitted by the training group) and counter-provocation (formulations of training strategies in response to these messages) the trainer and trainees are able to influence the unfolding of a learning context (Andolfi & Menghi, 1980).

This form of provocation and counter-provocation is used to regulate the dynamic equilibrium between belonging and separation to favour the progressive individuation of each trainee therapist. For example, while guaranteeing full support and respect, the trainer can challenge, amplify or criticize the trainee's idiosyncratic behavioural patterns, functions and feelings (Andolfi & Menghi, 1980, 1982; Andolfi et al., 1983).

Different facets of such a process of building a useful learning context for therapy trainees can be viewed as follows:

#### Training as necessitating connection

For the trainee to encounter herself usefully, she needs to belong to some system(s) within which her issues of relating will not only play out, but can be addressed.

Typical initial provocations from trainees entail an implicit request for the safety and stability provided by the cohesion of, for example, a nurturant training group. This desire (analogous to that of the client entering therapy) entails an impossible task for the trainer: to help the trainee differentiate herself as a major instrument of change, while simultaneously providing and preserving previously attained patterns of safe and nurturing connection. If this kind of connection had to become possible fully and unequivocally, the trainee would partake in a process that really masks anonymity and thus pre-empts any new and fuller experience of self (Andolfi & Menghi, 1980).

The experience of the need for, and the building of, community is, however, not superfluous, but very important during training. Firstly, it creates a circumstance within which the trainee (and trainer) can become increasingly aware of the rules of interaction that she has typically constructed in the effort to escape the pain of impending change by reconsolidating previously attained equilibriums. It provides the opportunity for trainees to investigate how they hook others into their schemes and also get hooked into others' schemes. Secondly, a realm of connection or the sense of community also provide the opportunity for disconnection, thereby allowing for more awareness of the relationally constructed self and providing the chance for more senses of self to emerge. As explicated in Chapter 1, developing a sense of self necessarily implies interaction and co-creation with specific discursive communities. A change in these interactive patterns also brings movement in the patterns of interpretation of self.

### Training as necessitating disconnection

The trainer has to find ways of creatively introducing difference into the training process in order to facilitate the evolution of autonomy and in that, greater differentiation of self for the trainees. As mentioned in Section 1, an experience of difference can bring a person (i.e. the trainee) to a clearer sense of her typical experience of the world, relationship and self. That is, a relational or contextual sense of the parts can emerge more clearly (Bateson, 1972).

The potential for such shifts is embodied in an acknowledgement of the training system as a relational system in constant transformation. This also means that the introduction of difference does not happen at a given point in time, explicitly or unequivocally. Processes of joining and separation are constantly at work in training systems. These experiences are also both desired and feared by the participants. It is, for example, in the trainee's conflictive autonomy and dependency needs (Stoltenberg, 1981) that the template develops for a usefully uncomfortable move in her web of relatedness.

In her struggle to separate from the trainer, training context, well-worn ideas and old patterns of relating, the trainee increasingly differentiates and new senses of her self can be negotiated. Through this process she can increasingly come to trust herself, be able to reach inside herself, and come to tune into herself en route to other people. A simultaneous (if everchanging) sense of self and other can emerge and she can come to know that to be human is to unfold and conserve in varying degrees at different times (Duhl, 1987; Le Roux, 1987). Thus both her abilities to engage and separate in different ways in different contexts evolve through experiences of separation (which conversely imply experiences of connection).

The importance of crisis in building and accessing the multiplicity of self

As discussed in Chapter 3, the experience of crisis is closely linked to the experience of separation. The sense of crisis that can emerge for a trainee from the multitude of separation experiences in the learning process, or from gaining an awareness of old identities (of self and relationships) is an important impetus in separation from old selves and the building and accessing of new nuances of self in context.

Similarly, what is experienced by the trainee (and possibly the trainer) as a hindrance to her functioning as a therapist, can transform into an important resource of self. This necessitates, however, a stepping into the experience of crisis. The effort to escape from or to solve the crisis only results in the co-construction of a therapeutic or training impasse.

Andolfi demonstrates this principle in the handicap intervention work he does as part of training. The trainee is encouraged to face her existential dilemmas in order to help elicit the necessary resources to break the rigid, relational rules that impede differentiation. The purpose is to increase the trainee's response-ability - to help her access more sides of herself in building creative healing contexts. Thus, in facing the dragon of her own crises, she can move from handicap to handy capable (Haber, 1990).

## **Implications for Therapy of Acknowledging the Therapist's Personhood**

### **Implications for the Way the Treatment Context is Conceptualized**

#### **The Dilemma of the Personal Approach - The Need for a Disciplined Use of Self**

The same proponents of freeing therapists to be themselves, also engage in alerting them to the dangers of the undisciplined use of self (Satir & Baldwin, 1987). Collier (1987), for example, warns against the peril of egoism, adding that the therapist's over-centrality or dominance will guarantee failure in the goal of facilitating the client's process and experience.

In essence, it is stated repeatedly that the idea of training is not to allow a more comfortable context for the therapist in that she can now drift regardlessly with what happens to come up in her at the time. Rather, the issue in training and therapy is to find the bridge between the therapist's personal life and issues, and her actual conduct of treatment. Discipline and discomfort is implied in the therapist's constant (explicit and implicit) striving to enhance her ability to utilize her own life experiences, personal assets and struggles on behalf of her professional performance (Aponte & Winter, 1987; Satir, 1987).

The aim of this is clear and specific. She aims at generating effective therapeutic outcomes (where effectiveness is conceptualized in terms of the co-creation of transformational contexts) and supplementing her own efforts at enhancing her own living. Thus a call for the disciplined use of self in therapy does not imply linear constraints, but rather prescribes a commitment to participation in a process which is always in search of the confluence of profession and person, community and self, crisis and transformation.

## Moving from Prescribing Therapist Qualities to Facilitating the Co-creation of Healing Contexts

Earlier acknowledgements of the therapist as a person primarily endeavoured to conceptualize what the ideal qualities of an effective therapist are. These typically referred to characteristics that would also be evident outside of the actual context of therapy - thus implying assumptions about stable and cross-contextually predictable personality traits.

A typical example of this approach is the way in which Rogers' (1951) description of the three central aspects of effective therapist functioning (in brief: warmth, empathy and unconditional regard) have come to be conceptualized as characteristics and been prescribed (as basic requirements for a therapist) in a great deal of contexts in the world of therapy.

Another person who has over time spent a great deal of effort at ascertaining what constitutes the effective therapist, has been Gurman (Gurman, 1987; Gurman & Kniskern, 1981; Gurman, Kniskern & Pinsoff, 1986; Gurman & Razin, 1977). He summarized and ordered many variables identified and prescribed in different parts of the literature. However, he also concluded the inconclusiveness of the research done on this issue. (In fairness to Gurman (1987) it has to be mentioned that he steadfastly confirms the importance of continuing to scrutinize this issue, and ascribes past research failings to methodological problems.)

Some of the major examples of therapist characteristics that have been identified in the past, can be summarized in the following categories (Gurman, 1987):

Personality characteristics: These include honesty, perceptiveness, open-mindedness, caring, empathy, attitudes and values about intimate relationships, pathology, and so forth.

Mental health: These include formulations such as psychological integrity, being at ease with oneself, level of differentiation, and so forth.

Gender: These descriptions do not typically describe the desirability of one gender above another in the world of therapy, but rather acknowledge the different impact of different genders. Collier (1987), for example, describes the different voice of women therapists, in that they work more with and through themes of attachment, whereas men therapists more typically work with and through separation.

Experience level: Most typically a higher level of experience is associated with better therapeutic outcomes. An interesting variation on this theme is the suggestion that experience as an individual psychotherapist can be harmful (if not preclude) effectiveness as a family therapist (Haley, 1976).

Demographical variables: Variables such as race, social class and ethnicity are considered insofar as they can contribute to conflicting values or damaging stereotypes held by therapists about their clients.

Apart from seemingly "outside" qualities, such as those described above, the effective therapist can also be described as displaying some of the following in-process qualities:

Therapist styles: These include the ability to model meaning clarification and positive perception of clients; level of activity (in that the more active therapist is seen to have fewer early dropouts); expressions of the therapist's involvement rather than expressions of mere understanding; structuring skills such as directiveness, clarity, self-confidence, and so forth.

Therapeutic relationship skills: These most typically reflect the familiar triad of warmth, empathy and acceptance, or at least, some minimal level of empathic responsiveness.

As much as there are a myriad of such ideal therapeutic variables that have been identified until now, and as much as these apparent recipes have been criticized for including "a litany of virtues more suited perhaps to the most honored biblical figures than to any of their descendents" (Parloff, Waskow & Wolfe, 1978, p.235), a scrutiny of these lists does reveal one very specific theme. All of the descriptions convey some nuance of a process of engaging with another in a full and real way. This recognition could enable one to move beyond the seductions of mechanistic prescriptions. Rather, what can be prescribed is a process of healing that entails a fuller and more truthful encounter between two people, than what traditional authoritarian approaches allowed. Whatever the qualities and experiences that the therapist can access to help her engage in this way with a specific client at a specific time, those are the appropriate therapist qualities in that context. Thus the process of becoming a committed partner in the co-creation of a transformational healing context comes into focus, rather than the search for specific qualities.

Even Rogers, who is credited with the famous trilogy of prescribed therapist qualities (Rogers, 1961), describes this shift in himself over time. In a recent interview with Baldwin (Baldwin, M., 1987b) he says:

In the past, I could be understood at a purely cognitive level. However, as I became clearer as to what I was doing, academicians had to allow room for experiential learning, which is quite threatening, because, then, the instructor might have to become a learner, which is not popular in such circles. (p.51)

### Spreading Expertise: Moving from Private Practice to Partnership Process

In the traditional authoritarian doctor-patient relationship in therapy, the emphasis is on the therapist's special ability to apply acquired knowledge and theory. This imbues her with the right to decide (privately) what is best for the patient.

In contrast, in an approach to treatment that acknowledges the therapist's possible positive use of self, she (the therapist) can also begin to form a partnership with the patient. Both can work together utilizing their respective actions, reactions and interactions. Thus the treatment context becomes a life-giving and life-learning context between client and therapist, who can respond humanly and personally. In this partnership therapists become responsible for the initiation and continuation of the therapy process. They are not in charge of the clients within that process.

A partnership can allow for the empowerment of both therapist (also in her personhood) and client through the therapy process. This shift in approach is most basically predicted upon the belief that human beings have the capacity for their own growth and healing (Rogers, 1961; Satir, 1987; Yalom, 1980; 1989).

### Therapy as a Personally Co-created Process - Building Local Communities of Significance and Transformation

Allowing for the place of personal reactions and interactions from both the client and therapist, pre-empt the possibility of a predictable process in therapy. It also implies that the therapist cannot be the same person with the same (predictable) patterns across the boundaries of different therapy interactions.

Indeed, the therapist's self is not a bounded, singular and, above all, inner entity. Rather, it is an amalgam of endless fragments from many meaningful interactions with the world and others.

Thus, what will emerge for both the therapist and client in terms of self and meaning, is constructed within the specific social setting. The emergence of personal, local narratives and meanings are negotiated. The process between therapist and client entails the construction of a local community of significance (McNamee, 1992). This allows for a context within which both can become increasingly committed to and moved by what happens. Thus, the process is recursive. The therapist is positioned within the system and not as an expert acting upon it. Then the therapist facilitates change through the participation in, and active involvement and engagement with, the perceptions and experience of the client(s) (Real, 1990). Not only does personal involvement allow for a transformational therapeutic context, participation in this community of significance also allows for new experiences of a relational self to emerge. Thus the process of therapy becomes a (conscious or unconscious) process of self-exploration for both the therapist and client, of getting acquainted with one's own feelings and coming to accept them as part of self.

### Moving from a Focus on the Outcome to a Focus on the Journey

In the traditional authoritarian (modernist) medical model, emphasis is first on eradicating the symptom, with the hope that health will follow (Albee, 1982; Dunham, 1984; Mann, 1979). In a partnership process, however, what is acknowledged as transformational is the process of negotiating self and community in the relating between the therapist and the client. This allows for certain interpretations, explanations, experiences and lines of action to emerge, and for others to be constrained (Gergen, 1990).

Thus, therapy is most effective when the therapist's goals are limited to the process of therapy and not the outcome (Baldwin, M. 1987a; Collier, 1987). Similarly, the most important choice for clients is not which technique (and thus technician) will help them best, but which therapist will offer the widest and most flexible response as an individual to the clients as individuals. MB

The issue then for therapists is not whether a stance is adopted that is active or passive, inquiring or assertive, but rather whether a truly healing domain can be created, a fifth province in McCarthy's (McCarthy & Byrne, 1988) terms. This is a place where polarities and tensions are not to be obviated and solved, but rather encountered in a close and personal interaction, in order for the potential for transformation that lies within the tension of seeming impossibility, to emerge.

#### Redefining the Goal of Therapy: Expanding and Multiplying Existing Narratives and Discourses

Moving the focus away from the outcome to the journey of therapy necessitates a re-formulation of the goals of therapy. Traditionally the expectation has been that therapy in its problem orientation is there as part of an endeavour to allow people to live problem-free. What renders the goal of eradicating problems irrelevant is an understanding that posits the experience of problems as moments within which movements beyond the habitual patterns that keep people stuck, can emerge.

The constructionist stance proposes that psychotherapy is a linguistic context and process within which both therapist and client become participants with no clear vision of the ultimate destiny. Both of them and their senses of themselves have also been formed by their participation over time in other linguistic contexts. In other words, their ideas about themselves, their relationships and

their lives have been formed through language in relation to others (Gergen, 1989; Harré, 1989; Shotter, 1989). It is the narratives that people have formed in this way, its limitations, as well as the limitations of the particular discursive habits or language games at play in people's local communities of significance, that (in this perspective) constitute the problem.

Thus the aim of therapy becomes one of co-creating a context within which the patterns of previous habitual languaging can be broken out of, in order for everyone's narrative discourses to expand or multiply.

Clients frequently enter therapy with fixed and constrictive narratives that provide an articulation of their stance toward the world. They tell their first (which is also their usual) stories as though they were monologues: single-voiced, absolute and closed. These (mostly negative) monologues purport to hold singular truths which has been and will be enduring over time.

Denied in this stance is what Bakhtin (1981) calls dialogism or, in other words, the interanimating process whereby self and other are authored in conversation. An allowance of this process in therapy is also what is called for in order for the emotionally insistent monologues that are presented initially to be allowed to expand and multiply.

Thus the therapist helps to create a dialoguing process through which more voices of the person can be heard in order to facilitate a move towards multiple description.

This is not a unilateral process being perpetrated by the therapist on the client. The therapist, as much as she may be cognitively aware of the possibility of multiple reality, also, in her personhood as well as professional being, enters the therapy situation with at least some singular stories about herself. Similarly, she also needs to go through a process of expanding and multiplying narratives, about her self as well as the client.

Moving beyond singular and constrictive narratives often become most possible when crisis is encountered. This is precisely because a sense of crisis disrupts a person's sense of a coherent and meaningful context, separating them from old meanings, narratives and identities. (This notion of the role of crisis is discussed in more depth in Chapter 3.)

Penn and Frankfurt (1994) discuss this notion of the goal of therapy by focusing specifically on the idea that language has the inherent potential to generate a reply. They propose that the reply to others is shaped by our initial reply to ourselves in inner conversation. In other words, we (therapists as well as clients) try to perpetuate historically formed narratives by imposing them as monologue on interaction. However, when interaction can move back and forth from inner conversation to conversation with others (or dialogue), the stuff of new narratives can emerge. Thus, a participant text is written (whether verbally or by hand) that is composed of many voices. These voices, often newly discovered or invented, can allow everyone's narrative discourses to expand and multiply.

Similarly, Sluzki (1992) notes that an encounter can be defined as therapeutic when, in its course, a transformation has taken place in the set of dominant stories of the client(s) so as to include new experiences, meanings, and (inter)actions, with the effect of a loosening of the grip of the set of stories on what has been termed symptomatic-problematic behaviours.

### The Nature of the Therapist's Healing Use of Self - Some Main Themes

A concise but comprehensive definition of the concept "use of self" is currently missing from the field of psychotherapy. Part of the reason for this inadequacy is that the therapist's use of self is a multifaceted phenomenon. More

coherently, it can be said that the goal for the therapist is to use her self in such a way that the client is engaged in an active two-way relationship within which the usual interactive roles, in terms of when which stances are taken, and what stays hidden and how, can be transgressed by both. Real (1990) says in this regard that the goal of useful therapeutic conversation is most often *more useful* therapeutic conversation. Furthermore, he maintains that for therapeutic conversation to be useful, it must first be conversation, as opposed to monologue, and it must secondly be therapeutic, that is, it must lead to a relaxation of therapeutic stances - it must be healing. Some of the main facets or themes in this complex process of the healing use of self can be distinguished as follows.

#### The Therapist's Multiplicity - Revisiting the Notion of Authenticity

The therapist is no longer seen to possess a predictable set of integrated, hierarchically arranged personal characteristics which will always help clients to move in useful directions. Rather, her self that emerges is a multiple, fragmented and socially negotiated version.

Rogers notes that in using himself, he includes his intuition and some essence of himself, "whatever that is" (Baldwin, M., 1987a, p.46). According to Collier (1987), the roles that the therapist can play, vary greatly, such as consultant, catalyst, resource-provider, reactor, observer, problem-solver, sharing human, sometimes even just a shoulder to cry on. She notes that from minute to minute, through awareness and accompanying discomfort, she receives cues to (also spontaneously) change roles. Whitaker (1976) refers to the therapist's freedom to advance or retreat from any position. Satir (1972) sees the therapist as using herself in multiple roles, from empathic listener to an artful dodgem-car-operator. Duhl (1983, 1987) discusses how the therapist becomes a weaver, linking images, behaviours, thoughts, and experiences with context, and

connecting all in a textured tapestry of life. Also in terms of professional role, she can become historian, dramatist or anthropologist. Keith (1987) conceptualizes the personal self of the therapist as in fact being a community of selves, and refers to his own selves as being at different times a giant in a miniature world, a lover, a woman, a barefisted warrior, sometimes helpless and fleeing, sometimes confused and partially dressed, sometimes crazy and creative - "a furtive schizophrenic, both chronic and acute, fragmented and out of focus" (p.63).

Real (1990) uses the term *multiple engagement* to refer to the way in which therapists can use themselves in a healing way in the therapeutic conversation. In this he proposes a role for the therapist that entails multiplicity, avoids unilateral therapeutic power and simultaneously focuses neither only on any particular set of techniques, nor upon a vague prescription of attitude. Here the therapist is seen as positioned in, rather than as acting on, the system.

Real (1990) describes multiple engagement as consisting of five therapeutic stances. These are seen as a set of specific therapeutic activities, therapeutic positions or uses of self, which taken together may serve to guide the therapist in her participant-facilitator role. These stances are also seen as illustrations rather as prescriptions for the therapist. Real also acknowledges that these are only some possible examples of a myriad of stances that the therapist might take to further therapeutic dialogue.

The five stances she proposes are: the eliciting, probing, contextualizing, matching and amplifying stances. In the eliciting stance the therapist takes on a one-down posture, asking about different theories and ideas about the problem and situation. She resists the temptation to rule on the correct version of reality. Instead she communicates implicitly and explicitly equal respect for competing constructs, modelling a both-and position. This stance serves to help move beyond the repetitive monologuing that typically tends to get a system stuck when the rules of censorship on the stories about this reality get too narrow and

predictable. Using the probing stance the therapist offers alternative descriptions of her own. In this she again does not offer the "true" version, but rather models ways in which each person can move themselves in order to invite more interesting and useful conversation.

The contextualizing stance equals the circular questioning of the Milan team (Selvini-Palazzoli, Boscolo, Cecchin & Prata, 1980). Here the therapist references a particular move, behaviour or idea in a system out into the interactive field, connecting it to the meta-domain of overall pattern. In the matching stance the therapist simply mirrors back that which has been shown to her, in order to facilitate a process of liberating that particular position. Using the amplifying stance, the therapist chooses a particular idea, affect, theme or behavioural sequence that is available as a resource within the system and, through her attention to it, evokes more of it. (White's (1988b) attention to unique outcomes is an example of an amplification stance.) These stances are another example of a conceptualization of the multiplicity involved in the therapist's place in therapy when she places her full personhood in active participation with others from within the therapeutic circumstance (Real, 1990).

The therapist's acknowledgement and use of her own multiplicity can also contribute to the co-creation of a context within which there is not only space for the client's multiplicity, but also for a perspective that communicates that there are many ways to deal with things. Thus clients can also move between different voices or narratives of themselves, for example their male or female voices (Collier, 1987), in finding ways appropriate to different experiences, demands and needs. The freedom to be inconsistent can become another doorway to transformational creativity for the therapist and client and save both from the trap of becoming a fixed theoretical construct. Often, therapy can also become a context within which different voices can emerge together for the first time. This can bring into being a new symphony which can teach the therapist and client that there is a world very different in nature from the specific bifurcated worlds they have so far created.

Young (1989) notes that the account of a multiple, fragmented self brings with it the implication of an inconsistent and even incoherent experience of self. This also has important implications for the notion of authenticity - an experience much valued in the therapist's functioning. In essence, it is postulated that for therapy to be effective, the therapist has to be there as an authentic other in a relationship with the client in order to create conditions for change (Lovlie, 1982).

Authenticity, however, is often associated with a sameness and predictability of self that transcends the boundaries of time and space. (This notion is underpinned by a modernist assumption about the existence of a unitary and genuine self out there, that is with ontological primacy - see Chapter 1).

An acknowledgment of the therapist's multiplicity, however, brings about an understanding of authenticity that emphasizes the importance of being human and personal within a given moment. Thus the goal for the therapist is to be within herself, within the way she is in that moment, and likewise with the other person in that moment. Thus authenticity implies being present as a person now, and not in the way she would, for example, rather like either the client or herself to be (Baldwin, M., 1987a; Lovlie, 1982; Satir, 1987; Yalom, 1989). It implies a steady awareness of herself within this moment, and a commitment to endeavour to stand the discomfort that this may bring (Collier, 1987; Duhl, 1983; Miller & Baldwin, 1987).

This experience of discomfort by the therapist can help her understand and deal with specific nuances of the experience of authenticity during a process of transformation. The explicit and conscious experience of personal authenticity is most often informed by a sense of staying in the same pattern (an implicit goal for living which is the typical legacy of a modernist education) and can, therefore, not be taken as an indication of attaining the abovementioned notion of authenticity. Indeed, transformation can often bring a conscious sense of

inauthenticity. This is part of the discomfort that needs not to be solved in the therapy process - by either the therapist or client.

### The Ethical Self - Integrity and Maturity in the Therapist

The concepts of "integrity" and "maturity" often emerge when the issue of the therapist's ethical use of self is discussed (Baldwin, M., 1987a; Bugental, 1965; Guy, 1987; Keith, 1987; Rogers, 1961; Satir, 1987; Yalom, 1980; 1989).

These concepts seem to be most essentially used to reflect a position of (as much as possible) awareness of self without assuming an all-knowing stance.

Many writers refer to the importance for the therapist of knowing her self in different moments - to have a sense of her reactions as well as what they connect to (Baldwin, M., 1987a; Satir, 1987; Yalom, 1980). Thus maturity does not only refer to experience of living, but it is what one has done with that experience of living which is seen to make a difference in therapy.

The idea of knowing the self is in itself a problematic notion. The self cannot be known in an assured, left-brained, pass-the-examination-level way of knowing. Rather, what is needed is for the therapist to be familiar with her self "to the point of being both pleased and pained with its familiar unpredictability" (Keith, 1987, p.63).

The idea of integrity refers to a position from which the therapist does not permit herself to think that she knows the other sufficiently (or vice versa). This also prevents the disrespect inherent in understanding too quickly. Thus the way in which the concept of integrity is used implies a refusal to be all-knowing and a comfort with the notion that all human problems do not have answers (Bugental, 1965, 1967; Keith, 1987; Shadley, 1987).

### Moving from Being a Missionary to Being a Pilgrim

Being a therapist implies also being subject to the seductions of a missionary zeal to take away all clients's hurt, of a hunger to change the world. This position of being the one to change things for others can be likened to the position of a missionary. Notwithstanding the nobleness of this endeavour, it also implies a disrespect for those who will be touched, in that the truth, the answer, as well as the way to attain these, is something the missionary-therapist alone is assumed to be privy to. Her job then is to convert those she works with to the more useful living she knows of.

As for any missionary, this position, if stuck to unflinchingly, guarantees failure in the way that it pre-empts a transformational journey for all parties in the encounter. (Perhaps one of the most famous failed missionaries is Stanley, who, in all his years in Africa, is said to have converted one person. Ironically, he is most famous for one rather chance encounter with Livingstone. Perhaps more importantly, his own later rendition of the personal meaning he found in his African pilgrimages acknowledges the importance of his mistakes. The most famous of these might be his declaration, in the height of his fame after the Livingstone-meeting, that the Zambezi River can be traversed from the ocean right up to the Victoria Falls. It was only years later, when he personally tried to do this, that he encountered the unnegotiable Ruacana Rapids, and realized that a journey easily prescribed for others, might be full of impossibilities when tried yourself.)

It is through encountering the ghosts of failure in herself and in the missionary endeavour that the therapist can attain a more useful position - one in which she finds herself on a journey, in an ongoing quest for meaning. Then her self is

not anaesthetized by a born-again enthusiasm (Keith, 1987), but like the client, struggles with the pain of growing until death comes.

The knowing of this struggle from the inside out (Duhl, 1983) enables her to encounter the client in a more real and human way, more respectful of the journeys they are both on, and of the ways in which their past and current encounterings of both arrogance and humility can lead to a communion of silence on their moment of joining pilgrimages.

This idea of the therapist as a failed missionary and a pilgrim can be likened to the character of the barman in the novel *The Fall* by Camus (1957). The barman is visited by survivors from the front of existence, seeking a home in solace and advice. Due to the fact that he was previously a judge who fell from the grace of the judicial system, he has not only witnessed, but also experienced much human misery, suffering and indiscretion. His encounter with his visitors is thus from the inside of his own experiences, struggles and failings. His only conclusion to existence on the front, close to the reality of life and its misery, is that there are no absolutes and certainties. Therefore, no person has the right to make value judgements, no person is perfect and we all falter at some stage or another and must, therefore, accept our and others' indiscretions. Failing, forbearance and grace are, therefore, fundamental in encountering in community, and hence surviving, the burden of life.

Jeter (1995) describes pilgrimage as an ancient tradition that offers each person the potential to become a social artist with the ability to become participant in transformation. According to him,

[d]uring pilgrimage, the entire world opens up; healing is possible, even when cure is not. The opportunity is presented to start life anew. Everyone has wounds and pains which cannot be hidden. In the context of a pilgrimage, illnesses

may or may not be cured; however, healing, the feeling of wholeness is most possible... Friends and kin entrust themselves to each other. Shifts in approaches to solving life problems occur because of the intense expression of care, concern and love. Isolation weakens people; tender communication reassures people, evoking the will to live consciously, mindfully. Healing is recognized as the personal attributes a person brings to the process itself, the inner resources gathered together and utilized. (pp.174-175)

#### Punctuations of Important Experiences for the Therapist

An acknowledgement that the dynamics of the therapy process are also imbued with the personhood of the therapist, suggests that the patterns and dynamics of the therapist's seemingly outside living will also feed the therapy situation. This idea is reflected in many renditions from therapists of how profound therapy experiences often correspond - in timing as well as content - with periods of profound emotional shift or turmoil for themselves (Andolfi et al., 1989; Duhi, 1987; Keith, 1987; Whitaker, 1991) . Thus seemingly outside troubles may diminish technical proficiency, but enhance the way in which the therapist is present as a person. This can bring a useful commitment and intensity in the co-creation of experience and meaning during the therapy encounter.

This realization leads to a search to determine interface issues within the therapist's professional and personal lives. All such searches offer renditions of personal transitions and/or tragedies as the most likely circumstances to be associated with the emergence of a sense of calling as a therapist, profound

and useful therapy experiences or transformation as a therapist (Guy, 1987; Shadley, 1987). The content of these can be explored in more detail.

Many writers explore this issue, offering a myriad of different semantics in punctuating seminal experiences in the therapist's life. However, a coherent thread seems to run through all of these in that they all refer in some way or another to movements in the therapist's web of connectedness. These most typically include specific life and death events, new patterns of connection-disconnection or developmental life transitions within the therapist's immediate relationships and significant meaningmaking communities.

Shadley (1987), for example, finds a pattern of therapists primarily punctuating the events of having children and the death of a parent, or also other events such as divorce, disengagement from the family of origin, children leaving home and the experience of their own developmental life cycle. Balsam and Balsam (1984) spend a whole chapter (the only explicit and detailed reflection on the personal life of the therapist contained in their work) on the attachment status of the therapist. Guy (1987), in his book, *The personal life of the psychotherapist*, give a detailed discussion of significant events in the life of the psychotherapist. He chooses to list these according to developmental stages, and then proceeds to discuss different experiences all pertaining to moves in the therapist's patterns of connectedness/disconnectedness. These include marriage, pregnancy, parenthood and relocation (early adulthood); divorce, the departure of children and death of a loved one (middle adulthood); aging and retirement, terminal illness and sudden death of the therapist (late adulthood).

#### Themes of connection/disconnection in family-of-origin discussions

The therapist's encountering of issues regarding her family of origin (Braverman, 1981; Framo, 1991; Goldklank, 1986; McDaniel & Landau-

Stanton, 1991) has become an important dimension in considering the therapist's differentiation and use of self. Again, the myriad of aspects focused on through this lens all reflect some nuance of the therapist's experience of patterns of connection/disconnection within the domain of her family of origin. Indeed, many renditions see not only the therapist's early experiences as seminal in her work, but also describe how profound experiences of connection/disconnection in therapy can again serve to reconstruct the therapist's transgenerational meaning making.

Whitaker (1991), for example, demonstrates this in his stressing of the importance of the therapist's experience of being and not being with others. He understands not only relationships in general, but also the choice of psychotherapy as profession, as well as the therapist's growth, in transgenerational terms as reaction to the experience of childhood and parenthood. Guy (1987) similarly discusses factors related to the therapist's family of origin as leading to psychotherapy as career choice. In particular, he points towards an early sense of isolation, through, for example, childhood experiences of parental death, illness, distant or unavailable parents, and so forth. (Connected to this pattern, the therapist also typically seems to have been assigned an early role in the family of either explicit therapist and caretaker, or of identified patient and thus lightning-detractor.)

Whitaker (1991) specifically views the effort to become a psychotherapist as an effort to retaliate against what was viewed as a poor childhood with bad parenting. In order to avoid the panic of retaliation the therapist starts to try to cure her mother or father (or other relative) - in the guise of clients - of their bad parenting qualities. The therapist can panic again about the danger of the possible failure of this effort and then start to carry out the same treatment process with people in her personal life who become transference objects. Professionalising then, according to Whitaker, implies moving away from the amateur

status of doing therapy simply as an imitation of the ongoing problem of trying to cure the therapist's own parents, to utilizing this personal process as part of an evolving professional role-set (Neill & Kniskern, 1982; Whitaker, 1991).

Other family-connected important influences on the therapist that are often pointed out are personal losses. Carter (1991), for example, in discussing death in the therapist's own family, describes her intensely personal experiences in the early seventies. She sees this not only as a description of her own permanent reconnection to her family of origin, but also as directly reflective of the approach she still uses in her clinical practice when faced with the death or threatened death of a family member.

#### Themes of connection/disconnection in conceptualizations of the therapist's work

The theme of connection/disconnection does not only emerge in discussions of important experiences in the therapist's personal life, but also in conceptualizations of her work and ongoing training.

Lovlie (1982), for example, offers a detailed study of the relational self of the psychotherapist. Stressing the essentially dialectical nature of therapy itself, as well as of the experience of all parties therein, she considers how the client and therapist mutually create the predispositions to live certain themes together. She focuses specifically on themes such as closeness/ distance, openness/closure and sameness/difference.

Andolfi also bases his work on a consideration of the dialectical processes emanating from the experience of separation/belonging for both the therapist and the client (Andolfi et al., 1989). This he sees as the central dimension in the therapeutic relationship. This focus ties in with his experience of himself as a therapist whose personal/professional handicap lies in connecting too strongly and finding it very hard to separate (Andolfi, 1990).

These are also the dimensions he uses most strongly in the training of (also experienced) therapists in the use of self. This process is parallel to the one at play in therapy. Andolfi and others' work can be seen as coherent with views of therapy/training as a process through different orders of learning from more dependence towards more separation and also individuation [for example, as expounded by Stoltenberg (1981) as discussed earlier in this chapter]. The therapist/trainer regulates the dynamic equilibrium between belonging and separation to be optimal for the progressive individuation of each therapist/trainee/client. Instead of protecting the therapist/trainee/client from the escalating tension and intensity which may result from continued movements within her webs of relatedness (such as the continuing individuation in a training group), the therapist/trainer utilizes the systemic tension to facilitate increasing openness and differentiation. In this, it is important for the therapist/trainer to be provocative while guaranteeing full support and respect to the client/trainee (Andolfi et al., 1983; Andolfi & Menghi, 1982; Haber, 1990; Watkins, 1990). These ideas about therapy and training clearly illustrate how the tension arising from movements in the patterns of connecting and disconnecting in the therapy or training context is used as a template in order for trainees to move towards a clearer sense (and ease in use) of self.

Themes of connection/disconnection in discussions of other factors impacting on the therapist

Movement in the patterns of connecting and disconnecting also emerges as a central theme in discussions of the impact of many other factors. In discussing the role of gender, for example, the differing roles of male and female therapists are conceptualized in terms of this theme. Masculinity is seen as defined through separation, and femininity through attachment. The male gender identity is seen to be threatened by intimacy, and the female gender identity by separation, and so forth (Collier, 1987; Gilligan, 1982).

Similarly, humour is seen to play an important role in therapy in the way that it can bring both distancing and sudden moments of intimacy in peer relationships (Keith, 1987).

As can be seen from the above, the theme of the significance of movements in the therapist's web of relatedness is pervasive, and shows an important connection with the therapist's use of self. These movements can bring a therapist to a clearer or altered sense of her self and can take place when her own pain is encountered. Thus the therapist's own crises and vulnerabilities are very important in the process of developing her therapeutic use of self.

The Therapist's own Vulnerabilities: Doing and Needing Healing as Counterparts

Traditionally the therapist's personal difficulties, stucknesses and vulnerabilities were regarded as even more noxious in the therapy situation than just the

notion of her personhood. This stance implies that the therapist should above all else be a healthy (read: problem-free) person.

In contrast, though, an acknowledgement of self as resource does not only imply bearing with the therapist's emotional frailties, but in effect positions it as essential for healing to take place. This understanding that it is only through experiencing pain herself that the therapist's (or any person's) deepest abilities to heal can be mobilized, is captured in the legend of the wounded healer.

According to this legend, Chiron, the healer centaur, suffers from an incurable wound originally caused by the poisoned arrows of Hercules. Thus Chiron is a healer who needs healing himself. It is also to him that Asclepius (born of the union of the god Apollo and the mortal woman Coronis) is given to raise. Under Chiron's tutelage, Asclepius becomes the Greek god of healing (Graves, 1955; 1959).

Miller and Baldwin (1987) point out that the image of the wounded healer is found again in the medieval myth of Parsifal. In the account of Chretien de Troye, the Fisher King, despite possessing the Holy Grail which has the power to grant all things to all persons, suffers interminably from an incurable wound. Thus the Fisher King is unable to avail himself for his own wound of the curing powers he has access to, but instead has to wait for the Holy Grail to be freed by Parsifal.

This understanding of healing happening through the woundedness of all involved, is in keeping with the cosmology underlying most ancient and non-Western healing systems. In traditional African healing, for example, the calling of a healer (her *thwasa*) is actually announced through her developing a severe illness (*inkanthazo*). The only cure for the symptoms (which can take many forms) is to submit herself to undergo formal initiation. A refusal to do this can result in madness, deformity and even death (Hammond-Tooke, 1989). (Similarly, it can be considered that the psychotherapist's entering of her particular world of healing, can be seen as the start of the ongoing treatment for

herself. This is in keeping with Jung's (1946) statement that the healer should at least know that she did not choose her career by chance.)

Thus the age-old shaman figure is a wounded healer in the fullest sense (Meyerhoff, 1976; Radin, 1957). She is a boundary figure, simultaneously healer and priest, in contact with the world of the living and of the dead, and stands personally at the junction between heaven and hell, between suffering and healing. She takes on the pain and wounds of people who need her abilities. In this way she gains an understanding of healing far beyond rational thought and simultaneously is able to join in a process of transcending the pain through the power that becomes accessible through personally experiencing the junction of hurting and healing.

The wounded-healer paradigm has been revived in modern Western approaches to healing by figures such as Jung (1951), Guggenbuhl-Craig (1971) and Groesbeck (1975). Jung (1951) maintains, for example, that it is only the wounded doctor that can heal. This idea is expanded on by the notion that not only does every patient have a hidden inner healer, but every healer has a hidden inner patient (Groesbeck, 1975; Guggenbuhl-Craig, 1971). Thus real healing can only occur when each gets in touch with their hidden sides.

Others such as M. Baldwin (1987a) agree that it is only as the therapist views herself as vulnerable, flawed and imperfect that she can see herself as helping another person. He says that "some people who call themselves therapists are not healers, because they are too busy defending themselves" (p.50).

Similarly, Kreinheder (1980) contends that

[i]f you are going to be a healer, then you have to get into a relationship. There is a person before you, and you and that other person are there to relate. That means touching each other, touching

the places in each other that are close and tender where the sensitivity is, where the wounds are, and where the turmoil is. That's intimacy. When you get this close, there is love. And when love comes, the healing comes. The therapist is an expert in the art of achieving intimacy. When you touch each other intimately and with good will, then there is healing.

(p.17)

Thus for healing to take place, the therapist has to touch her client and the client has to touch her (Lifschitz, 1991; Snyders - personal communication, 1990). The therapist/healer, in being with the woundedness of the client, can gain a greater awareness of her own woundedness and in that a growing ability to be with her own vulnerability (Lifschitz, 1988). This dissipates more of her professional armour and is crucial in creating a context within which, using Buber's (1955, 1970) terms, an I-Thou encounter can take place. Here both people take on the role of both subject and object and are able to recognize the totality of other in this common experience, and in that to confirm each other's deepest humanity.

In this process the client's own innate ability to heal can also be recognized and mobilized through the mutual flow of energy that is generated in such a healing encounter. [Miller and Baldwin (1987) also postulate that this energy created by the recognition and integration of a therapist's own woundedness can be the sustaining force that prevents professional burnout. Thus, I-It interactions (Buber, 1970), which result from a reliance on techniques and professional distance, are most likely to result in a sense of personal emptiness in the therapist.]

This accessing of both wounded person and healer in one's self entails a growth towards discovering hidden parts, becoming more of oneself and finding a greater sense of balance and understanding which reflects the original roots

of the word healing. Heal derives from the Anglo Saxon word hal, which means whole. Thus, to heal is to make whole, or more specifically, to facilitate an ongoing process within which more parts and polarities can be recognized, accessed and used (Miller & Baldwin, 1987).

There is a sense of transformation that can accompany the infinite-seeming moments of accessing and finding the healing power in hidden woundedness or pain. This transformation can entail a sense of transcendence over the mundaneness, boredom, predictability and finitude of possibilities in our daily lives, as well as in the typical behavioural and emotional routines therapists can fall into while doing their work. Thus, encountering pain and woundedness - especially if it finds expression in a context of communion with others - can constitute a wellspring of creative energy and insight. This implies that the creativity of the therapist (as wounded healer) is always renewed if she is open in a non-habitual way to her own vulnerability. According to Miller and Baldwin (1987), this is what Nouwen (1972) might have been referring to when he said that the creative man (sic) is always close to the abyss of sickness.

### **In Summary: Community and Crisis: Accessing, Using and Transforming the Therapist's Sense of Self**

An exploration of the notion that the therapist's personhood is her most important resource in the therapy situation, reveals that it is also not by chance or through sheer rational choice that therapists come to their profession.

The therapist (like any person) has, over time, in her specific discursive communities, joined into interactions and languagings that have left her with specific stories about her self. These have evolved as she has repeatedly been posited as an I in interaction with an-other. Thus it is in the movements in her webs of connectedness that she gains a sense (or senses) of identity.

Some of her stories about herself typically either include or hide narratives of pain or woundedness from her past. These are described by many as instrumental in her joining with a domain where human pain is confessed and transformation around it is endeavoured.

Thus she offers to clients the possibility of entering into a new community of belonging in the therapy situation, one in which different discursive patterns from the ones they typically encounter in their daily lives, could lead to the transformation, expansion or multiplying of their own constrictive narratives which have become like monologues.

For the therapy to become a truly transformational domain, it has to allow for the possibility of real encounter - real community - within which both participants are present in a daring and human way. Once again, the therapist has to offer the client the chance of encountering her (the client's) sense of I in new ways in interaction with a very present you. Thus the therapist has to bring her own personhood into the encounter in order to build an I-Thou meeting (in Buberian terms). If she is only present as instructor, expert or technician, the client's monologues can persist, as transformational dialogue requires an interanimating process which requires of both the I and the you to be present in a fuller sense. As representations of the other are contained and located within our selves, there can be no I without a you and no you without an I. Thus for the therapist to allow for more stories about the client to emerge, she also has to be present as person in interaction, with access to as many voices of her own as she can.

Thus her use of self involves her ability to be present in as full and human a way as possible, to simultaneously employ her own (constantly developing) ability to move as freely as possible between different stories of her own and to actively build and co-author more stories in participation with the client.

However, as with all human tendency, the therapist also tends - in a yearning for safeness and predictability - to get stuck, time and time again, within set and constricting stories about her self and the world. Thus she also needs to join in the process of moving and being moved beyond known meanings and stories. Being too sure about herself and seeing the process of therapy as too predictable, can make her lose an openness to the new journey of the specific therapy situation which is necessary for co-creating a participative transformational experience.

Getting in touch with her own vulnerability is one of the most important ways in which a therapist can escape the monologues of her own linguistic and behavioural habits. Becoming, for example, touched, moved, frightened, shaken or excited in the therapy enables her to again enter the journey of transforming old meanings in a way which builds a context within which all participants can be present in an increasingly full and risking way. Then it becomes possible to find new replies to each other and to self and, in that, to join in a discursive community within which new and more stories are actively built from the inside.

The therapist's sense of vulnerability can emerge when something in the therapy situation suddenly brings her in touch with old familiar, current or hidden pain in her self. She can also encounter new disruptive experiences or crises which, even if they seemingly fall wholly within the domain of her personal life, will require of her to come to altered senses of her self and her world which will diffuse into her work as a therapist. Such disruptions can (not denying the pain involved in such a process) actually serve, in a renewed way, to prevent her from falling into too set and familiar narratives about her self and the world, which in turn will cause her to enter the therapy situation in a too distant and protected manner.

Although any experience that brings a sense of pain, disruption and vulnerability could fall within the ambit of the process described here, there does seem to be a pervasive theme to the kinds of experiences of crisis that are

most instrumental in bringing therapists to their profession, as well as in usefully moving their positioning of themselves therein. This theme constitutes moves of different sorts within therapists' webs of connectedness. It is experiences of connection-disconnection that serves as a template for the building of stories of identity (for all people) and it is these experiences that push therapists towards the helping professions. It is also themes of connection-disconnection that permeate conceptualizations of the therapist's work (Lyddon, 1995; Pistole & Watkins, 1995). Similarly, it is movements in patterns of connection-disconnection that most often constitute crises for the therapist and lead to the transformation of not only her sense(s) of self, but also of the ways in which she can access and use these (new) stories.

Such movements often entail the encountering of experiences of loss, whether the new encountering of an old instance of loss, or the occurrence of new losses. The pervasiveness of the content example of the experience of loss around therapists' work and use of self, calls for an exploration of the way in which loss impacts on people's experiences of themselves and their world. This, with specific focus on the way in which an experience of loss can bring about transformation in a person's narratives, will be discussed in Section 3.

## SECTION III

### TOWARDS TRANSFORMING SELF: THE JOURNEY THROUGH LOSS

In this section, it will be argued that the experience of loss is much more than one content example of crisis. In the role it can play in the intense, intimate interactive fabric of human existence, as well as in the tapestry of socially spun meanings, it is one experience that has the potential to profoundly transform human existence.

As shown in the previous two chapters, the experience of connection-disconnection can be seen to serve as a template through which all human experience of self, other, and the world gain specific meanings. It is in relatedness that theories develop and it is of some nuance of relatedness that these theories try to make sense in a more or less obvious way. It is also the struggle of being your self in the presence of others that can be seen to lie most profoundly and centrally at the core of all therapeutic experience. This includes the content of struggles that bring both therapist and client to therapy, and the dance of healing being played out between them - one that contains the rhythm of many dances, past and future.

It is in connection and disconnection that webs of significance are spun - intellectually, experientially and spiritually. Thus in patterns of relating explicit or implicit models, ideas and other communal languages are built that form the ideological nets that catch, sensor, organize and provide meaning to whatever is out there.

A movement in the webs of relatedness and significance could then have transformative effects on the ways in which meanings around self, other and the world are negotiated. Such a movement could be provided by an experience of loss, as an event and signifier that falls outside of the usual pattern of connection-disconnection through which seemingly stable webs of significance are built up to that point.

Thus the experience of loss can be seen as pivotal to all human activity, with the potential to transform all meanings, rather than as just one specific content example of a human experience of crisis. This argument, which will be discussed in much more detail during the chapter, is, however, much broader than the way in which loss, mourning, and the experience of death has traditionally been approached, especially in the field of psychology.

## CHAPTER 6

### TRADITIONAL VIEWS OF LOSS

Traditionally loss has been seen in psychological literature as a (mostly single or once-off) event during which the loss of something is clearly demonstrable. Most often, discussions on the experience of loss have focused on death (and concomitantly dying and mourning) as prototypical of the loss experience (Carroll, 1985; De Vries & Carmi, 1979; Jackson, 1957; Kubler-Ross, 1969, 1975; 1981; Lifton, 1979; Smith, 1985; Staudacher, 1987).

The extreme painfulness of the loss or death experience is very central in these discussions. Freud (1917), in describing how part of the essential work of mourning is the testing of reality, commented that why this process should be so extraordinarily painful is not at all easy to explain in terms of mental economics. Bowlby (1980) reiterated that the loss of a loved person is one of the most intensely painful experiences any human being can suffer. One definition of grief refers to the state of mental and physical pain which is experienced when the loss of a significant object, person, or part of the self is realized (Stephenson, 1985).

The painful inevitability of loss, and the fact that loss is seen to equal death in the traditional literature, does seem to have a strong influence on the trends of these discussions. It seems that the history of thanatology reflects the two broad themes of death denial and fear of death. This leads most basically to a trend that dictates that since the experience of loss/death cannot be avoided (Feifel (1969; 1990) terms death an absent presence, even before its actual arrival), the most one can personally and professionally strive for is to recover from the experience, that is,

once again reflecting the desire to avoid or get away from loss.

This trend finds different expressions in different traditional theoretical perspectives, as explored below.

### **Traditional models of loss and grief**

#### **The Disease Model**

In this perspective the experience of loss and grief is seen either as a disease or analogous to a disease, a definite syndrome with psychological or somatic symptomatology (Engel, 1961; Lindemann, 1944). Engel (1961), for example, argues that grief is a sickness and should be treated as such. He compares grief to a physical wound and sees grief work as the process which slowly heals the wound in the psyche.

Thus the disease model stands in direct contrast to a growth perspective. This model is pathology orientated and views health as reparative rather than as a natural proclivity towards growth. The basic underlying assumption here is that the most that can be hoped for is the healing of a wound, or, recovered ease after disease.

## Biological Explanations

Biological perspectives serve to explain an aspect of the human response system (most typically the respiratory, autonomic and endocrine systems, as well as cardiovascular and immune functions) during the reaction to loss, and limits itself to this area of understanding the experience (Littlewood, 1992; Osterweis, Solomon & Green, 1984). As in the disease model, biological explanations see recovery or health as adaptation. No attention is paid, for example, to the influence of people's interpretations of their experience.

## The Psychoanalytic Tradition

Psychoanalytic literature has contributed vastly to the way grief has been understood (Freud, 1917; Jacobson, 1943, 1946, 1965; Klein, 1935, 1940). The emphasis here has been on the intrapsychic processes operating during mourning. Freud (1917), for example, saw mourning as libidinal de-cathexis from the lost object and identification as a substitute for a libidinal tie. Klein (1940) later explained mourning in terms of reactivation of paranoid anxieties in an inability to maintain the depressive position.

Bowlby (1980) noted that in the psychoanalytic tradition the study of grief has usually been approached through a focus on depressive illness in adults, and that the bulk of the clinical literature here is concerned mainly with pathological variants.

## Attachment Theory

Recently attachment theory (Bowlby, 1961, 1969, 1973, 1980; Parkes, 1972) has combined an evolutionary perspective and a psychodynamic perspective. Human beings are seen to make strong affectional bonds, which serve security and safety needs. Consequently unwilling separation and loss give rise to emotional distress. In the course of evolution responses develop around the fact that losses are retrievable and the instinctual response to separation is aggression. Bowlby (1980) differs from Freud's (1917) conceptualization of the functions of mourning - which is to detach the survivor's memories and hopes from the dead - by positing instead that there is a persistence of relationship between the bereaved and the dead person.

Similar to both biological and psychoanalytic perspectives, attachment theory limits itself to a consideration of healthy and pathological mourning, and does not concern itself with, for example, growth aspects of the grief experience.

## Cognitive-Behavioural and Stress Perspectives

Very little has been written on grief per se within a cognitive-behavioural framework or within stress models. Loss is essentially conceived of as a stimulus condition that is cognitively evaluated and produces a stress response. The main assumption here is that emotions and behaviour are a function of how environmental demands are construed. The aim then is not to attempt to change a troublesome situation or eliminate all painful feelings concerning it. Success is

rather defined in terms of improving the individual's competency to manage important aspects of the environment. Effective management depends on possessing the necessary cognitive and behavioural skills to confront a given stressor, and on being able to mobilize these skills whenever necessary (Beck, 1979; Haaga & Davidson, 1986; Monat & Lazarus, 1991; Roskies, 1991).

Thus, in the face of loss, the individual will be helped to increase coping skills through cognitive and behavioural techniques such as cognitive restructuring, problem-solving skills and stress-inoculation techniques. Since the aim is to help the person manage the stress of the loss, the goal from this perspective, once again, is adaptation.

Even though the above examples of traditional approaches to loss differ markedly in their description of dynamics, they share some basic premises, which can be seen to summarize the traditional approach to the experience of loss.

### **Basic Assumptions of Traditional Approaches to Loss**

The main assumptions underpinning traditional approaches to the issue of loss can be summarized under the following headings.

## Loss is a Discrete Event, the Quality of Which is Determined Mainly by What is Being Lost and How it is Lost

The traditional clinical literature on loss mainly consists of content-focused examples of losing (through death) either a specific other person, or of dying yourself (through terminal illness). The quality of the experience is seen to be mainly determined by who is lost. In this vein special focus is placed upon, for example, the death of a parent (Berlinsky & Biller, 1982; Hilgard, Newman & Fisk, 1960; Jacobson, 1965; Koller & Castanos, 1970; Smith, 1985; Staudacher, 1987), the death of a spouse (Conroy, 1977; Di Giulio, 1989; Maddison & Viola, 1968; Parkes & Brown, 1972; Smith, 1985; Staudacher, 1987), the death of a child (Carroll, 1985; Craig, 1977; Jolly, 1976; Kirkley-Best & Kelner, 1982; Smith, 1985; Staudacher, 1987) or the death of a sibling (Adams, 1981; Cain, Fast & Erickson, 1964).

The other factor assumed to have a major impact on the quality of the loss experience is the way in which the person has died or is to die. Similar content-based discussions, research and writings can be found regarding this theme. The most frequently discussed causes of death are illness (Sherizen & Paul, 1977), especially heart problems, cancer or other malignant disease (Assael, Wallach & Rosin, 1979; Carroll, 1985; Rosin, Wallach & Assael, 1979; Smith, 1985), suicide (Cain, 1972; Cain & Fast, 1966; Hajal, 1977; Parramore, 1979; Staudacher, 1987; Wijzenbeek, 1979), euthanasia (Kohl, 1979; Levinson, 1979; Young, 1979), human-made or natural disasters (Klein, 1979; Lifton, 1967; Robinson, 1979), the death of young or unborn children through miscarriages, still births, abortions or sudden infant death syndrome (Smith, 1985; Worden, 1982) or the death of the elderly of natural causes (Smith, 1985). Content examples of loss that do not

necessarily include physical death and that do get attention in the literature are mainly divorce (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1975, 1976), relocation, physical dysfunction and change of life circumstances such as retirement or retrenchment. Although these are all seen to have their own characteristics, it is assumed that such losses can also be experienced as a form of death.

### Loss and Mourning is a Problem to Manage or Solve

The traditional clinical literature tends to focus narrowly on the problematic and even pathological effects of loss on a bereaved individual (Brown, 1966; Cain & Fast, 1966; Cain et al., 1964) and the unquestioned assumption that people need to be helped, to, as constructively as possible, get over this experience. Even though authors of such texts often (if briefly) acknowledge that loss can be a "turning point...a psycho-social transition", they proceed to show that the bereaved are people in trouble with "an increased risk to physical and mental health" and thus need to be helped over this period (Worden, 1982, p.ix). Similarly Staudacher's (1987) very start to her book reads:

What does the grieving person need to know, have, and be able to do in order to successfully work through the pain that accompanies the death of a loved one? Exactly which perspectives, insights, strategies, resources, and courses of action will ease the survivor's burden?" (Preface, no page number).

Thus the goals of studying, discussing and dealing with the experience of loss remain a narrow range of options of either solving/getting rid of the experience in the healthiest way possible (Fleming & Altschul, 1963; Oltjenbruns, 1991; Ramsay, 1977; Worden, 1982) or promoting a more open accepting attitude in society towards death, in order once again to serve the first goal (Carroll, 1985; Kubler-Ross, 1981; Silverman, 1977; Viorst, 1986).

These goals apply similarly to what is termed normal or uncomplicated grief, as well as pathological or complicated grief. Complicated grief reactions are said to be of three main types. There is delayed grief, absent or distorted (also called unreleased, repressed, or disguised) grief, and chronic grief (Leick & Davidsen-Nielsen, 1987; Littlewood, 1992; Worden, 1982; Zisook, 1987).

Recognition of complicated grief has simultaneously pointed to the need for intervention or management (Lindemann, 1944; Raphael, 1975). Worden (1982) made a distinction between grief counselling, of which the aim is to facilitate uncomplicated grief, and grief therapy, of which the aim is to resolve pathological grief. In both of these instances, however, the emphasis of the professional intervention prioritizes recovery as the main and most appropriate goal.

### **The Effects of Loss Form a Fairly Predictable Process**

The experience of loss and mourning has often been conceptualized as a process which takes place over time. This has emanated in a variety of models which delineate the stages or phases of the loss response (Bowlby, 1961; Kubler-Ross, 1981; Lebow, 1976; Ramsay, 1977). Although these stages are generally not seen

to be invariable and it is acknowledged that people can progress at different rates over time, these models have introduced a strong sense of predictability of the loss process, and represent a formalization of emotional and other reactions involved in mourning.

Kubler-Ross (1969), for example, delineates five much-quoted stages of dying: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. Later theorists such as Parkes (1972) and Bowlby (1980) proposed a phase-oriented approach which is more encompassing and has a different emphasis to Kubler-Ross's model. They separately conceptualized two models, both entailing four phases and showing a great deal of similarity. The phases of the two models are:

Parkes (1972)

1. Numbness
2. Pining
3. Depression
4. Recovery

Bowlby (1980)

1. Numbness
2. Yearning/searching
3. Disorganization and despair
4. Reorganization

Zisook (1987) observed that despite variations from individual to individual, most models of the loss or mourning process include at least three similar, partially overlapping but distinct stages: 1) an initial period of shock, disbelief and denial; 2) an intermediate period of acute somatic and emotional discomfort and social withdrawal; and 3) a culminating period of resolution.

Thus such predictions of process begin with shock and end with resolution. Change is acknowledged, for example, in the way all of the above stage or phase-models recognize the painful nature of the internal changes that occur in moving

through the grief process to resolution. These changes are necessary for the adaptation of the individual to changed external circumstances. Resolution is thus viewed as successful adaptation to change which is primarily external (rather than a more profound transformation of self-in-context). In this way even writers who have seemingly moved to a developmental perspective still expound reductionistic view of loss and death as the *last* stage of growth (Kubler-Ross, 1975), with more or less clearly distinguishable phases one has to move through in order to attain closure.

Such research into the course of loss and mourning also remains implicitly pathology-focused (in that the last stages repeatedly reflect the successful escape from the dangerous difficulty of the earlier stages). More explicitly, Parkes (1972) argues that part of the difficulty of fitting loss and mourning experiences into existing descriptive disease categories derives precisely from the fact that such experience is a process and not a state. It is not a set of symptoms that starts after a loss and fades away. Rather loss and mourning involve a succession of clinical pictures which blend into and replace one another. Parkes (1972) likens mourning to a physical injury, in which healthy healing can occur or complications can set in.

#### Loss is an Individual Experience

A general trend in traditional approaches to the experience of loss is that the focus is mostly individually orientated. Although the importance of others as, for example, support systems during recovery is emphasized (Staudacher, 1987), the struggle is seen as one that the person is grappling with essentially by herself. The bigger context of her living is essentially ignored.

This individual emphasis is ironic in that the whole issue of loss implies not only a domain of relatedness, but also the fact that it is within this domain that profound experiences play themselves out.

In contrast to these traditional premises, certain paradigms have offered conceptual apparatus that could initiate a move away from the reductionism of the views on loss mentioned above.

## CHAPTER 7

### PARADIGMS THAT OFFER ALTERNATIVE UNDERSTANDINGS OF THE EXPERIENCE OF LOSS

Two notable examples of paradigms offering a less reductionistic view of loss, are the existential and the systemic perspectives.

#### **The Existential Perspective**

Smith (1976) suggests that a fuller understanding of loss and mourning might be achieved by considering the individual's experience of bereavement in his or her existential and social context, an omission made by the majority of traditional models explaining loss and mourning. Existential therapists are not concerned with isolated psychological reactions in themselves, but rather with the psychological being of the living person who is doing the experiencing herself (May & Yalom, 1984).

Existential thinking contributes an important option for expanding the traditional reductionistic lens on loss and mourning, by positing this experience as an ontological phenomenon that is most intricately and undeniably connected to the experience of life. Since Heidegger's (1962) *Being and Time*, many existentialists have recognized that the fact of existence has to be faced in the certainty of death. Indeed, it is precisely the notion of not existing, non-being, that gives life meaning. Similarly, Koestler (in Dinnage, 1990, p.1) has noted that without the word death in our vocabulary, there would be no civilization -

"the cathedrals collapse, the pyramids vanish into the sand, the great organs become silent".

Existentialism is concerned with the tragic nature of life. It has been described as a philosophy of crisis, which dares to express the distresses and crises of living openly (Heinemann, 1958). Thus the existentialists can be seen to be devoted to discovering the basic human condition, and what constitutes it, and to be the shock troops of the humanistic movement (Bugental, 1965, 1967; May, 1969). Indeed, existentialism is characterized by a striking preoccupation with death (Feifel, 1969).

Towse (1986) describes bereavement as an experience of the possibility of non-being. May and Yalom (1984) postulate that existential conflicts arise between the individual and the givens of existence, such as death. Death, they say, plays a major role in the individual's internal experience. To cope with the terror of obliteration, the individual erects defenses against death awareness.

Thus loss provokes existential anxiety. May and Yalom (1984) claim that the death of someone close to us confronts us with our own death. Towse (1986) suggests that loss may thrust a person into existential despair, evoking a fear of standing alone and the potential loss of the self. Rowe (1988) argues that it is the ability to confront existential crises that results in the successful self.

It is loss too (for example, through death), that presents us with another ultimate concern of existence: the meaning or meaninglessness of life. Yalom (1980; 1989), for example, outlines four givens of existence: the inevitability of death for each of us and for those we love; our ultimate aloneness; the freedom to make our lives as we will; and the absence of any obvious meaning or sense to life. As Leick and Davidsen-Nielsen (1987) note, working through loss is so demanding because the mourner has to confront all four conflicts at once. Thus loss may be the first glimpse into the abyss of nothingness, into the possibility

of non-being, and may thrust an individual into existential despair (Towse, 1986).

The humanist perspective (Bugental, 1967; Buhler, 1959; Frankl, 1966) is often combined with existential theory to explore how people can deal with loss (or death) in life. Shaffer (1978) points to two central emphases within humanistic theory: the person's essential wholeness and her unfulfilled potential. Humanistic psychology is not only concerned with describing the existing way of the human experience, but also to ask: how might life be extended, enriched, or made more meaningful? As such, humanistic psychology is involved with helping people to grow and evolve towards greater realization of their potential.

The humanistic position views a tragedy (the existentialist focus) such as loss as a challenge to personal growth. Goldstein (1939) writes about finding an affirmative answer to the shocks of existence, which must be borne for the actualization of one's own nature. Buhler (1967) claims that fulfilment in life seems to result primarily from a constructive and thoughtful way of living - constructive to the degree that even major tragedies as well as great misfortunes are overcome and used beneficially. Sutich and Vich (1969) refer to converting a problem situation into an opportunity for further emotional growth.

The value of the contribution of the existentialists and humanists in moving beyond a reductionistic pathology-focused view of the experience of loss is indisputable. They bring an understanding that in facing the issue of loss and death, one is facing the complete issue of one's living, the problem of one's own survival, how to sustain it and whether it is legitimate.

A criticism that can be brought against these views is that they still focus on the individual and her eventual seemingly almost unilateral ability to make meaning (or not) in her living and through that to transform it. An effort at producing a more holistic description of the dynamics between people and elements in living, is found in different emanations from systemic thinking.

## **A Systemic (and Emerging Constructionistic) Perspective on Loss**

A major way in which systemic thinking moved away from the reductionism of the traditional views of loss was simply by going beyond the focus on the individual. In general, it started to examine the impact of loss on the entire family system and to consider both normative and dysfunctional processes in relation to a system's life-cycle passage and cultural context (Berkowitz, 1977; Donley, 1993; Evans, 1965; Gelcer, 1983; Paul & Grosser, 1965; Pincus, 1974; Stubblefield, 1977).

Pincus (1974), for example, writes about the experience of death within a context of an understanding of the relationships and interactions in the family. Bowen (1976, 1991) describes the disruptive impact of death or threatened loss on a family's functional equilibrium. In this he focuses on the emotional shockwave that reverberates through an entire family system after the loss of a family member. Paul and Grosser (1965) describe the effects of unresolved mourning on relationships and especially on marriages. Both Bowen (1976, 1991) and Paul (Paul, 1976, 1980; Paul & Paul, 1982, 1989), in different therapeutic approaches, emphasize the importance of coming to terms with loss and changing relationship patterns associated with it.

Also, a multigenerational developmental perspective on the impact of loss started emerging. This posits that, rather than regarding events surrounding a death or loss as pathological causes of disorder, they can be seen as normative transitions in the system's life cycle. Such transitions carry the potential for growth and development, as well as for immediate distress or long-term dysfunction (Jordan, Kraus & Ware, 1993; Walsh & McGoldrick, 1991).

Thus loss is not simply seen as a discrete event (another basic difference from the traditional approach), but rather as an experience involving a transactional process over time, with the approach of loss and in its aftermath. Individual

distress following loss is not only seen to be due to grief, but also due to changes in the realignment of the system's emotional field. Loss modifies the system's structure, and generally precipitates the need for the reorganization of the entire system. Perhaps more importantly, the meaning of a particular loss and individual responses to it are modified by the system's web of beliefs, which in turn is and has been modified by all loss experiences (Kuhn, 1981; Reiss & Oliveri, 1980; Walsh & McGoldrick, 1991).

According to Walsh and McGoldrick (1991), this perspective implies that in order to help families with loss, therapists must reappraise family history, replacing deterministic assumptions of causality with an evolutionary perspective. They note that the temporal context, like the social one, provides a matrix of meanings in which all meanings are embedded. Thus a family cannot change its past, but changes in the present and future occur in relation to that past. In essence then, systemic change involves a transformation of that relationship with the past (Hoffman, 1981, 1991).

Following from this, systemic thinking can be seen to imply that for a family to adapt to loss, it needs to be in harmony or balance with its past, not in a struggle to recapture it, escape from it or forget it. In order to do this family members have to reconstruct their history and place their losses in a more functional perspective. Here adaptation is not understood as resolution, but rather as finding a way to move on with life. The multiple meanings of any loss are seen to be transformed throughout the life cycle, as they are experienced and integrated with other life experiences, including other losses (Walsh & McGoldrick, 1991).

In this process, the family is seen to face crucial tasks. (These tasks do not impose - as in the traditional approaches - expectations of fixed stages, sequences or schedules on the complexity of the loss experience.) One conceptualization of such tasks are (Carter & McGoldrick, 1989; Walsh & McGoldrick, 1991):

1. Shared acknowledgement of the reality of loss and shared experience of loss. This involves sharing attempts to put the loss into some meaningful perspective that fits coherently with the family's life experience and belief system.

2. Reorganization of the system and reinvestment in other relationships and life pursuits. This involves in essence the realignment of relationships because of the disruption to established patterns of interaction.

Also, more authors have started to account for the importance of the wider context of the loss experience. Rituals, for example, interpreted through cultural and ethnic traditions, have become seen as a means of healing in the system (Hammond-Tooke, 1989; Imber-Black, 1988; Metcalf & Huntington, 1991).

In essence the systemic perspective's contextual widening of the lens contributed strongly to a move away from regarding the experience of loss as the (protracted) reaction of an individual to a seemingly discrete event. Rather, it can be regarded as a process that may be triggered by an event, but which speaks most closely of, expresses as well as affects, the patterns of connection-disconnection in the broader (also historical) ecology.

The most central ideas inherent in this perspective can be summarized as follows.

## Loss is Not an Optional Experience

Loss is often described as being at the heart of human experience. It is seen to force us to confront our ultimate priorities, reminding us more powerfully than anything else how much relationships matter.

This is in contrast with the denial of death and loss that is such a prominent feature of Western society and is probably part of the modernist myth of the continual advancement of the human being's ability to gain control over everything, including all forces of nature (Becker, 1973; Walmsley, 1986). Imber-Black (1991) notes in this vein that Western culture has increasingly allowed the funeral industry to shape mourning rituals so that they express more about capitalism and the denial of death than about authentic healing. In this process relationships that need to undergo the changes demanded by a death rigidify, and symptoms emerge which are metaphorical expressions of incomplete mourning and unhealed loss.

The reluctance to address loss as both an inevitable and an important part of existence reinforces what Rosaldo (1984, 1989) terms the invisible community of the bereaved. The greater irony is that essentially everyone - while entertaining notions of their own immortality in order to escape the terror of their own mortality - forms a part of this unspoken community.

## Loss is Not a Discrete Experience, It Forms an Integral Part of the Complete Cycle of Life

The experience of loss, in the way that it can catalyze shifts in the life course, affirm or move values and bring a consciousness of human connectedness, is

an experience of ending and beginning that forms a most integral part of the human life cycle. Lifton (1975) puts this as follows:

There is no love without loss. And there is no moving beyond loss without some experience of mourning. To be unable to mourn is to be unable to enter into the great human life cycle of death and rebirth - to be unable, that is, to live again. (p.vii)

A life cycle perspective on loss, joining a developmental framework with a family systems orientation, views loss as a transactional process involving the lost with those who remain in a shared life cycle that acknowledges both the finality of loss and the continuity of life. This implies that a purely interactional approach for understanding as well as intervening in a system's experience of loss can never be adequate. (An example of such an interactional stance is Haley (1976), who maintains that he does not believe in ghosts and, therefore focuses his therapy exclusively on the interactions of the living.) Rather, one needs firstly to acknowledge that loss is not optional and secondly to be committed to the importance of human connectedness and the continuity of relationships within the system (Becker, 1973; Lifton, 1979; McGoldrick, 1991; McGoldrick & Walsh, 1991; Rolland, 1990; Walmsley, 1986).

The loss experience can bring many here-and-now shifts in the system, such as the reassignment of roles and tasks, the forming of new attachments and the shifting of old allegiances. None of these can, however, be understood adequately without a perspective on the transgenerational encounters with threatened or actual loss and the timing of life-threatening events within the individual's and system's life cycles (Rolland, 1991).

Similarly, dysfunctional dealing with loss can be conceptualized as happening when continuity stops. Examples of this may be when time (in the system's experience) has stopped, when relationships rigidify or when mourning

becomes a family secret. [W.H. Auden expresses the sense of all things stopping with a loss - a sense that most of us get to know at some point - most movingly (Beeton, Kossick & Pereira, 1984):

Stop all the clocks, cut off the telephone  
Prevent the dog from barking with a juicy bone,  
Silence the pianos and with muffled drum  
Bring out the coffin, let the mourners come.

Let aeroplanes circle moaning overhead  
Scribble on the sky the message He is Dead,  
Put crepe bows round the white necks of the public doves,  
Let the traffic policemen wear black cotton gloves.

He was my North, my South, my East and West,  
My working week and my Sunday rest,  
My noon, my midnight, my talk, my song;  
I thought that love would last for ever. I was wrong.

The stars are not wanted now: put out every one;  
Pack up the moon and dismantle the sun;  
Pour away the ocean and pack up the wood.  
For nothing now can ever come to any good.]

Systems can become locked in time through dreams of the past, in the emotions of the present, or in the dread of the future. They can close entirely, with an inability to attach to anyone. When systems are unable to accept a loss, they tend to develop fixed ways of relating to handle their future fears of loss. For example, myths, secrets and expectations that develop around a critical loss may be incorporated into the rules of the system and be passed down from generation to generation (Bowen, 1991; Coleman, 1991; McGoldrick, 1991).

Thus many of the set patterns routinely observed in systems may reflect the inability to deal with loss, which has finally become the inability to connect with anyone else out of fear of further loss. In contrast, reconciliation or dealing with a loss is defined as both an internal and external process, a compromise carried out by the members of a system in times of crises to alter their personal myths about the types of relationships they require and the way they and others must act to meet their needs. A system's life cycle provides numerous occasions in which individuals must alter their most basic assumptions about themselves and the key persons in their lives. This implies altering the limited range of extremely personal myths they have built up around their systems of belonging. If this is not possible, a fragmentation of these systems of belonging may result which will impact in various ways on future generations (Gutstein, 1991; McGoldrick, 1991).

If loss is seen as such an integral part of the life cycle, it can also more specifically be seen as having everything to do with life's transitions. It not only is a byproduct of these periods, but becomes a catalyst for transition in itself. Transitional periods always involve beginnings as well as endings. Commonly, preoccupations about death, about life's limits, an anticipation of separation and loss or a resurgence of prior feelings of loss surface at such times. Also, at these times and in the face of the loss experience the tasks of the next life stage may need to be altered, delayed or given up, alliances may need to be shifted, and, more profoundly, the place of self in the system may need to be renegotiated. From this emerges the notion that the experience of loss plays within the dialectic of connection and disconnection.

## Loss is Necessarily an Ambiguous Experience

To speak of loss is to enter a realm of paradox, since we are dealing with a process within which connecting or belonging and disconnecting or separation are interdependent counterparts (Andolfi et al., 1989; Bowlby, 1969, 1973, 1980; White, 1988a). For example, joining with one person (like a partner) may mean separating from another (like a parent). Loss can also make new connection or re-connection possible, and vice versa. Andolfi and his colleagues (1989) point out that these shifts, which seem paradoxical at any one point, become comprehensible over time. The meaning of the loss experience can, therefore not be examined by viewing it as a discrete event. Rather, it is by understanding it as an unexpected punctuation in the more predictable meaning(s) which evolve through the rhythm of counterpart experience over time, that the experience of loss offers a useful entrance into the person's socially constructed narratives of herself as a person between others.

Thus, experiences regarding loss bring many complexities into play. Dealing with loss means dealing with changes that go far beyond the event which represents the loss. It can bring about the profound restructuring of fundamental relationships. Apart from the specific relationship/ connection that is lost, one's sense of other close relationships, connections-disconnections with one's family of origin and with a larger community within which meanings emerge, come into the picture.

## The Experience of Loss Takes Form Within a Social Web of Meanings

Given the diversity of system forms, values and life courses in any given society, the systemic thinkers warn not to confuse common patterns with

normative standards (Walsh, 1982) or to imply that alternate life pathways or timetables are pathological insofar as they differ. The uniqueness of each life course in its context needs to be appreciated in every assessment of the multigenerational system life cycle and in our understandings of the meaning of loss. Historically constructed meanings within the ecology - for example, the understandings built around the system's legacy of losses, as well as the communally sanctioned tendencies in dealing with loss - will all influence the experience of the person most profoundly (Hertz, 1989; McGoldrick et al., 1991; McGoldrick & Walsh, 1983, 1991; Rosaldo, 1989).

This notion ties in closely with a social constructionist perspective, which, as a specific emanation of systemic thinking (as discussed in Section I) has already strongly infiltrated the above discussion of systemic thinking about loss. A further discussion of social constructionistic approaches to loss, with specific reference to explicit socially constructed behaviours and meanings around loss, will follow.

### **The Social Constructionist Contribution to the Understanding of Loss**

According to social constructionist thinking (Gergen, 1971, 1985a, 1985b, 1993; Hoffman, 1993), separation and loss as such may be an inescapable part of living, but the form and course this experience takes cannot be regarded as a naturally occurring phenomenon, rather as a social and historical construction. Thus a sense of loss is neither an innate emotional event, nor a cognitive process, but rather an experience that takes form and meaning within social exchange (which in itself is highly circumscribed by historical, cultural and social context).

Through this perspective a recentering in the study of experiences of loss is achieved. These premises brings a move away from a concern with seemingly

predictable and bounded feelings and behaviours in the loss process. Rather, the concern is with the webs of socially constructed meanings that give form to a sense of loss, as well as the active co-operative enterprise of people in relationships in which these systems of meanings arise.

The search then is to find a way of accessing these meanings and the patterns of relating that maintain them. One route to take is to focus on the (socially constructed) rituals that groups and societies tend to follow when faced with the experience of loss. Such rituals, composed of metaphors, symbols and actions, speak symbolically of the meanings constructed around loss and ongoing life, and point to the directions that are followed in making sense of the loss while also enabling the continuity of living (Imber-Black, 1991; Imber-Black, Roberts & Whiting, 1988).

Rituals can take many forms, be they implicit or explicit. They can lie in the embarrassed silences or muted understandings on the one hand, or in the extreme pornography of violence on the other hand that modern Western society, for example, can bring forth. They can lie in the highly circumscribed and extended periods of mourning with particular rituals to mark the passage of time, which can be found in Hindu culture. Whatever form rituals take, an examination of not only the differences, but specifically the similarities between different rituals, can be most useful in revealing some of the main socially constructed meanings around loss and ongoing life.

#### Rituals: Celebrations and Maskings of Loss and Death

Imber-Black (1991) notes that a cross-cultural examination of mourning rituals reveals certain similarities, such as the fact that they are all space-bounded and time-bounded, providing a sense of psychological safety for the participants. For example, people come together to grieve in a time-limited manner that is

mutually supportive and allows for the initial expression of pain and loss in a context designed to promote interpersonal connectedness.

There are, however, also many seeming contradictions and complexities in what can be regarded as the universals of death rituals. They can be simultaneously an arena for acknowledging finality, but also be filled with expressions of sexuality (such as in the Berawan funeral rituals). American death rites reveal the irony that in a country where togetherness is a national fetish, often no phase of the most severe crisis of the family's existence takes place at home (Metcalf & Huntington, 1991).

Furthermore, whereas rituals may seem predictable *per se*, this is often not the case. Rites may well succeed in calling forth the experiences and interactions deemed appropriate to the moment, but nothing is guaranteed.

Given the multifaceted nature of the meanings that emerge around loss and death through socially constructed rituals, as well as the indeterminacy of these rites, it is necessary to try and discern some of the major nuances embedded in these implicit understandings.

(This presentation of categories does not pretend to represent the complexity of anthropological studies on this topic, nor take full account of the major points of debate in this field, such as the relation between ritual and emotion, the political significance of ritual and the universal in symbolism (Bloch & Parry, 1982; Metcalf & Huntington, 1991; Needham, 1987; Rosaldo, 1984). Suffice it to say here that for the purpose of this discussion and in keeping with the epistemology of choice in this text, the relationship between ritual on the one hand and emotion, habitual behaviours, and cognitive action and content on the other hand is not seen to be causally determinative in either direction, but rather cybernetic.)

### Loss Rituals as an Arena for the Acknowledging of Finality

Modes of ritual practice that simply acknowledge the fact of a loss or death can fairly easily be detected in all groups. These mostly consist of some form of presenting the realness of the loss to those that remain, for example through the habit of viewing a body and a coffin, whether on a deathbed, in a funeral home, on a pyre, or in an open and specially assigned vehicle leading a mourning procession. The creation of a space within which the painful presence of the loss can be acknowledged is most often demarcated through rituals which create a time out of time. Signifiers of this kind of space can include the wearing of certain clothes and colours, and sometimes through the way in which emotion is showed and shared. The latter can vary from the open wailing found in some groups to the sad quietness often surrounding Western experiences of loss. The latter is often criticized by commentators such as Schiff (1977) who says, for example, that Jackie Kennedy's stoic demeanour at her husband's funeral set mourning back a hundred years. What is probably ignored by this implicit prescription of mourning behaviour is that in each case, regardless of the specifics of the unspoken rules for behaving, what happens is clearly distinguishable from that group's daily rituals and habits. This disjuncture between mourning rituals and what goes as contemporary life, serves to create an important space for the acknowledgement of the loss.

Such rituals that portray the realness of finality do not only occur immediately subsequent to the incident of loss. Many cultural and religious groups have rituals that occur subsequent to a death in prescribed time sequences, enabling the living to remember and honour the dead and deal with the loss over time. Such rituals as the Catholic anniversary mass or the Jewish ritual of the reciting of the Kaddish on the anniversaries of the death reflect the reality of mourning that occurs over time (Imber-Black, 1991).

The importance of this nuance of ritual may easily be disguised by its blatantness, but is revealed by the stuckness that can result from an absence of acknowledging a loss. Imber-Black (1991), Ramsay (1977), and many others discuss in differing detail the nuances of such unfinished mourning and unhealed loss. Imber-Black (1991), for example, notes how families can actually subtly design rituals or try to keep traditional celebrations or life-cycle rites of passage seemingly unchanged to support a pretence that no loss has occurred. In other families a moratorium is placed on certain rituals, in order not to show, but to hide the loss.

Such instances, where an acknowledgement of the loss is censored, and valiant but unsuccessful attempts to avoid pain are made, also result in the avoidance of any genuine sense of connection and support. For example, the seemingly commonsensical moratorium that can be placed on any rituals that may remind those that stay behind of what was lost, also has another very damaging outcome. Often, such people discover that contexts of life, of other people's stories of loss and of celebration exist all around them, exacerbating their sense of pain with isolation, and cutting them off from the emotional support that, according to Imber-Black (1991), lives within the fabric of familiar rituals.

This importance of sensing yourself as part of community during a time of loss, is also revealed by the nuances of many rituals.

### Ritual-Bound Creation of a Sense of Connectedness in Living Through Disconnection

Rituals of death and loss often invoke a supposedly communal (if not universal) emotional and behavioural process to account for a host of small rites of kinship. Additionally, such rituals often require shared meals, visits, gatherings

and so forth, all serving to promote interpersonal connectedness (Imber-Black, 1991; Metcalf & Huntington, 1991; Van Gennepe, 1960).

This nuance takes different forms in different rituals. Sometimes it can be seen to lie in a part of the ritual that simply acknowledges life or in the way that the detail of the existing social collectivity is acknowledged. The former is apparent in rituals such as the Berawan death rites where expressions of vitality and sexuality are auspicious (Metcalf & Huntington, 1991) or in Irish wakes which typically centre on getting drunk, telling stories and jokes, and playing pranks on the corpse (McGoldrick et al., 1991). The latter can be seen in many rituals (from many different groups) wherein the expressions of mourning are precisely assigned according to kinship roles. For all the violent or subtle displays of emotion, preexisting social arrangements and the meanings attached to them govern these behaviours.

In Hindu death rites a close friend or relative usually bathes the body with soap and curd to symbolize life. The large network of extended family relationships plays a major active and prescribed role in cushioning the grief surrounding a death. Sacrifice for family glorification is one of the important tasks of completion for a death. Similarly, in traditional African and African-American ways, greater emphasis is placed on attending a funeral than perhaps any other family gathering. In Jewish death rituals a specially trained group of community members (the *hevra kadisha*) takes the responsibility for preparing the body for the burial. Additionally, during the family's seven-day mourning period (*shiva*) all food is cooked by friends and all arrangements are handled by others (McGoldrick et al., 1991).

In essence, the fact that death and loss rituals are mostly embedded in extended family and community participation offers firstly a safe space to be in crisis and secondly, the opportunity of acknowledging the connection of not only the deceased but also the bereaved to present and future life, and in that, to acknowledge continuity.

Under this and the previous subheadings the ritual representation of death/loss and of life/continuity is respectively discussed. The fact that these nuances are encountered simultaneously and not separately, is another nuance of the meanings around loss that needs to be explored.

### The Ritual Representation of the Ambiguity of Loss

Many aspects of death rituals simultaneously act as reminder of death and continuing life, of pain and of healing, of power and of helplessness, of good and of evil.

This is, for example, often portrayed in colour symbolism. Turner (1967) suggests that there exists an almost universal colour triad of red, white and black associated with mourning. In many societies, white relates to such things as purity and fertility, red to both good and evil aspects of power and life, and black to decomposition and evil. Black is the more well-known funeral hue. White, however, is often added, for example, in Christian funerals to symbolize the joy of eternal life. Red is an important funeral colour in Madagascar. An important feature in funeral rituals in Madagascar is a large number of expensive, brightly coloured striped shrouds. These come in many colours, but are always called the "red cloths". Red here is seen to represent life and vitality in opposition to death.

The ambiguity of loss is also often represented in rituals around the cutting (or not) of bodily hair. Leach (1958) notes that practices involving the special cutting of hair have a worldwide distribution, but are particularly prominent in funeral ceremonies. The form can differ dramatically: frequently survivors are enjoined to shave their heads as a sign of mourning, but elsewhere the custom is reversed, mourners forego the usual custom of shaving and trimming hair

and hence this symbolizes a hirsute dishevelment during the time of mourning. (Again, what is important to note is that the content this ritual takes, constitutes within that particular context a disjuncture between daily life and the space opening around loss.)

Similarly, drumming often accompanies funeral rituals (Turner, 1968). Metcalf and Huntington (1991) note that the drumbeat has an obvious affinity with the heartbeat and rhythm of life. Or, equally, it can resound with the hollow finality of death.

Thus there are multiple symbolizations around the same facets of death rituals. In essence, they seem to symbolize the simultaneous encountering of liminality and continuity. Other facets of such rituals do, however, seem to symbolize the meaning that continuity does not necessarily imply the continuation of exactly what went before.

### The Ritual Representation of Loss as Transition

Death is often regarded as transition, and funeral rituals are seen as carrying this symbolism. One example, once again, is the prevalence of drumming at such times. Needham (1987) states that there is a connection between percussion and transition. Metcalf and Huntington (1991) note that percussive noise seems to punctuate and divide or mark time, the way that a line or wall would demarcate space. Hence they see drumming as a natural symbol for marking a temporal change in status, especially one as irreversible as death.

Often the transition of the dead person into another realm is what seems to be most noticeable as a transformatory nuance in death rituals. Jung (1964) points out that ancient initiation rites, such as those celebrated in the Eleusinian mysteries, were also used as a preparation for death, as if death also requires

an initiatory rite of passage of the same kind. While in this text we are more concerned in loss with understandings of what happens to the living (rather than the dead), these rituals do reveal important meanings for the living. Essentially, death is seen as carrying some nuance of a promise of immortality, of a transcended everlasting life, and in that as strongly supporting of a notion of continuity.

Similarly, other death rituals are often seen to consist of phases of separation, transition and incorporation. The Bara people of Madagascar, for example, perform a series of three ceremonies in the process of providing final disposition for each person. There are: (1) the burial (into an individual coffin), which takes place in the first few days after death; (2) the gathering, which is a great feast celebrated after the harvest following the death; and (3) the exhumation and reburial (in a communal coffin) after the corpse has completely dried and the flesh rotted away. Metcalf and Huntington (1991), who describe this in great detail, note that each of the ceremonies concentrates on liminality of a different sort. The burial is largely concerned with the transition of the corpse. The gathering is distinguished from the other ceremonies by the concern showed toward the reordering of social relationships that have been altered by the loss of a kinsman. This is manifest in the witchcraft fears and accusations that concern the settling of old scores. The affair closes with the granting of new names to the deceased and to some of the living. The reburial focuses on the transition of the remains from the individual coffin to the final resting place in the communal coffin containing the bones of agnatic kin (Metcalf & Huntington, 1991).

Thus the death ritual becomes a rite of passage concerned with arranging the ambiguities that loss reveals and creates in the organisation of the relationships within the social order, as well as between the worlds of the ancestors and the living. What is important in this rite-of-passage kind of ritual is that although the ambiguous and transitory nature of loss and dying is acknowledged, it is essentially life that is seen as transitory, and death as tragically unambiguous.

Thus all of life is ultimately a transition, and only a meaning system that includes (re)birth allows an understanding of the ultimate nature and meaning of loss and death.

The central importance of this kind of transition is vividly expressed in one of the Bara legends about the origin of death (Metcalf & Huntington, 1991). God is said to have given the first man and woman a choice between two kinds of death. They could die like the moon, being reborn over and over. Or they could die like the tree, which puts forth new seeds and, although dying itself, lives on through its progeny. It was a difficult decision, but the first man and woman chose to have children even at the cost of their own lives. And which of us, asks the storyteller, would not make the same choice today?

Thus, through rituals, it becomes more apparent that loss means transition. This does not only refer to what is lost or has died, but even more importantly to those and that which stay behind. Briefly it can be stated that loss and death is seen to bring continuity through transition, which implies the evolution rather than simple conservation of what went before. Different facets of this kind of continuity through transition can be explored in more detail.

### Ritual Representation of Rebirth Through Death - Transformation of the Social Order

When loss occurs, the simultaneous encountering of things that end and things that carry on can only lead to an altered sense of what is, a sense of things falling apart, shifting or taking on completely different meanings.

These transformations occur not only because the physical playing field and its elements have changed, but also secondly because the possibility of ending and loss creeps into everything that is also alive and, therefore, alters and

complexifies its apparent meanings, and thirdly because the communities of translators, the webs of meaningmakers that all of existence filters through, have been altered.

This sense of an entire shift in a social web of meanings is, for example, invoked by the folk saying (referred to by McGoldrick and Walsh, 1991) that when your parent dies, you have lost your past, but when your child dies, you have lost your future.

Similarly the social order can be transformed in a more active way during the rituals surrounding loss. Death rites are often described as becoming arenas within which leadership, for example, is asserted, or contradicted, and at each occasion, renegotiated. Somali death rites, far from enshrining the values of the social order, are actually subversive of them. The second (gathering) phase of the Bara funeral ceremonies, referred to above, is focused on the reordering of social relationships that have been altered by the loss (Helander, 1988; Metcalf & Huntington, 1991). Hertz (1960) describes how panic can sweep over a group with the passing of specific people. His argument, which is limited in that it essentially turns upon the social status of the deceased, does point out how a loss can leave a large rent in the fabric of society, which plays out in the way the corpse is handled in, for example, Borneo death rituals.

Many groups, as shown in Puerto Rican families as well as in many African practices, have a ritual of participating in long vigils before the funeral takes place. During this time, people who have become disconnected over time, return and have to find a way of reconnecting, with the system having to shift to make space for them (McGoldrick et al., 1991).

What rituals such as these implicitly reveal is the sense that, with a loss, the whole connected community goes through some sense of redefinition. This transformation is more intense for those for whom the relationship with the one

that was lost, takes on more significance. It can in effect, bring a sense of having to redefine self in the absence of the lost one.

### Ritual Representation of Rebirth Through Death - Transformation of Self

Hertz (1960) describes how in Indonesian death rituals, the widow may be obliged to rub the products of decomposition of the corpse on her own body. One interpretation of this is that kin are seen to be contaminated by the death, in that the loss brings about some extinction of their own social person. Each severed relationship can leave a person that much reduced: a social and psychological amputee. Of all relatives, the widow is seen to be the most disfigured. Thus she must, like the dead man, undergo a liminal phase during which her identity is readjusted (Hertz, 1960; Metcalf & Huntington, 1991).

Somewhat similarly, in Jewish custom, mourners are from the time of death until the burial exempt from the requirement of observing the ritual law (McGoldrick, Almeida, Moore Hines, Garcia-Preto, Rosen & Lee, 1991). This can be seen to acknowledge how, in the moment of loss, the person is unable to continue as before, even to wholeheartedly participate in honouring God, and to signify how the experience of loss alters the person in terms of who she is by shifting how she is in all significant relationships.

The above discussion on social meanings surrounding the experience of loss as they emerge through (historically) socially constructed meanings, point strongly towards the centrality of the experience of loss (for example, through death) in the full experiences of living and all the meanings that emerge around it. A sense of loss touches on themes of death and finality, of the meaning of life and the relativity of values, of the origins and endings of the world as we know it, and of resurrection and transformation. As Jung (1964) points out, even the

altar in Christian churches represents, on the one hand, a tomb and, on the other, a place of resurrection. This notion of the experience of loss lying at the nexus of many shifts in meaningmaking, and in that most central to the whole process of meaning making, can be explored in more detail.

## **CHAPTER 8**

### **EXPERIENCES OF LOSS AS CENTRAL TO SOCIAL MEANINGMAKING**

#### **Patterns of Connection-Disconnection as Necessary Template for the Construction of Meanings**

As discussed before (see specifically Chapter 1), all knowledge, identities and experiences are intersubjectively created. This emphasizes a relational domain as a sine qua non for the construction of all meanings. Such an emphasis directs all attention to the (historical and social) communities of interpreters within which this continuous construction takes place.

Gaining a sense of values, meanings and identities thus implies participation in some centralized communities of significance, and non-participation in others. Through these patterns of connection-disconnection webs of meanings emerge that can give us a sense of safeness, predictability and legitimacy.

All theories and paradigms - academic and informal - can firstly be traced to the particular patterns of connection and disconnection that they emanate from, and secondly be seen to try, in some way explicit or implicit, to make sense of these patterns, as well as to maintain them.

It is a shift in these patterns, most specifically brought about by an experience of loss, that affects the patterns of meaningmaking profoundly.

### **Loss as Bringing About a Shift in Webs of Significance**

An experience of loss entails a shift in the webs of relatedness that make up the person's centralized communities of interpreters. The more central the person that has been separated from, or with whom the active interaction is stopped or changed, was in your own negotiations within the community of interpreters, the more profound the shift.

This shift is not simply brought about by the person's absence, but by the impact this has on the reorganization of the whole social web and the typical patterns of meaning making. This impact is certainly not similar for all. Although these interpreting communities imply collectivity, their nature and impact depend for each person on their current and historical positions and movements within this web.

This notion of the nature of the process inherent in the experience of loss also implies that it is not sufficient to focus on death as the main example of loss (such as in the traditional literature on loss). Whilst the experience of death is certainly an extreme and universal one, it is the process (that is, the experience of loss and the storms that it stirs up through its effect on our meaningmaking communities) that we should try to detect, rather than to make inferences about a certain content example of a trigger of this process. The experience of loss and the disruption of discursive communities can be brought about by the sense of your own pending death (and in that of the people you have hoped to become and to be with), of the death of another, of the loss of a relationship close to your heart, of the vanishing of a projection into your future - the sudden realization that a dream will never be realized, certain experiences will never be had, certain relationships will never materialize, certain losses will never be turned around - or the vanishing of a projection into your past - the discovery that an idealized figure from your childhood was most flawed. Thus, although reference in this study is for practical reasons

most typically made to the loss of a living relationship with another person, this does not exclude other possible triggers for the same process.

The movement brought about through loss in our webs of significance entails an unexpected separation from others in the usual patterns of our interactive discursive communities, and, therefore, from the sustained meanings (derived from our sustained patterns of negotiating in these communities) with which we cushion ourselves.

It is then the discontinuity of meanings and connections in the consensual domain of the community of belonging which leads to the declaration of the loss as a crisis. The predictability and, therefore, safety of the whole ecology of ideas is under threat. The person becomes disconnected from what she wanted to be connected to. Simultaneously, what seemed marginal or peripheral, or even clearly unwelcome, now looms larger than ever before.

Thus, what the experience of loss calls for is moving beyond previously perceived boundaries into another domain that now has to be constructed and known in such a way that adequate and sustained consensual validation once again seems possible. This entails the transformation and redefinition of not only boundaries, identities and meanings, but also of the way in which this knowing becomes known. In other words, the discursive community/communities, as well as their patterns of negotiations, get transformed.

Thus, a sense of loss is not simply one content example of an experience of crisis, but has inherent in it the ability to transform all of a person's knowing and living negotiations. As mentioned in Section 1, the word crisis is, in fact, derived from the word krinein which literally means to separate. An experience of loss, then, is a crisis during which the person gets separated not only from, for example, another person, but also from old meanings and identities.

Different aspects of the experiences emanating from the shifts in the webs of significance that can be brought about by loss, can be referred to as follows.

#### Loss of Other as Loss of Sense of Community

Maturana (in Capra, 1996) refers to the fact that the crucial role of language in human evolution lies not so much in the ability to exchange ideas, but in the ability to co-operate. Through this discursive communities are created which serve as source of the unfolding and legitimization of humanity and its many emanations.

This concept is also central in the understandings of the social constructionists. A person is thus seen to exist in and by virtue of such an abstract community. Being in this web of meanings can bring to the person a sense of living in a predictable ecology within which her own story is unfolding. An experience of loss then also brings a move in this predictable ecology and with that an experience of losing a sense of safety, belonging and community in general.

#### Loss of Other as Knowing Anew That Which Went Before

The experience of loss often brings a reflection on life as it was known before the sense of loss shifted the person's patterns of knowing. This ties in with the notion that the nature of something emerges more clearly or differently at points where difference is encountered (Bateson, 1972). Similarly, the nature of a relational bond is perceived in specific ways by those involved in it. These narratives of the relationship which emerge during the process of connectedness necessarily hide other (counterpart) narratives about the same relationship and about the people

involved in it. Thus patterns of connectedness-disconnectedness, as the template for communication, always imply censorship. The telling of one story makes the telling of another impossible.

[It is similarly only on his deathbed, that in Joseph Conrad's (1988) *Heart of Darkness*, Kurtz finally and for the first time comes face to face with the sense of emptiness about his own life - and which leads him to his wrenching last words: "The horror! The horror!" (p.149).]

Old hidden stories that might be met for the first time at the point of encounter of loss, can include the unspoken legacies of loss emanating from the historic fabric of the specific communities of interpreters and hidden in more recent negotiations of meanings that make the belief in permanence more possible.

It follows then that getting out of the usual pattern of connection-disconnection - even temporarily - becomes an indispensable condition for encountering the hidden counterparts of what was apparent, and to bring any growth or shifts in the meanings attributed to the world, as well as to the people who constitute it for you, and to yourself.

#### **Loss of Other as Trigger for the Mourning of Unmet Needs**

The mourning of a relationship that has been lost often entails a grieving for unmet needs.

The pain caused by a sense of unmet needs can entail the anticipation of forever unfinished processes and thus imply a focus on the future. The altered knowing of the past that often comes with loss (as discussed under the immediately preceding

subheading), can, however, also bring about a sense of the needs that were unmet while the relationship was a live and active one. This is a new encounter with what seems to be past (but until now unknown) loss. This, combined with the sense that the opportunity to redeem the relationship experience into a more whole and fulfilling and thus a seemingly more meaningful one is also lost, can be devastating. The simultaneous sense of lack of fulfilment and ending can seriously challenge the sense of continuity and meaning.

#### Loss of Other as Loss of Source of Feedback

The person who is lost often served as source of emotional nourishment, of social feedback, of concern, and in all of those as source of a sign that your own living was meaningful. This function did and does not only remain a characteristic of the specific individual person, but evolved as a function of the whole interactive space that the specific relationship formed a thread of. The inaccessibility of this thread alters the surrounding social web. For the person that is experiencing the loss of another person, the loss can then extend to the loss of a complete space within which her own legitimacy, acceptability, and central to that, her belonging, used to be constantly and implicitly confirmed. Without warning she can find herself at the borders of language communities, instead of at their centre. She no longer has clarity about the meanings of it all and is no longer safe within the seemingly predictable and sustainable feedback from a seemingly sustainable discursive community.

## Loss as Source of Social Reorganization

The loss of a person through her death or inaccessibility due to another reason changes the patterns of all the discursive communities that her interactive presence forms a part of.

The necessity to change and re-establish relationships in a system after a loss has occurred, has been discussed by many authors (as referred to before). The social reorganization that is called for after a loss, does, however, entail much more than the establishment of new relationships.

Since the community/communities of interpreters and patterns have been interrupted in the process, new connections and disconnections have to be formed. With that goes the establishment of new lines and patterns of negotiating meaning and knowledge around the world, life, people, and self.

In this vein White and Epston use innovative interventions in their work with loss in order to transform and recreate family narratives (Epston, 1991). They found that often those who have suffered a loss develop deeply self-blaming stories about the loss which inexorably starts moving them towards their own personal tragedy. These stories which serve to increasingly isolate the person are an indication of the destructive kind of fragmentation that can follow the breaking of connective patterns in social webs through loss. Their approach (which they term deep play associated with creative endeavour) is in sharp contrast with the usual kind of serious talk with which the profound issue of loss is typically approached. This latter trend is often just another product of the stuckness created by the disruption of the local communities' connecting and meaningmaking abilities and adds to the fragmentation and reduction of interactive possibilities in the moment. This very well-intended respectfulness can stymie any measures of creativity and in that

actually prevent the necessary transformation of social and meaningmaking patterns from taking place.

This social transformative impact of loss is probably its most profound, in that it makes the redefinition and evolution of the person's sense of self a necessity, and can be discussed in more detail.

### **Loss of Other as Loss and Redefinition of Self**

#### **Identity and the Search for Continuity**

It has been argued up till now that the identities granted by people to all things, people, as well as to themselves, are emanations of ecologies of ideas. What is also important in trying to understand the impact of a sense of loss within such an ecology, is a recognition of how much energy is spent in trying to conserve a sense of predictability and continuation of this ecology.

Capra (1996) notes this tendency in referring to some teachings of the Buddha, which he sees as containing some of the most lucid expositions of the human condition and its roots in linguistic patterns.

In the Buddhist view, people out of ignorance (*avidya*) fragment the world into separate and seemingly independent objects, entities and meanings. People see these as above all firm and permanent, instead of recognizing the fluidity and transience of all things. This clinging to rigid ideas about fixed forms and categories, while actually existing in a fluid and impermanent space, is seen as

lying at the base of all existential suffering. (Similarly, Varela refers to how the belief in an independent and fixed self results in what he terms Cartesian anxiety.)

This active dream of permanence is not being labelled here as simply problematic. Rather, it can be understood as part of the essence of the human experience which arises from the tension between wholeness and fragmentation, between continuity and discontinuity - all of which play out in patterns of connection and disconnection.

The pursuit of fixed meanings and permanence, the fear of change and the suffering resulting from the impact of transient processes, all has to do with the fragmentation and seeming unsafeness that discontinuity on some level of experience can bring to the person's sense of everything.

#### Identity and the Encountering of Discontinuity

The encountering of discontinuity somewhere in what is pursued as a permanent meaningmaking ecology can bring a discontinuity in past meanings and patterns of connection. In this sense the sureness and fixedness of all identities are under threat in this moment and the ensuing process.

Regarded from a different angle, it is only through discontinuity in the discursive community's patterns that new and transformed meanings become possible. Before the disruption, the webs of meaning making show set limits, firstly in their seemingly enduring repeating patterns, and secondly through their continual efforts at sustaining and legitimizing themselves.

Thus transformation of meanings and identities become possible when discontinuity (for example, through the experience of loss) is encountered outside of the predictions of discontinuity and disconnection that is already part of the discursive communities' meaningmaking habits.

### Loss and the Transformation of Sense of Self

As discussed before, a sense of self can only be a relational one, and can only be attained interactively. In simpler terms, there can only be an I through a You. It follows quite clearly then, that when a shift occurs in the person's sense of who and where her Yous are, her sense of I also has to shift.

Connection, then, is not about reaching towards something outside. It is about recognizing the self in the other. It is a deeply personal endeavour wherein you can only touch the other by letting the other touch you. Similarly then, disconnection is not so much about losing another, but about losing the self that is only accessible through the other.

Thus another person, when in some relationship with you, becomes a repository for your own identity, and you a repository for theirs. Should they disappear or the relationship become less easily accessible, a part of yourself gets lost, and the part of yourself that has to do with them and their identity, suddenly seems useless.

Similarly, the whole connected community/communities of significance evolves as a repository for the person's identity. At the point and through the process of loss, this whole web of relatedness and patterns move, and takes with it the person's sense of safety in being able to know before - through the web's repeated patterns - who she is. Thus a vacuum (of identity, history, continuity) is produced by a loss

of some of those links that constitute selves-in-context. In having to live through this shift in context, the person is in migration, leaving behind familiar markers, predictable relationships and the icons of past meanings, without having the clear sense of a next destiny.

Thus the experience of loss becomes a moment where the person finds her self removed from a part of her own history, having less to do with the people with whom she has constructed it, and removed from her couchedness within the patterns of a familiar web of meaningmaking. It is a moment where new and hidden narratives of her self in the relational domain of living and dying can emerge, as new patterns and webs of meaningmaking have to be built around her.

It is during this process that a shift and/or evolution in her sense of her own self can emerge. (It is through such movements in the person's webs of relatedness that individuation can occur. This can be seen to refer to a person having a complexity of senses of self that has not only emerged from, and does not only fit with, one clear discursive context, but from the kinds of transformation elicited by discontinuity in meaningmaking systems.)

This evolution becomes possible firstly through the fact that the crisis moment of the loss creates an opportunity for increased openness and flexibility (as much as it is a moment of fear and unsafeness) around old behavior patterns, stories and identities. Secondly, the resulting social fragmentation and isolation creates a moment for a new gathering and forming of kinship systems and through that of discursive communities. Through both of these sides of the process the person becomes able to draw other boundaries and to hear different voices of her self and of those next to her. Thus also those people she knew before, she now knows in a new way, a reorganization and changed reconnection that forms part of the transformation of her own sense of self.

Epston (1991) refers in this vein to the process of (what he terms) reconciliation that is necessary after the kinship system fragmentation that follows the experience of a loss. This *reconciliation* is defined by him as both an internal and external process, carried out by the person in the crisis of the loss and entailing the altering of the person's personal myths about herself, about the types of relationships she requires and about the way she and others have to behave in order to meet her needs.

Thus the experience of loss precipitates a whole process of transformation of identities and meaningmaking patterns. It necessitates an altered and profound reconnection to an entire web of life - one that incorporates a sense of transience.

This nuance of the gaining of altered and relativized senses of self and of meaning, of new ways of believing while knowing of impermanence, finds some echo in the fact that the word "reconnecting" comes from the same root as the word religion: *religio* in Latin.

Or as e e cummings puts it (Cummings, 1965, p.72):

i thank You God for most this amazing  
 day: for the leaping greenly spirits of trees  
 and a blue true dream of sky; and for everything  
 which is natural which is infinite which is yes

(i who have died am alive again today,  
 and this is the sun's birthday, this is the birth  
 day of life and of love and wings: and of the gay  
 great happening illimitably earth)

how should tasting touching hearing seeing  
breathing any - lifted from the no  
of all nothing - human merely being  
doubt unimaginable You?

(now the ears of my ears awake and  
now the eyes of my eyes are opened)

## EPILOGUE

In the previous sections different angles of the social construction of all identity, and most notably of our senses of self, have been discussed. Our ideas of who we are and can be, and of what we can and should do and not do, grow from ecologies of ideas, from the semi-familiar rhythm of connection and disconnection within our usual discursive communities. Thus our sense(s) of I is indelibly linked to our senses of who our You's are. In this mutual and historically based granting and perpetuation of meaning, we try to attain what seems to us to be stability and continuity. We move in webs of what seems to us to be set meanings, evolving habits that do not threaten what seems to us to be a largely axiomatic world. However, it is when we encounter unexpected and often painful moves in these webs that transformation of all meanings become possible. Such moves entail changes to the pattern(s) of connection and disconnection that we are used to in our meaningmaking communities. It is the discontinuity of what went before. In the previous sections the encountering of loss was shown to often entail such a move and in that a transformational process within which new stories around the world and self can now emerge.

All meaning, theoretical and otherwise, was shown to evolve from the template of connection-disconnection. This template is also most notable in the worlds that therapists move and work in. It is the moves and meanings between people that become the focus of their professional conversations. It is their own patterns of connection-disconnection from which they themselves evolve into different forms of therapists. Furthermore, the question of the possibilities of transforming one's sense of self, and recursively with that, one's options in relating, is at issue for both the client and therapist personally. In that sense, as discussed before, the therapist's experience(s) of loss is particularly interesting. In this chapter, all of the above ideas which have been discussed at length in the previous sections, will be

approached in another language. Here, my stories of the narratives of loss of two therapists from two different contexts, are given as illustration of the ideas discussed before. These stories are not offered as proof and will not be analyzed accordingly. Such an effort at finding proof would imply the search for an ultimate truth. Rather, these stories are offered as lived reality synchronous to these ideas. It is a different language used to enhance the telling of this version of the story of the transformational power of loss. To me, these are stories of hope evolving from lives interrupted by painful experiences of losing most that seemed familiar before.

### **Isabelle's Story**

Isabelle is a 33-year old woman who is married to Alex and has two daughters, Robin, 5 and Beatrice, 2. She has been qualified as a psychotherapist for nine years.

She is the only child from her mother's second marriage and there was a bigger age gap than usual between herself and both her parents. Her father was +- 50 years older than her and her mother +- 40. She has two half-siblings from her mother's first marriage, both of whom are also a great deal older than herself.

During the last five years both her parents have died from cancer, first her father and eighteen months later her mother. Her mother had already been diagnosed as terminal when her father died.

Although I knew her somewhat from professional contexts before, our relationship really started developing when she came to see me for a while for psychotherapy a few months after her father's death. She returned around the time that her mother was dying, and again about two years after her mother's death.

Isabelle describes the main threads running through the sense(s) of herself that she had evolved for most of her life, as someone who was organized and socially very able.

*If I look back on how I was before I'd lost both of them I think I was always well-dressed and I always looked good and I always had the right amount of empathy and I could always listen...I think I became a therapist at the age of five.*

Isabelle used to think of herself as having grown up in a materially privileged and emotionally "quite normal" environment. She was exceptionally close to her father, adoring him as far back as she can remember. She was less close to her mother, but remembers feeling proud of her, as she was a beautiful and graceful woman that got a great deal of explicit admiration from a lot of people.

Isabelle specifically remembers always having had extreme difficulties in dealing with people leaving, even when they are going away for short periods for seemingly unthreatening reasons. She recalls:

*This difficulty with separating spread over into so much of my life, into every aspect of my life. I didn't realise how much it did affect. I almost stumbled upon a greater awareness of it in the sense that I kept feeling so anxious when Alex [her husband] was going away and I thought well it is because my brother and sister went away. I didn't even realise the enormity of why I thought that and when someone goes away I always tried to be so good because I got scared they won't come back. I would try to make everything okay, not fight with them, not be disruptive, not express emotion and just say I am okay. Because I got afraid if I am not okay they really won't come back. I would turn myself around in knots, inside out to make everything perfect so they won't be sitting far away thinking ah I don't want to be with her.*

This formed a central thread in Isabelle's patterns of relating. Certain meanings around the reasons for this difficulty were also evolved by the people in her immediate social webs, most notably her family. The idea that formed was that Isabelle couldn't deal with others leaving because her brother and sister, whom she was particularly close to, left home when she was still very small. The quality of this constructed meaning - referring to an event long gone and seemingly unchangeable, and employing a semantic permeated with permanence - served to bring a sense of permanence to her relational pattern. She would not question the absoluteness of this interpretation until after the death of both her parents.

In this vein, in telling her story of the losses in her life, she notes that the difficulty is that she "*actually almost need to go backward*", since the more overt losses she dealt with later in her life, enabled her to deal with the more hidden losses she experienced earlier in her life, and that it was really this journey that brought profound shifts in her sense of self.

*I think the first loss I dealt with was the physical loss of when my father died and that was the first time that I ever experienced loss, in a very concrete sense, in that I lost him. And he died very suddenly and it was an enormous shock - and it was something that I thought about through my life. I thought one day he will die, but I never realized what loss actually meant.*

*And I also had the sense that when he would die, I would die, because I never knew how I would ever cope without him.*

*And then the second loss was the loss of my mother, which was a year and a half later and that was something that was yet another physical loss. So in terms of that, those were the two sort of major losses that I've had.*

*But looking back on what in fact happened in my life, I had been dealing with the issue of loss from when I was very, very small, but not knowing that that's actually what I was dealing with. That only became more apparent to me after their deaths.*

*Then I started seeing that I'd lost so much throughout my life and never realized that all of that had actually been an enormous loss.*

*So in a sense my journey was sort of one that was from something that happened recently, right back into something that happened in the past.*

The journey of mourning her parents also, entailed her moving in unfamiliar relational patterns and brought with it new lenses in her considering and constructing of the nature of the webs of connection and disconnection within which she learned about herself and about who she is and can be in the presence of others.

Firstly, she remembers the loss of her father as bringing experiences she had never known before.

*I think that through the process of my father dying and me actually facing that terrible pain that I didn't even have words and I still to some extent don't have words for... I remember feeling like I'd, I knew I could feel this enormous, enormous pain and loss. I didn't have a word in the world to describe it, and if I think back on most of the losses that I've experienced, that I had experienced up until then I always think of that painting "The Silent Scream", of standing there screaming and nothing coming out. And I think I felt that way when Anne left me, I felt that way my whole life with my parents' with their fighting. I felt that way when my brother left even though I screamed, it did nothing. And when my father died that was my feeling but then something started coming out, that scream did come out and I learnt to find words to piece with that pain. I learnt to just feel it, and it was so difficult because it was intolerable for me, and there were so many times when I would sit, feeling so desperate and crying, and crying and crying for him, and think to myself "I don't want to feel like this, if only I could go back to how I was, if only I could not feel sore, if only I could cut off". And I just couldn't do it, there was just no point at which I could do it. And I think that in a funny way through him dying,*

*and through me going through that process, he gave me the gift of life because I had never had it before. Because through that absolute pain and dealing with - for me the most frightening stuff, the most frightening stuff in the sense of, not the stuff of home, but the most frightening feelings for me, because they meant I was going to die. I felt so desperate that I thought it was going to kill me, and that's what I was so afraid of, I thought "I'm going to die, I'm never going to wake up, I'm never going to be able to get up tomorrow morning, because I feel like this". And I would wake up the next morning, I'd feel exactly the same and think I'm not going to make it, I'm actually not going to be able to do this. And through it I actually learnt what it means to live, and through it I actually became what I would regard as a person because I think that I learnt to live and how to make contact with people which was something I had never done before.*

The immense pain and disruption in her world brought about by the death of her father, brings many shifts in her way of relating to others and to her own feelings. Later, she sees his death as preparing her to be able to face the emotions and issues which were to emerge after her mother's death. In the period after her father's death she is also kept in old patterns (of being controlled and taking care of others) by the imminence of her mother's death. This is illustrated in who and how she was at the time of her mother dying.

*I sat with her while she died and I counselled her through it, I mean if I think about it, it was just so ludicrous. I sat with her while she died and she was struggling, and I think the worst thing, the thing that for me really just epitomized my mother so much was that she couldn't even acknowledge her physical pain of the cancer. I remember the morning that she died she was bleeding internally, she was in the most incredible amount of physical pain and she turned to the doctor and she said "I'm in a bit of trouble". And that to me .. it is just my mother. That she couldn't say in her last moment when she was dying this is fucking sore, this is fucking awful, this is something I'm in a bit of trouble. Oh, her doctor would have to phone me*

after she had been there to find out how she was, because he had asked my mother, and she would tell him she is fine. She was always fine. So she sat keeping, I think what had made her ill to start with. Keeping everything, all contained, all inside never been able to face anything and she couldn't even face her own illness, she faced on the surface, she went off to therapy, she went to meditation. She was not okay about dying. She was not okay about being sick at all. But she would go to the doctor, and he'd say,

"how are you", this is my mother who could not get up for three days at a time because she was so tired, from her liver, who she would wake up every morning, she would have diarrhoea for two to three hours that she would get hot flushes and hormones flushing through her system, she was menopausal, who could barely walk without getting out of breath, completely and utterly out of breath, and she would say "I am fine thank you or I'm a bit better".

And family would say "how is your mother?", and I couldn't even tell them how absolutely bloody awful it was, and how sick she was, because I'd also been taught that you don't do that. I still cannot go to the doctor and tell him I'm ill. I mean for me to go to the doctor I have to have pneumonia okay and I go and say "I have a bit of a sore throat", because I've been taught that's what you do. And that morning that she died I think in a way I still played the consumer therapist, in the sense that she was lying on the bed and she'd have a lot of morphine and she was dying, I mean she was very close to being dead. And I sat with her and it was such a horrible, horrible thing to do, it was so awful to sit and watch my own mother die and yet I held it all together, it was ludicrous. And she was struggling and she kept saying to me "I can't get over, I can't get over" and there I was stroking her forehead saying "it's okay, you're going to go soon".

With the death of both her parents, her meaningmaking communities shift drastically. She does not have access to the interactions and dialogues through

which her identity within certain patterns of relating was also constructed and continually strengthened.

In the loss of her parents Isabelle's social webs, the sites of the co-construction of the identity of herself, her parents and her history, move dramatically. In it she also moves from mourning a dead mother to mourning a living mother. A new story, set of meanings, about her childhood emerges. In this she reconsiders what she thought she knew before, encounters the loss of unmet needs and meets her parents and herself in a different way. This process of transforming webs of meaning, also entail a punctuation of different events.

*My memories of my childhood now are memories where I think I lost being a little girl - such a long time ago. I don't remember much about when I was very small. I know that my sisters' told me that when my parents' left and went away on holiday, I was absolutely devastated, but I know I've never been able to deal with people leaving and with people separating from me, at all.*

She tells of many instances where the presence and more notably the absence or looming absence of someone or something important, stands out in her memories.

*My first real recollection of somebody going away until recently, was of my sister leaving, she is seventeen years older than I am, so I was six when she got married and she left home. And I remember feeling devastated. I remember feeling that I couldn't believe that she'd gone*

*...We stood in the station and watched that train because they were going down to Cape Town by the blue train and then they were going off to live in London. And I remember everybody crying, and I just stood there and I was numb from shock. I couldn't even cry, and I got home and I remember I found my father crying. And I'd never seen him cry before in my life, and when I saw him cry I started to panic and I thought 'what's happening, he's crying'? And he covered up very quickly. I*

*felt very anxious that he was so upset. I was so used to seeing my mother cry at everything - I mean she'd cry when she'd put on a record . So I mean I was quite used to her crying. But I wasn't used to him, and it made me terrified. I used to cry for Anne and then I used to miss her. Nobody helped me really deal with how desperate I was. She was so much like a mother to me, and she'd provided so much nurturing for me, that my mother never had. And had protected me from so much, and had really been there for me always.*

*And after she had left, I think it was about a year later or even less, my brother Alan had come back to live at home. I felt quite protected by him. And I remember my mother telling me, that he was going to live in Australia and I just didn't believe it. And often I can hear my mother or even Sam saying - " I'm going soon! ", And I'd say - "No you're not - I'm gonna come with you! " I think I just thought I would go with, because for me it was the most natural feeling that I would just be with him. I have such a clear recollection of the day that he left and I went to the airport, and I got to the airport and we were standing, I think outside where people go through to get on the plane - to board the plane. And the horror of him going and the horror of that loss actually hit me, and I threw myself on the floor of the airport and I just cried, and cried and cried and screamed for him (which was something I was never allowed to or did never do).*

*I would have done anything to have got on that plane with him. I was frantic. And I was always told throughout my life, that that was why I couldn't deal with people going, because Sam and Anne had left. And NOW I have come to a point where I realize that my not being able to deal with people going has got very little to do with that. I think it made it worse, it made the way that I deal with loss worse but I think that I had lost so much during my childhood anyway, particularly in terms of what was going on at home at that time, on a much more subtle but also a much bigger scale.*

*When I was 2 or 3 we left Brits which is a very small, little community where the only people I ever spoke English to were my parents. I used to run around the streets and go to my friends and I was quite happy. I don't have much recollection - I think I was happy in terms of friends, I don't know, I wasn't very happy at home.*

*And we went to live in America when I was three and I just had the feeling, when I look back on it that it was just the most awful year. I know that I didn't fit in at all at school, nobody could understand how I spoke. All the kids used to say "She talks funny", because they didn't understand my accent at all. And my parents - well my father was never around because he was back at university at the age of 59 and having to really prove himself. And my mother was demented in that flat. We were in a small little flat and I remember her shouting at me so much. And I remember feeling completely unnerved and just feeling VERY vulnerable and insecure. I really didn't know where I was, I remember I wouldn't eat. My mother was very angry with my father that she'd landed up in this place - with him not being around... I just remember feeling very unhappy there. And very frightened because they were always fighting. My mother was fighting with him all the time, and he with her and she was shouting at him a lot. My main memory of that time is that he wasn't there so she was fighting with him or about him. And I remember my father telling me a story, of one day she was actually cooking something and she walked up the stairs with a knife and he got such a fright when he saw her that he actually threw me into the bathroom with him and locked us in there. And they always laughed about it, but there was actually nothing funny about it because that was the extent of what was going on, as she walked up those stairs he thought she was going to kill us. So that always gave me a very good indication of the fact that it really wasn't okay there at all.*

*And then we left America at the end of that, and we came back to Johannesburg and we lived in a house, which, if I think about that house it makes me feel quite*

*physically sick because I just remember feeling so unhappy, and it was such a dark house and there was very little light that used to come in to it. And for me it was such a dark place - by that stage I just remember being so insecure and so unsettled that I just didn't know whether I was actually coming or going. And the sad - I think the worst thing was that my mother was there but she really wasn't. And now I see that the loss that I experienced was loss from when I was very , very little, and looking back at that time, that was the time really where I think it's impact started becoming strong. And I remember my parents starting to fight and that house just being so dark. The only sense of any light that I had was that I had a whole lot of fairies that I believed lived in the bottom of my garden and I used to go there everyday and sit with them. And I was so lonely. So much wasn't there. I don't even know if I can describe it as a loss because those words of course weren't there then and also there wasn't a sense that I'd actually ever had anything to lose - but there was just this incredible emptiness.*

*And I remember that I had a dog there , a little poodle and my father had big Great Danes, so we had two Great Danes . And I remember that I gave my poodle a sweet and the Great Dane tried to grab it and the Great Dane took my poodle by the scruff of his neck in his mouth and shook him until I think the dog died of shock .*

*And I remember the horror of that because I felt so guilty and responsible for that dog's death. And I was too afraid to tell my mother, and so I said to her they fought over a bone, and I remember that sense so much of being scared of her, and scared that if I just did anything wrong she would just turn her back on me completely.*

*At that time I don't remember her ever walking out and I don't remember any of that stuff, I just remember that dark house and feeling awful .*

*And in a sense, I think that while she was alive as a mother, she was very much dead for me- she was very much gone in a way. But she wasn't so completely gone, she always sort of played lip service to my emotions, in a way that I found*

very comforting because it was all that I had. So she would comfort me - you know- she'd say " it's so difficult for you", and I often look back on what she said and I feel like she must have read one of those books on parenting, like 'Between Parent and Child' and learnt that you've got to be empathic and you've got to reflect how your children feel. So you've got to sit down and say I know it's very hard for you" or " you must feel very sad right now". But there was no point ever, at which she took what I was feeling and took my sadness and comforted it at all, or allowed me to express it, or allowed me to actually just show the consequences of how I was feeling or how I was actually feeling.

I was allowed to feel sad, provided that I only cried a little bit, then she gave me a little bit of her sort of empathy and a little stroke then I had to be fine. But I wasn't - I mean , I remember crying about nursery school and somewhere there was a message from her that enough was enough. Because I think she used to get desperate, because she didn't know what to do, but she'd get very irritated with me. I remember her feeling irritated - a sense that she was very angry or irritated, more with me - that I was a pain, because it had gone on too long.

And then at the end of the year that I finished nursery school we also moved house - I think - yes we did, and I started at a new school. And we moved into our house in Hyde Park which was this beautiful house that they'd built and it was sort of this very unique, beautiful designed house, and everything was imported and everything was beautiful, and I was allowed to choose my bedroom and I was allowed to choose what I wanted and it was all this sort of, on the surface, this beautiful sort of palace for you know, a queen and king and the little princess. Then when we moved into this house, and I remember being very scared. It was awful, there were builders everywhere and it wasn't properly finished and I think that for me as a little girl there was a sense that I didn't have any ground underneath at all. And I went into the new school and I hated it. I was so scared at school, I was so scared of the teachers and so scared of the other children.

*And I remember the mornings in that house being a horror because I wasn't allowed to speak to my mother in the morning, because my mother was not a morning person and she had to have a cup of coffee and cigarette before I could speak to her. There was this absolute silence on the way to school because she did not cope with mornings, and I would be driving to school absolutely beside myself anyway, because I was so scared of going and I didn't want to, but I couldn't tell her that I didn't want to go because she would have been angry with me and she would have gone to talk to the teacher. She would never have dealt with me.*

*And at that time, I think that their fighting got a lot worse when we first moved into that house. I think also I was right next to their bedroom, my fancy pink and orange swinging bedroom, was right next to their bedroom. There was a bathroom that we shared that was in between us and that was the time I think, until I was about nine or ten and I was six when we moved in, that I just remember constant, constant fighting and them screaming at one another, I remember that we would sit down for a meal there would always be a tiff or an argument but not a full blown fight. And in the mornings there would always be some bickering that used to go on. But the worst fights that used to happen was after I had gone to bed. And my father very often used to put me to bed, which I used to like. And he used to put me to bed and I used to go to sleep, and I just remember being, woken in the middle of the night by this shouting and screaming and the two of them fighting with one another. And I would get beside myself - I would just be desperate and I would be so terrified. And eventually I would get out of bed and I would just run to them. They had a dressing room which was right next to the bathroom and I used to close the door.*

*I think in my mothers 'Between Parents and Child' it was told it was not good for a child to be exposed to too much conflict. And I remember eventually always*

running into that dressing room and I remember saying "please don't fight, don't fight." And my mother would look at me, like down at me and she would say, "This has got nothing to do with you Isabelle." In a cold voice. "Go back to bed." And I would go back to bed and I would lie there and my heart would actually pound and pound and I would toss and turn and I couldn't sleep and then I would fall asleep and I would have nightmares every single night. I can't remember nights for years where I didn't have nightmares. And my mother would come and say, "It's just a bad dream darling". And then what I used to do was I used to go and lie in their bed for the rest of the night. And she didn't want that because she said I would kick her. So she made a little bed for me at the bottom of their bed, which I thought was just wonderful because at least I could be with them in the night. So I would wait and I would kind of wait until it was late enough and the fighting would start and then I'd go to their bed. Because it was the one thing where I felt that at least I was with the two of them and at least neither of them could leave me in the middle of the night, because I always used to worry that I would wake up in the middle of the night and my mother wouldn't be there.

And then during the day she would spend a lot of her day talking to me about my father, and how awful he was to her. And if she got angry with me she would walk out the door. I used to get absolutely frantic. I was so frightened when she used to leave that I didn't actually know what to do with myself - I was just scared and desperate.

She would always threaten that she's had enough - we would have had a little argument about something or I would have misbehaved once too often, and she would have said to me "I've had enough of you - I'm going". And she'd just walk out the door and I would be running after her and saying "Mummy, don't go, don't go" and she'd say "I have had enough Isabelle" and she'd get in her car. And I remember standing behind that front door waiting for her and thinking that she was never going to come back. And I had a very sweet nanny, who'd come and say

*"come and play, come and sit with me" and I couldn't. I used to stand at that door - but I was too afraid to say how scared I was that she'd gone, because I thought it was my fault. And I always had a sense with her that any loss and any leaving was because of something I'd done, which was what terrified me. And when she would come home, I would do anything in the world to make it better, and I used to sit and draw her pictures when she wasn't there because I thought it would make it better, make her pleased with me and decide to stay. I used to make a little box of things because I would do anything to make her feel better - to take away that threat of her going. And I would draw her pictures. I would do anything, and I would leave notes on her pillow. I was prepared to do whatever it took. I would in a sense just shloop her to the endth degree to get her back. It wouldn't have made any difference to me what I had to do, because it would have made me feel better. You know because as long as she would be there again and not go away, it wouldn't matter what I would have to do. And that was sort of this most desperate thing for me - was to keep her happy all the time so that she wouldn't leave. And the slightest thing could spark her off. I'm sure that I was naughty at times and I'm sure that I was difficult at times but mostly I was this extremely good and well-behaved little girl. But I was told from when I was so little that I was impossible that I - I don't actually know when I was, or when I wasn't, you know.*

*I was just taught that I had to be good all the time. That was the way that I would avoid her leaving me. And I would be contained, and not only that, I would also be very facilitating of her and I would be her therapist. And if I could sit - I mean I think I became the therapist when I was six, because if I could sit and talk about how she felt about me then she would love me, love me in her own way. But I would then fulfil her and she wouldn't leave and she wouldn't walk out the door and we could have some connection. And that was the only connection that we had. And I saw it as being connection because even later in my life I thought, "well at least mom does talk to me about how she feels." It was no connection for me though, in the sense that it wasn't what my mother should have done, but it was better than*

having nothing and it was better than that disapproval and it was better than her walking out that door. It didn't ever prevent her walking out again though...

Looking back at all of it - throughout my life ... I can never remember my mother sitting on the floor playing with me... I can never remember her doing anything with me. Except that she used to sit, she had this desk with a built-in sewing machine and she would sit behind there it was like in the centre of the house .. she would sit behind there and I was allowed to come and sit on the floor and I could make clothes for my doll. But I cannot ever remember her painting with me, she sent me to art classes. And I can't remember her drawing with me, I can't remember her playing any games at all. Not even snakes and ladders, I can't remember any time that she ever played with me.

If I wanted to swim, she would call the maid to take me to swim. She would never get into the swimming pool. It was so funny, 'cause children used to say they're going swimming with their family and I didn't know what that meant. And through all of this I was anxious and shy, God, I was so shy ... I used to just ... they used to I used to hide behind my mother. I was so terrified, so shy.

And I remember that I had a little dog, this beautiful little dog, a little Dashchund and I carry this dog around from when I came here from school, till when I left in the morning. I used to wanna cry in the morning, because I'd left the dog. I went to sleep with the dog, I used to want to be with the dog all of the time .. I think I used to half suffocate the dog with love because I just use to walk around with this dog and hold him by me the whole day, because the dog was at least something that I felt some warmth from. In all of this my father was there in the sense that he would come home and he would be very loving towards me - he always was. And he would be very happy to see me. For him I really was his little tootsie. And he would indulge me - my father indulged me my entire life with anything that I wanted and everything that I want. So, he didn't really set a limit from the day I was born, till the day that he died - I don't think he could have. That was another fight they

would always have - my mom would say "Michael, please discipline her!" And he'd say : "She's fine, darling" And she'd say "She is not all fine. She's impossible!" Huge fight about me and I would be standing right there.

And I remember at one stage, she decided .. think I was about eight or nine, she decided that there was definitely something the matter and she sent me off to see a therapist. And I remember going to somebody every week. And I used to try and find ways ... I used to make myself sick, so that I wouldn't have to go. I was also very good at making myself sick so I could miss school.

This therapist probably wasn't that hard but to me she seemed fairly hard. She had this hazardous sort of hairdo and she used to sit behind her desk and I used to play in this doll's house and draw pictures, and I used to absolutely hate it. I can't remember what she'd do with me, but we used to go through this whole thing, and we played with these dolls you know - the sort of usual play therapy thing, but I used to cringe. I used to hate it. And all I know was that I never talked about what was hard for me. Because that was what I learned, that you just don't do that anyway ... you don't really show.

And it was what I also came to accept, was actually O.K. - that that was how you dealt with things, you went to therapy. What I learned was that I was never allowed to show how I felt ... that I was never allowed to express my feelings and that all I had to do, was cut them off and pretend they didn't exist ... and be a good little girl. So I went to this therapist and even later in my life, I went for therapy. I never spoke about what I really felt, I don't think I even really knew what I felt like. I presented somewhere along the surface, knew always that I could mouth the right words, I could talk the talk, but I couldn't actually feel it. And, I don't think I even knew how I really felt about most things. I knew what I should feel, I knew what the appropriate response was. And .. I could feel a bit sad, I mean I wasn't totally cut

*off and totally numb but I never knew what it really meant to feel any pain, because I had spent my whole childhood covering it up and making it fine.*

*So I wasn't at any point allowed to express it. The only way that I could express it, was by going to therapy, or by being therapeutic. Was the only way I was allowed to express myself, really.*

*When it came to Matric, I started working hard and I got the distinctions I needed. And went to university and I still did exactly what she wanted, what - in a sense - she had set out for me to do. People would say to me : "What made you become a psychologist?" Well, I've been her psychologist from 5. I didn't become a psychologist - I was born a psychologist. I mean I think from when I could speak, I was a psychologist. I don't think that it was really an issue of whether I became something. I was that. And, that was acceptable. What I'd sit and do was to sit and therapize my mother and everybody else.*

*I think that there was such a sense for me always that my mother was dead but alive. And I think that she really was. And I think also that she told me that the way to do things was just not to worry. I remember one night having a fight with my father. The one thing that I had with my father, was the ability to have a fight. He would scream - with him I would scream back and then it will be finished. But, what didn't finish for me was that fighting made me very anxious. So, for him it would be finished, and I would never have to go and make it better with him, because he didn't reject me for fighting with him. But I would feel very anxious. And I would go and sort of hang around my mother 'cause I was just scared, because we had a fight. And I've always been like that about fights. I remember till the day he died, if he and I had had a fight, I would have to make it better before I went to sleep, because I was scared that he would die in the night. That was always my fear about fighting with people. That it would be the end of the world ... or that they would go away and I wouldn't have had a chance to have made it better. Always*

*my thing, so with my father I also had it. But it wasn't something that he had done to me, it was something that I think it was directly from my mother. I remember one day going into my room after a fight with him and I was crying. My mother came and she said to me that "He has really hurt you, hasn't he darling? And I said "Yes, he had" I said : "I hate him" And she said to me : "I'm sure that you do" and I said I hated him and I'm never gonna let him do that to me. And she said to me : "One day you'll learn to just cut it off and he'll never be able to hurt you, and then you'll be fine."*

*And I remember her saying to me when I used to fight with Alex, not even fight with Alex, when I used to get anxious about Robin in a way. For example if he worked late and I was on my own, 'cause I just, I couldn't cope with it at all. And she used to say to me: "You know what, darling, Robin's really silly to do that to you, because one day a part of you will die. And you must stop caring about him." And that was her way of me dealing with what I was feeling.*

*You just cut it off and it would die and then you'd be fine. And you might be just totally unavailable,, but you would be fine. And that was what I also learned: When things are really sore .. you just push them away. And I think that probably when my father died, was the first time that I was physically ever allowed to be sore. It was the first time that I was ever allowed to really ... experience pain. This was acceptable for me ... to feel absolutely awful, 'cause he was dead.*

*And I think only when my father died I think that was the point at which I actually realised what it meant to experience pain. To experience emotion and to experience what it felt like to be desperate. 'Cause I had been desperate in my life. But, I had always covered it up so quickly. I had found a way to manipulate this situation to make it better for myself. I wouldn't manipulate a situation for any gain, it was to make it less scary, that was all. Not to get into that deep sense of feeling absolutely desperate.*

*Even now for a long time if I was confronted with a desperate feeling I would try and manipulate the situation, so that it would be better, like if Alex had to go away I would try and manipulate it so he would go away for much less time so I wouldn't have to feel desperate. And when my father died I think it was the first time that I ever felt what it was like to be floating in a sea of - it was absolute darkness and desperation and absolute fear, and the fact that I couldn't control it. When he first died I did contain it, I was fine, I mean I had lost my father but on the surface I seemed okay. But I knew that within me I wasn't okay, very strongly. And I wasn't so cut off from myself that I really didn't know when I wasn't okay, I knew that I wasn't okay but I never until that point knew just how terrible I felt and just how desperate I felt. Because I could feel sad - I learnt to feel those things, to experience those things but it was always in a way that I could still have them under control, that they didn't engulf me, that they didn't overwhelm me, that they didn't threaten me, because the minute - when I say threaten, the minute I felt that an emotion could overwhelm me it threatened me so much that it would almost back me into a corner. Because I would feel that I was going to drown, and I would never be able to get up. And when my father died that was how I felt, I felt that I was actually drowning, I felt I was never ever going to get better. I thought I was just going to descend into - I mean I was in this kind of blackness, and in this death and I just thought I was just never going to feel alive again, never going to feel life, never feel what it meant to actually live. And yet I had never really lived, I had never actually known what it meant, to actually live as a human being.*

*I had known my whole life what it was like to be a contained little robot and looking back on myself I almost feel like I had the right amount of emotion programmed into me, like it was injected into me, you know, you could be sad for this long, in this quantity and you were allowed to cry for x number of minutes, and you were allowed to feel those things. So it wasn't as if my mother had said to me "you will never feel anything again in your life and you're not allowed to cry". I was allowed*

*to cry but for a very short time. And so I think that before he died I walked around in a shell. It was in many ways so much like my mother. And if I look back on how I was before I'd lost both of them I think in many ways I was so similar to my mother, in the sense that I was always well-dressed and I always looked good and I always had the right amount of empathy and I could always listen. My mother could listen and be very empathic and very- she had on the surface an incredible serenity. People used to say, " you know she was so serene and at peace " and I thought, " my mother, my mother who'd spent her whole life anxious and conflict-ridden and hysterical on many levels ", was on the surface very serene and contained.*

*And I think I was very much like that, and that what I adopted in being a therapist was her therapeutic skill, her skill at feeling other people's emotions and I think I could do it with more depth than she could but it was a skill. And in many ways I think even when I did my M.A, it's a pity I didn't do it now - I mean it's nice that I've got it - but I think in terms of being a therapist I've become a therapist now, a real therapist. I was not a therapist. I had the qualifications, I had the title and I had the skills but I had absolutely no clue what I was doing if I look back on it. I think I did therapy relatively effectively in terms of the fact that it was an academic thing, it was academic thrown in with a bit of deep empathy, but it wasn't about me being alive in that room. It was about me being a therapist and I often think if I look back even on my internship, even if I was with a person I think I was behind a one-way mirror, that's how I always see myself, I might as well have been behind a one-way mirror because I never really made contact. I was too afraid to make contact, I was so afraid of making contact with people that I just couldn't do it. I didn't know what it meant, that was the part I really didn't know what it was about at all.*

In the absence of the seemingly stable relational space with her father, Isabelle also started constructing him differently.

*I think in a sense although he was there for me, in that he is very loving and he was probably .. and I think I absolutely idealised him, because I saw him as being so much more than he was, as well, for so long. Because my mother was so rejecting and he was so accepting of me in that anything that I wanted, anything that I did, was acceptable. That it became, he became a lot more than I think, in reality, he actually was. And yet .... there was a warmth for me, and he was very much the .. but it was only in short period. And I think until recently I always felt that he had protected me, I now know that he didn't protect me at all.*

*And in that sense he wasn't good with me either. He was there for me in a way that he knew how to be and it was a hell of a lot better than my mother. And ... he was there for me in there for me in the way that he knew how to nurture and how to love, and I always know that he loved me .... completely and absolutely ... unconditionally. I mean I could have done anything with my life, my father would've adored me, no matter what I would have done. And yet, in a very real sense - he didn't protect me from that fight and he wasn't really there for me in the way that I wanted to believe that he was, he was very much there for me in a very practical sense as well and he would always help me and he would always look after me and even as an adult, he would do it. But I didn't do a thing, I mean in terms of running my life he ran my life for me. But he never, he couldn't help to deal with how I've been.*

*And I think that with my mother's death, because I was dealing with the death of my father and I remember - I mean, it was again my mother, there she was dying and nobody had mentioned it, there she was so ill with cancer and she'd had it for five years and nobody had spoken about the fact that she was going to die. And I remember you saying that I needed to speak to her, and I remember her coming to my house and I thought " I know I've got to do this, I know that I've got to say something about this ". I was so tense that I remember feeling like I wanted to vomit. I remember sitting there thinking, "I'm going to actually get sick". And she*

sat down and I was sitting on the couch and I said "Mom", and it was the most unnatural thing that I'd ever done, because I'd never ever spoken to my mother.

And I said "you know I went for therapy today" and if I look back on it, it was probably the only way I could have ever approached it because therapy was okay.

And she said, "yes, I'm very pleased you're going".

And I said (swallowing) "well, mom". And I just remember feeling so tense, I remember feeling physically ill, I was going (taking deep breaths), "you know mom, we spoke about you being sick". She said "yes, darling". I thought I can't pull this off. And she said "yes darling". And I said, "Corinne said I must talk to you about it".

And she said "yes I think that's a good idea darling. Well I sat there and thought "well now what am I supposed to say, I don't have a script for this, I don't know what this means, I don't have a little box that I can haul out now

and put in the tape and know how to say it like a robot. I didn't know what to say.

And I remember - she said, "I think that's a good idea darling", and I said to her, "well you are very sick mom, and we both know you're going to die".

And she said "yes".

And I said "and I'm very scared"

And I remember sitting there and there was just this silence, and I thought "oh, shit, uh,uh, I can't and then I actually from somewhere and I said to her

"I'm very scared and I'm going to miss you so much". And we actually started talking about her dying, and we actually started talking about her being sick. We never did it enough, I mean the only time that we ever really did it enough was the week before she died. But I sometimes still think that in it I couldn't really let go. It was closer than we'd ever been, it was more connected than we've ever been, because we'd acknowledged one secret. But we hadn't begun to acknowledge the thousands of other secrets..

and to really show feeling. And we'd shown the feelings around her dying, that it was the easiest thing to show the feelings around. Because it was so understandable that I would not feel okay with my mother dying in front of my eyes. So we could talk about that and she could talk to some extent about how difficult it was for her, but never really, never really. She could not get to a point where she could really acknowledge it. But we did cry together and we did talk about it together which was much more than we'd ever done, much, much more. And after she died that left me with a sense of tremendous peace about her and it was a peace that I couldn't make sense of but I actually felt so peaceful with her and I didn't feel desperate that she was dead. I didn't feel desperate like with my father, seeing my father lying dead in bed and I just remember standing there looking at him and thinking "uh,uh" and I started to shake him because I wanted to wake him up.

And I said "uh, uh, Daddy, you can't, Dad you can't have gone".

With my mother I didn't feel that at all.

And I just think to myself, not even in the last minutes of her life do I actually say, "don't go". I don't know now given how I feel about her if I wanted her to go or not, but at that point I didn't want her to go. At that point we had some connection, more than we'd ever had and the last thing I wanted in the world was to watch my mother die. And I wanted inside of me to scream, "don't go mommy", like I had screamed for many years. I just couldn't do it - I sat there stroking her hand and telling her "you'll go soon". Her therapist - never mind her therapist, her daughter to the end, and my sister was sitting on the chair crying and she said "do you think mommy knows how much I love her" and I said "come and tell her".

Giving my sister's inability to ever be able to speak to my mother, a space in the midst of an absolute horror, and say "you can't leave me, you're not allowed to" and then I my sister who has a chance to speak to her. But when she actually died I felt-initially all I wanted to do was scream in that hospital, I wanted to scream and scream. When my father died I screamed that whole hospital down, and they put me in a room and said "you'll have a cup of tea" and I said, "I'll do no such thing,

*I'm allowed to cry in this hospital, and I will cry, I couldn't care less about the patients or about you" - I thought fuck. you, I've just lost my father. But with my mother, I mean the doctor came in - he was crying when he said " you may now go home and look after your child" and I said "yes I will".*

*I should have said "how dare you tell me ", my mother's dead, but all the time I was still capable of doing it. But I wasn't that capable of it that I didn't fall apart, I fell apart far more quickly than with my father. But still through my grief for her and my horror of her being dead, had a feeling of a peace about her. I thought at the time it was because I had been able to speak to her. I think now I had that sense of peace, because I could stop struggling with her, I could actually stop that whole struggle, that I was actually free of that incredible struggle. That I was actually free to go off and find what I needed to find within me. And I would always think to myself that the peace - you know it's because we had some connection. And I think yes to some extent at least we had something, but we could never have truly connected. My mother could never have given that to me, because my whole life I had looked for her to give me some sense of - some connection - some sense that she was there and I had done everything in the world to get it from her and I never did. I was never going to get it ever and that's where another huge loss came in, which is the loss of, as you said the other day, of grieving a living mother.*

*When she died it was actually such a relief because it was real because she had actually gone. And she hadn't abandoned me and she hadn't left me, and she hadn't walked out the door on me because I wasn't good enough - I hadn't lost her because I was wrong, I'd lost her because she was sick. And it was - that gave me a freedom, a freedom to be able to grieve for her, in a way that I had never been able to before because she had actually gone.*

*I didn't experience it at all as a relief at the time when she died, but looking back on it now, it was - it freed me, it actually freed me to grieve for her. And it freed me to*

*also feel things about her, that I was never allowed to feel when I was little or throughout my life, because I was just taught that I had to be good all the time*

*And the loss of a living mother is a loss, that's so different from them dying, from both my mother and father, from my mother dying. Because when I grieved her death I grieved the fact that she was no longer here. I felt pain that I didn't have a mother any longer, now I feel pain at the fact that I never had a mother and at times now I find myself calling for my mother. And realising, where all I want to do is sit up and call my mommy. And knowing that whether she is alive or dead she is not coming because she can't because she never ever could. And for me it is without doubt the hardest loss that I have ever had to deal with. I think the pain of losing my father which I thought was the point in my life at which I would die I use to think when he dies I go. It's completely different to this, because this is like looking back on the horror of my life on a life that on the surface of it looked fine. If I was very unhappy about their fighting I was told that I was imagining it. So I was left with this thing that it wasn't so bad. So for me to turn around and face it, look at it, to actually feel it, to experience it is a horror. I do not have words to describe it, because it is not a loss that happens in the normal course of one's life. It is a loss of something that is so intangible because it is a loss of something I never ever had. Of something I so badly needed and I did have, it is also acknowledging that I lived such an awful awful childhood. A childhood in a house that was like a hell. It was a house of bloody horrors and it was always a secret. I didn't live in a house of horrors and it is also the fact that for the first time I am actually not only acknowledging to myself but talking about it to other people, I have never ever been able to do this because I was always scared that if I really told someone what went on, he wouldn't like me. I would always feel that if I told anybody how terrible it had been for me that they would think I was lying, that they would think I was exaggerating and as a result they would go away, because I was at fault, because I was naughty, because I was ultimately responsible. It spread over into so much of my life, into every aspect of my life.*

*And I also think in a way, I was grieving my dead mother that was an entirely different thing to grieve my living mother. And I think I had to go through the process of grief of my dead mother to grieve my living mother, I could not have done it the other way around - I don't think I could have. I think it would have been academic, an intellectual exercise. I don't think it would have been about feelings, and pain and emotion, I think it would have been this thing - I better deal with my childhood in a little box because my mother's going to die one day - not about she's dead but she was never really alive.*

*And I think had my mother died first and then my father it would have been so different for me and my father's death would have been even more desperate for me. But I also would have had to look after her which would have been a completely different thing. But apart from that just in terms of the loss the loss of my mother was a much greater horror but my sense of it was that the loss of my father would be a greater horror, and in some ways it was a greater horror because it was the first loss and it was the parent I was close to but at least it prepared me for this because this was a much, much greater horror. Not her death but the duality of it, the fact that there're two losses in one person, in one relationship. And had it not happened that way around I might not have got to this point.*

*But there is a blessing - because, particularly if my mom had lived I would never had the courage - I can't imagine myself having the courage to face this and have to face myself. Because I don't know what I would do. But I am free now to face it, I don't have to deal with her in her flesh. I am dealing with her all day. But I don't actually have to go visit her, even if I go visit her she's not there, and I think that for me I thought so often - how would I do this if she was alive? Could I do it? Could I look at her, could I actually be with her and be dealing with it. Wouldn't I have to be*

*forced to split myself off in a way and be dealing with it here and facing her and being a good girl. Would I have had the guts for face. Would I have had the guts?*

*Would I have had the guts to face it, to look at her and face that stuff because my mother's response would have been to blame herself, "oh I know I was such a terrible mother and then "but mommy you weren't such a terrible mother". And she'd say to me " Anne gets terribly depressed, deeply, deeply depressed, and she lives her life on antidepressants which don't even tend to help because she's still depressed. And my mother would often say Anne is so depressed and I failed her so badly, And she knew what she needed she knew she had failed Anne, me she thought she hadn't failed she thought I was the model child, because I had done all the right things. Anne was the difficult one, but she was the oldest one and my mother used to say " but I failed her so badly". I don't even think she realised how badly she'd failed her, but as soon as she'd feel that I'd say " you know mum, they were terrible circumstances " and I don't know if I'd have the courage to not do it if she was alive. And in her dying and in me losing her, in a concrete sense it has given me the freedom, to break that cycle for the first time ever.*

*I used to believe that people go away and they never come home and they never come back, and the only way they ever come back is if you're so nice that in the process of being so nice if I do that now, I have lost myself. I could not go back to that lovely little shell, you know, pretty on the surface and absolutely dead. And I can not go back to that because facing the losses have meant that I can live as a fuller person, not just in doing the right thing. Now I have a different sense of that leaving that would lock me up so.*

*And with my father there were times I think, if I look back on it, that I had lost things with him, that he was a father, but he was not really, really there for me. And that is even harder for me to face, because I can see my mother now so clearly and I can't see him so clearly. I know it will come and it is even more frightening for me.*

*Because he was - I made him into so much more than he was. And that is why that is frightening. So in a sense I think talking about loss I think I lost a childhood, I don't think I have ever been a child. I think the last time I was a child I was riding my bicycle up and down the street in Brits when I was three. I never knew what it meant to just run in the grass. I would run in the grass, but I would run so tense so agitated - I was always an adult. I lost being little at the age of three. And I am only learning at the age of 33 how to be little again. And it is still difficult.*

*I lost being a person. I was never able to be honest about how I felt. Not that half the time I knew how I felt but I could never just be honest about it. So much of what happened in my childhood resulted in me losing so much. Losing the ability to be a person, losing the ability to feel, losing the ability to do so many things, and yet being so absolutely perfect.*

*but really like a robot*

*Really dead - lost.*

*When I think what my sense of myself is now, the first word that I think of is that I am alive and I am actually real. I am sore, I am in pain. I feel awful but at least I feel. And the feeling when you say who am I, I am just a real human being who is actually living for the first time. And my sense of myself is that I am alive. I can't funny enough, if you had asked me that question six or seven years ago I could have given you a whole long description of myself, now I can't do that. But I do feel real. And I do feel alive. And I feel very sore, enormously vulnerable. I feel like my skin is actually rubbed raw, I feel like somebody has peeled off the layers of my skin - like layers of an onion. I have got to the absolute core and that is how I am walking around. Like my skin is actually raw, that the pain is there that I feel so transparent but that I have the guts to do it. That I have the courage to walk around with it. Well I don't feel like I have a choice because I can't stop it. But that I am alive and I am living, and I am really feeling things.*

*I am able to be real with my children and able to actually be with them and feel actually to be able to love them and I am actually more able to be real in my relationship with Alex although it is harder. It is much, much harder. Because he gives me so many of my mother's messages. It is much harder for me to be real with him. It is also much harder not to fight him and in that way fight my mother and it is much harder for me to communicate what I need with him. But I am getting there and I also find that what is happening to me in the process is I am becoming more truly independent I am actually able to by myself for the first time ever. I could never be on my own, I use to get frantic if I had to be on my own, I would go out I would do anything to avoid being on my own*

*So in that sense it is enabling me to have a much more real relationship with myself. I can actually face being on my own. I don't die when I am on my own, and now I am actually able to just be in this with myself. And truly when I am with particularly with my children I feel that I am really with them. I am also able to get irritated I am able to tell them that I am in a bad mood, I am feeling awful. I could never have done that before. Because I was going to be a perfect mother and now I am a real mother and I get cross and I get irritated and I also get very happy. And I am able to hold my children and really love them, give them real love where I am not just holding them. Where I am able to walk up to Robin and Beatrice and say "please come here I have to have a kiss", and give them the hugest hug and kiss in the middle of the day. I could never do that but then I'm safe with them, because if I am myself and I am real and I am all these things it's so good for them and I'm safe there. Because they enable me to be little, we can roll in the grass we can play games we can laugh, we can tickle each other, we can have pillow fights. I never did that, the only person who ever did that with me was my brother. I don't know what those things mean. I don't have a sense of what it means to do those things with little people at all. I can sit on the floor and play games I can do things with them for the first time in a long time and actually be there. Not be there as a model mother who is stimulating her children but actually be and it is absolutely*

wonderful, it is so freeing. And that is why even when I feel absolutely desperate and overwhelmed with pain I just think I have to go through this because at the end of it I am not prepared to land up with them sitting where I am now, talking about loss. I can't. I'll make plenty of other errors I'll make it from being a person though. You know last week when I left you I got home my Uncle had phoned to say my Uncle in Israel had died, my father's brother and for the first time, in so long in my life, I burst into tears on the phone.

And you know it was the most extraordinary thing, nobody knew what to do with me, my secretary did not know what to do because they have never seen me like that. And I cried and cried. Because I was feeling so awful as it was, it was just added to it. And then I phoned Alex and said Lionel had died and he said I am so sorry, I am so sorry for you. I said I am even sorry for myself. I feel so shit, I fetched Annie from school we got in the car and I said I am feeling very sad today. She said why mommy? And I told her. And she said it is very sad when people die. I burst into tears. We had a whole conversation about death which is something I would never have being able to do had I not gone through this process. And we manage to talk about death in a very real way, I could have never done that ¼. And she said to me was it sad for you? I said yes I was sad. But at least I could talk about it. Not sit there and say it wasn't terribly sad because it is actually okay which was my mother.

And she did not hesitate to ask me the question. I was so terrified of my mother that if she was crying I would comfort her or run away because I could not cope with it, because she cried all day. It makes my connection with people around me much more real. I can show myself, I don't have to hide, I could never do that before. I think with my sister for the first time we talk like sisters talk, not like the therapist and the victim, like before. and its very much happened with you. Where with other therapists I would hide, it would be so easy to hide. I never had to hide from you

*and I am able to tell you I feel awful. I could never do that before. I would only tell what I wanted to as soon as I got uncomfortable I would say I am fine.*

*The losses also became explicit.*

*I think it is through the loss of my father and my mother that I am able to face and look at the other losses because my losses - they did start when I was very small. They have almost gone to the beginning of my life.*

Some months after Isabelle told this story, she also tells that her relationship with Alex is much easier and friendlier and how his regular leaving on business trips also does not fill her with distress now.

Isabelle's story reflects how the losses of her parents in different ways constituted for her a loss of a sense of community and of how it brought a new sense to her of that which went before, triggering a mourning of unmet needs at different times in her life. This encountering of discontinuity, not only in relational patterns, but also in her previously held meanings about her life and about important others, serves as source of social reorganization and triggers the transformation of her senses of her self and her usual patterns of relating. The same issues and processes are portrayed in Anders's story.

## Anders's Story

Anders (46) is a Swedish psychotherapist, family therapy trainer and supervisor. He lives in Stockholm and has been working in the field of psychotherapy in the region of 20 years.

Our association started when we were in the same training group with Maurizio Andolfi in Rome during 1990. Over the years since then we have been together in numerous training situations in different contexts.

Anders's history reflects much physical movement. His father was a Swedish diplomat and they lived in many different countries on many different continents as a child, amongst them Colombia, Tanzania and New Zealand.

The personal issues Anders has typically been grappling with in his work and personal life, can be described to revolve around a central thread of struggling to stay in intimacy. During his training with Andolfi, his work on his own personal/professional handicaps revolved around the way he is constantly oscillating in his relating, moving closer and further in some constant rhythm. At times his struggles have taken on a meaning of having to decide whether to live or to die.

Anders told his story of loss on a tape, which he subsequently sent to me. The tape starts with a strong instrumental piece of music depicting a receding thunderstorm. He comments on this choice of music:

*This music has been very important to me over the past few months. There is a very strong metaphor in it, the thunderstorm receding into the distance, its still there*

*but the gestalt is the beauty of these voices and of life. It expresses very much what I'm going through right now and what I'm struggling with.*

Anders describes the typical pattern of his own relating over many years as follows:

*I became very self-sufficient very early, and proceeded to walk around protecting myself in different ways, especially from disappointments. I've also always had to find quite a large distance to other people and I think that in my line of work it became possible to be close to other people and yet stay safe.*

Anders's interpersonal struggles have often been attributed to the fact that his father had committed suicide early on during Anders's life. He tells this part of his life story:

*When my father died, he jumped into a river into the rapids. My mother still maintains that it wasn't suicide. The night before he died, he gave me two poems, both of them about separation. He was depressed at the time, very much pulled into himself. It was in the summer in Colombia where he was posted. I was there for the summer holidays.*

*Our driver at the embassy heard in other ways that when my father was driving up there he was driving very fast. My father was an extremely careful driver, he was not a very good driver, but he drove very slowly and he'd been driving like mad on the way up. So I think there must have been some very strong feeling - anger? - that he was carrying.*

*I had a very strong sense of guilt, because what happened was, that on that day in the end he wanted me to come along fishing and I opposed him, maintaining my wish to go to a bull fight instead. I got dysentery a while later with a very high fever and in my talking in that fever my guilt came out that I blamed myself for not coming*

*along because I would have saved him and so on. When we came back from the bull fight there was a lot of commotion in the house and something had happened, but there were no clear messages. The driver, my mother and I got in the car. My sister stayed behind from her own choice and we went up to Rio Guasca. And when we got up there in the town centre, there was a city hall and there were a lot of people standing in the town centre. We got out of the car, no, now I remember, my mother told me to stay in the car. She and Elisú (the driver) went into the town hall but of course I didn't stay in the car, I went after and there was my father in a coffin, very simple wood coffin, and he was dead.*

*And I also told my mother when we left the village and went to Bugetau we stopped on a bridge crossing this river, and I told my mother, don't worry, I'll take care of you. I was 14 at the time. And I realize now that the way for me to handle the shock was to devote my energy to somebody else.*

Anders describes how an ecology of disconnectedness grew in his family.

*After we came back from Rio Guasca I have a strong memory of my sister and I in the evenings sitting beside each other on some steps in the house with some very strong feelings between us, but not finding a way to put any words on it. During the summer we went home for two weeks for the funeral. The funeral was of course a very official business. We got to Arlanda airport and the coffin was standing in the hangar and there were lots of official people around. Anders tells of how this picture from his memory would for many years bring up an immense feeling of loneliness. The cut-offness he experienced all around him at the time, is also illustrated paradoxically by the way a single opposite event stands out from the rest in his memory: We were met at the airport by Ola Linstra, one of the first very strong woman politicians in Sweden. There was something she conveyed of sympathy which was a very strong experience for me, 'cause there was some honesty, some understanding, something..., it made a very great impact on me.*

*Then we went back to Colombia and my brother came with us. Something happened there that is hard for me to look at. There was..., not a fight, my brother was much older, but there was some tension between us. When I was sick with the high fever, I attacked him with words, asking him what the hell he was doing here, because father didn't want him here, or something like that. We never resolved that issue. We never did anything about it and nobody helped us either.*

*After that summer I went back to school in Sweden. That year was terrible. I couldn't get any help to cope with my father's death. My mother, when she called, she couldn't even know what day it was or know what was happening, she was so high on drugs and booze. My brother had already finished with school and so had my sister, so I was alone there and I got more and more pulled into myself. That was my way of tackling it, of handling it. I pretended not to think and feel so much about it, but of course I did.*

*But when I felt sad I just pretended I wasn't. This also meant not being able to speak to my mother about this. And having the role of being there for her needs I got further and further away from my true inner feelings around my father's death. After that year I moved to Stockholm and lived with my mother. The family's way of coping with this whole thing was very dramatic. We had Sunday dinner every Sunday and it always ended with a fight, and then my brother would leave and my sister would leave and I would stay behind with my mother and her sadness.*

*Also, in the summer holidays after I'd finished school in '69, we went on a car trip to Spain, all of us. And I remember very clearly that it was impossible to talk about father. My mother would always come with little comments that gave a very negative picture of him. And of course it was her way to keep the family together, but emotionally it was a catastrophe.*

*I felt even more lonely. There was no way to reach the other people in the family and something that had a quality of true feelings. I know my sister and I were the closest, but we couldn't find words.*

The patterns of disconnection in this relating served as template for Anders to construct very strong meanings around what was possible and not possible in terms of who he was in the world, between others.

*The years went on and I went through life being self-sufficient and not really allowing myself to let the feelings of loneliness and a longing for a closeness to other people make itself present. Of course on one level I made a lot of good things, but this issue of loneliness, abandonment and not allowing the true feelings any space, formed a lot of my life.*

Anders also remembers his struggle to find and stay in connection, and also his continual hidden fear of the disconnection.

*I remember an episode. I was together with Ulrike, a girl from my mother's home town. We were engaged but I broke it off. So I got rid of my flat and went to the Alps. I was studying economics and got headhunted by the IMF. They offered me a tremendous salary, a flat in New York, etcetera. I got a fright. So I decided it was too early to settle down. I broke up, sold my flat and decided to go and climb in the Alps to see if I could work myself along a couple of years. I got into feeling extremely lost so I went to Germany to see Ulrike. And she was settled and in her own life. And that instance was the first instance I got caught up in the abandonment, in the totalness of the despair. I got psychotic. I stayed there. There was a girl, a drug addict I met, she helped me in a way I don't understand to find myself again.*

*Now the death of my brother had also happened a couple of years before. It was not the same kind of loss I experienced with my father. My brother and I had a very*

*complicated relationship and I felt and still feel I was far away from him. it's not just the difference in age, its also that he was very shut off, also from himself, extremely intelligent and creative. He was like on a deserted island. He took sleeping pills and lay down in my mother's bed, my mother was away at the time. Some friends must've gotten some kind of signal, because they went and called at the door and he didn't open. Eventually they got the police to open the door and then it was too late. My brother was still alive physiologically even though he was brain dead. When I got to the hospital the doctor there had put my brother on a respirator. I was away in the Alps climbing. My mother sent several poste restante messages to a local post office. And the people at the post office, when they saw three telegrams to the same person had arrived, decided it must be important. They saw it was from Sweden so they found out where the Swedish climbers stay and finally I got the message. When I heard there was this telegram, I knew my brother was dead. I even said that to the friend who was with me. So I called home and got the story and took a flight home. We went to the hospital, said goodbye to my brother and then the doctor turned the respirator off. The doctor explained that he had done it like this, because he waited for me to get home more for the sake of my mother than anything else.*

*This loss is complicated in the sense that I don't know whether I liked my brother. This is a very painful feeling. Maybe we never really had a chance. I have some memories of him being caring, but I think he was so caught up in looking after himself. The family's official myth about his death is that Eva, his daughter, (he wasn't living with Eva's mother at the time) that her mother had gotten a new boyfriend and Eva liked him, and that was so painful for my brother, that he killed himself. That still doesn't explain why he went to lie in my mother's bed, but that is my mother's official myth.*

*From Germany after the psychotic episode I decided to go to Tanzania to my sister. That was another disappointment, because going to my sister I thought now we*

*can really meet. But she was so lost from herself too so there was no deeper connection. And when I went home I started studying psychology. Perhaps to try and understand something more about all these things.*

Anders's shift in constructing an identity and a world for himself through psychology, rather than economics, can be seen as evolving from his urgent, but hidden needs for connection, for a place to counteract his lostness. The world of psychology, however, also suited his already set sense of himself and his relational patterns, because it also offers a seemingly legitimate way of keeping distance or getting out of intense encounters. In this vein he says later:

*I think in my work being close to other people, has been a way to express my ways of coping with loss in a creative way, but there has always been something that's missing.*

So he takes steps to find more useful spaces for himself, but these never entail moves outside of the parameters of his senses of who he is and of his patterns of relating, as they have been built in his rhythms of his encounters with others over many years. Even the loss of his brother becomes another instance in what has now already become a familiar pattern of disappointment and disconnection in his world. After his brother's death he makes some effort to escape the ever more stifling caretaking role that had become part of his identity with his mother:

*After my brother's death I decided that this time I'm not going to be there for her. So I simply stayed for a week and then went to my place.*

This effort does also, however, take the form of more disconnection without showing himself, and in that way becomes yet another echo of a set pattern instead of being transformational.

It took a painful experience outside of the usual patterns and parameters of his webs of relatedness, for a transformational context to emerge for him. This came in the form of finding a way to truthfully mourn the loss of his father. The story built around Anders's father, also the story perpetually given to him, was a very negative one of a man who wasn't there, who didn't care enough, and who, as proof of his selfish disloyalty, had left his family behind in the worst possible way. This story also served to stop Anders from encountering the fullness of the loss of his father. If his father had been such a negative figure, it diminishes what was lost, the sense of lost possibilities. His father, also as a living figure, became just another story of disappointment and disconnection.

Later, an incident of synchronicity enables him to shift the socially constructed meanings around his father for the first time. In this, he also becomes able to build a story that contains the idea that he has lost something precious, and in that, he encounters the loss of his father for the first time.

*It took me many years to allow myself a more direct and deep sense to mourn the loss of my father. And for many years my mother forced onto me a very negative picture of my father. I went to therapy. My therapist was an older man who by co-incidence had an old friend with whom he had dinner and they talked about the war and the Swedish delegation in Berlin during the war. My father was stationed in Berlin as a diplomat towards the end of the war. So my therapist's friend told him about this man ...[his father's name] whom he had worked with there and whom he had admired and liked very much and could give my therapist a very concrete and clear and colourful picture of my father. Then what happened was that the next time I came to therapy, my therapist gave me back another picture of my father. So in a sense he gave me back my father. By co-incidence or whatever. It was a very very strong moment for me and it also helped me to take hold of the issue of the loss, the longing for my father, the anger at his betrayal.*

In this process Anders also becomes able to shift the meanings he held around his father.

*Finally I could get a clearer picture of his motives and his desperation. I think that one part of his desperation had been that he came from a very poor family in Northern Sweden, became a diplomat and the problem was in this class migration with no way back.*

Anders tells of how his father was required to officially change his surname, since his own name was typical of too low a class to be a diplomat. Anders understands this as contributing to his father's sense of not being good enough, and to his despair about fulfilling loyalty expectations.

*He was very estranged from his brothers and sisters and not feeling at home in his new context and I think it put an extra burden on his loneliness. I think his life history, of having left something and finding no way back, being lost where he was, I think that was what caused this drastic step in his desperation.*

*That also connected to my parents' marriage where my father was very lonely also. They didn't reach each other. So he had to carry the burden of his life history by himself.*

*Having found this description and this understanding gave me a new sense, new feeling around my father's abandonment or the loss. I think that when I can identify with his life history, the loss doesn't hurt less because its pain is still there, because I've needed him many times in my life and he wasn't there; so the pain is there but there is no blame in it. I can still feel the anger, its like the thunderstorm, its receding, its pulling away. And I don't know whether you can talk about forgiveness. I don't really understand what the word means.*

*In one way my way of tackling it has been, well, from the beginning, to do as I always do and did and that was to put my energy into other people and then the despair and the anger and the longing would catch up with me. But I had no really good way of handling it, so I was kind of swamped in all these feelings and it just gave me sense of despair.*

Being able to encounter the loss of his father, brings profound shifts in his abstractly-constructed meaningmaking community, and with that in his sense of himself and who he can be in the presence of others. This brings new shades of meaning in his reflecting on himself, his life and his past. Amongst this, are new identities he attributes to people, such as his mother, and a new interpretation of where in his life he encountered loss.

*This issue of loss is for me mainly connected to something that seems more important now, in one way. If you can compare I don't know, you actually can't compare. But for me this thing is much more central right now than the death of my father and brother. And that is the deep deep sense of loss due to the abandonment I felt inside of relationships, like that with my mother. Even if it took on actual forms of abandonment like when I was sent off to boarding school, it was much more an abandonment of not being emotionally present. That to me contains a lot of pain.*

Thus encountering the loss of his father, brings about transformational shifts in his meaningmaking communities. Also, the telling of some new stories make the telling of some old stories impossible. Before his story about himself of having to take care of his mother, constructed within the patterns of interaction, contributed to making it impossible to question her negative story about his father. Now, being able to tell another story about his father, it becomes impossible to only tell a protective story about her anymore.

*Even though my father abandoned me by committing suicide, he was also the one who was present, who was steady and who could show me or teach me the sense of belonging. I was sitting a couple of months ago trying to write a letter to my mother and I started looking through some old letters. It was '56, '57, shortly before we left for Nieu-Zeeland and my father wanted to make a trip around Northern Scandinavia and my mother went to see her relatives in Germany and I was sent off to some friends on the west coast of Sweden. I have a lot of letters that my father wrote from his travels. He was conveying many things, he was conveying that he missed me, telling about what he was doing and seeing and experiencing. He was building a bridge to the time we would see each other again, 'cause he was always referring to it.*

*As a contrast I have a lot of postcards from my mother in which she's telling me not to be sad, not to cry, to be a big boy and so on. I was six years. I think this record from the history of the summer of '56 mirrors something that has been there much earlier. Now I see more of my mother's emotional absence and how I always only could be there for her in her needs.*

*So the loss of my mother was not derived from someone dying or disappearing, but the loss of never having had. I'm reminded of this issue a couple of times a year when I have to go for medical controls on my back. [Anders has serious cancerous growths on his back, which has to be treated and controlled continuously. Medically these growths are attributed to the fact that, as a very young child, his back got seriously burnt in the sun due to his mother's negligence.] That keeps this issue very very alive for me.*

*The consequence of this very much has been that I early became competent and self-sufficient. Saying that doesn't mean I gave up the hope of reaching my mother or trying to get some real response from her, but trying on and on, experiencing disappointment after disappointment, created an issue which is also something I*

*have been struggling with and that is how to handle disappointments. And these disappointments have left me over my life with a very deep sense of despair. On the one hand deeper inside of me I still carried my joy and optimism and hope but it has been overshadowed by this feeling that when I really hope for something, it never turns out that way, it always ends up with disappointment. And of course in different parts of my life I have created the disappointment just to make the pieces fit.*

*I think that loss, the loss of never really having had a mother in that sense, is probably the strongest feeling that often gets hold of me in this period sometimes.*

*I can also see how the loss of not having had a feeling relationship with my mother, lay a foundation for the stuck way in which I tackled the more apparent losses of my father and brother.*

The new meanings recursively bring shifts in his meaningmaking webs, also his historical ones, allowing him to, in this changed social context, evolve new and different meanings about himself.

*So I talked about the despair and with the despair is a despair is also a big anger. A big anger at being abused and a big anger connected to the feeling of "onmacht" [helplessness], of not being able, there is no way I can do something about it, frustration, and well I tried to handle this in many different ways during my life. I think something which is a very very big change in my life is that I am recapturing the hope and the beauty as a central part of my existence. I saw this during my day in Dalaro [referring to a specific training experience] where I really got connected to the feeling and believing that I could trust, trust the relationships with other people.*

He refers to an incident that formed part of a painting experience during the training in Dalaro, where I was also present:

*When you conveyed something to me when we were painting and you provoked me to kind of take the shit by pulling the paper away - it was a small incident but the fact that it took me a while to realize that I could take the paper back has come to illustrate to me that I don't have to be frustrated, I can take responsibility for myself in relationship to others and that's a deep consolation. I don't know if that's the right word but it also leaves me with a sense of a new sort of competence which also means that this shift is a process that has started and grows. The strongest change and the one that makes me the happiest now is not only that I'm able to be really close to other people and stay put, but also that I need closer relationships. And the trust is there, the sense that I can take care of myself. I won't be beaten up, I won't be hurt, I can defend myself and take care of myself in that manner without things turning into a catastrophe.*

Moves in his sense of self, again, recursively, necessitates moves in his webs of relatedness which were constructed in the erection and in the wake of previous meanings.

*That's given me lot of hope, it's also meant that I've made a decision to divorce Anna [his wife], because our relationship is or was based on the distance I needed 10 years ago. And to me it was a kind of enactment of my solitude and when I've tried to reach out and to change this position, it has not been possible.*

The shifts do not only entail practical shifts in his position in his social webs, but also shifts in terms of his relational repertoire of patterns of connection and disconnection.

One example entails a different way of encountering his mother.

*Now I got to understand more of the relationship with my mother, and finally I asked Tom [another therapist who knows his mother too] for help to speak to her. And it became so apparent how the way of communicating there, the consequence was*

*that I get caught up in double binds all the time. And whichever way I would try to convey something about myself or to get a response or a dialogue, it would show itself to be impossible. Being able to evolve this understanding/meaning around his relationship with his mother, also frees him from continuously trying to make that relationship better.*

Another example of shifts in his relational repertoire and recursively in his social webs, entail his situation in his marriage. *When things started moving in me, I felt stuck in this relationship, and for a time didn't even consider other ways of changing the situation. And I feel very embarrassed, because I walk around and have and give the picture of myself of someone who knows a lot about himself, can be full of insights, ideas and options, but when the realization finally came to me that I can divorce, it was like 'A-hah, Eureka'. It was kind of embarrassing that I couldn't see it before, but maybe that's the way things happen.*

Shifts in his senses of himself and in his patterns of relating also echo into his formal working domains.

*I'm so bloody tired of being the consultant, the teacher, the therapist, always untouchable, always having to perform. More and more I need to be Anders, not to have different roles all the time, but to be more home when I work.*

In the process different messages also echo from within the social webs within which his new meanings take on form, strengthening the transformational meanings.

*I was very happy because this summer I was away for a week with a group that Gunilla and I had in training. I regard them now more as colleagues, even though I'm leading the group. We were away working on some central life issues. And I was very happy afterwards because I heard later through another channel that one woman in the group had commented that I was so different, so much more*

*personal, not private, but personal, more spontaneous and easygoing and that made me very happy because that was also my ambition.*

*Like in the music, for a big part of my life until now the storm has been present, trying to survive in these strong forces. Now it is receding into the background. It is still there as part of my life history. But other parts of optimism, above all, of another form of creativity is coming in place of having to find storms or the demons or whatever you'd like to call them.*

### **Some Brief Reflections**

The telling of both Isabelle and Anders's stories reflects a process of meaningmaking within the flow of expected and unexpected ebbs and tides in encountering closeness and distance in relationships.

Their stories can be read to portray how their senses of who they are and can be or should be in the presence of others, and of how the world works, have always evolved within the complexities of their social webs. It also contains some reflections in how they participated in this co-creation of meaning, performing in ways that would keep the assumptions about their worlds intact. Similarly, they tell in a personal language of how an experience of loss can disrupt the worlds we depend on (even grudgingly). They tell of how this brings the pain of having to deal with the immense shifts in our communities of belonging and translation, and in that, of a disruption of the readymadness of previous meanings. Isabelle and Anders both reflect on the shifts in their senses of themselves and in that of their patterns of relating after encountering most unwanted losses. These stories are not portrayals of problemsolving, but of transformation.

These stories also serve to remind us, beyond sophisticated and multiworded explanation or reflection, of the wordless pain that constitutes the space of encountering loss.

Furthermore, the different language of the stories give some hint of the complex multilayeredness of lived human experience - a web always too complex to be adequately portrayed in the reduction of the talking cure or of written language. There are many intriguing nuances in these stories which remain unstored *here*, partly because they lie beyond the ambit of this discussion. Questions emerging from a reading of these stories which might be usefully raised in other discussions or writings, include: A hypothesis about people primarily forming and re-forming their patterns of connection and disconnection within their vertical (transgenerational) relationships, and perpetuating these patterns within their horizontal relationships; and questions about the connection between cancer and certain patterns of hiding stories of pain. Perhaps most importantly, I need to reflect on the waves through my own meaningmaking patterns while involved in the bringing forth of this manuscript.

### **In Summary**

These stories also serve to illustrate how experiences of connection-disconnection become the template (as discussed at length in the previous three sections) according to which people's senses of themselves, the patterns of their relating and also the meanings they construct about life in general are formed. There are rhythms of presence and absence - which we help to perpetuate - that constitute our usual communities of translation. Echoing from the senses of who and where the *Yous* in these communities are, our senses of ourselves are formed and

perpetuated as well. Cosmetic changes, and efforts at shifting these patterns easily become engulfed by the usual discursive habits within these meaningmaking communities. Transformation becomes possible when disruption of these usual patterns of connecting-disconnecting within such communities occurs. Such disruption can be brought about by the experience of loss, as illustrated in the stories above. Thus loss can be seen as one of the (few?) experiences that, in its impact on our discursive communities, has the potential to bring about in depth transformation of our senses of ourselves and of our patterns of relating.

The connection of the experience of loss to change and to therapy and therapists is also suggested by the stories recounted above. Therapists, as all people, evolve in their personhood from certain patterns of connecting-disconnecting. However, it can be said that their senses of themselves and of who they are with and to others, evolve in such a way that their therapisthood becomes subtly predestined. Thus they become therapists not so much because of explicit career decisions or success at professional selection procedures. They start playing roles - no matter whether it takes the overt form of being helpful or of being problematic - within the webs of their discursive communities, that serves to help (themselves and others) deal with the repeating struggles of connection and disconnection. They themselves, in their senses of who they are and of how they can find meaning, are motivated by these struggles and the pain they have encountered (and do encounter) within it. Thus therapists, in their professional movements, play out in some form the patterns learned within their meaningmaking communities. The relational habits and meanings they bring with them, can, as much as it motivates their professional being, unwittingly serve to perpetuate set and stuck patterns. Thus, the journey of finding and believing in transformatory processes, is especially central for the therapist.

As shown above, experiences of loss can often serve to help therapists evolve not only in their own lives, but also professionally, from being a seemingly effective

mental health professional, to finding a way of being part of a healing process (see also the discussion on wounded healers in Chapter 5).

Most essentially then, the meaning - theoretical and otherwise - portrayed and explored in this manuscript involves a perspective on the ability of an experience of loss to usefully transform meanings we have attached to ourselves and our world. In one simple way, it portrays once again that pain is not simply something that should be avoided or taken away as quickly as possible. Rather, it shows that loss is not only something that can not be avoided but that, beyond that, we may also need it in our living.

Because I could not stop for  
Death,  
He kindly stopped for me;  
The carriage held but just  
ourselves  
And Immortality.

Emily Dickinson

(Beeton, Kossick & Pereira,  
1984, p. 241)

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