

THE JOURNEY OF A TRAINEE THERAPIST: FROM AN  
INTRAPSYCHIC TO AN ECOSYSTEMIC DESCRIPTION

by

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relationships can teach humility and reverence for all that is greater than us and beyond our control.

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## AUTHOR'S NOTE

Traditional prescriptions of dissertation formulae have been altered to fit in with the descriptive methodology of this work - ie: only certain aspects of the APA editorial system were utilised. The aspects which were included were done so in order to join some of the readers of this piece of work.

I have included a title page, acknowledgements, summary, key words and references. At times these conventions have been altered as in the references being at the beginning of the dissertation where they are superimposed on a photographic image. The reasons substantiating all these alterations will be found in the body of the dissertation itself.

The dissertation is ecosystemic both in terms of its subject matter and its structure as I felt that a conventional manner of presentation would be lineal and therefore invert the very intention of this work. This unconventional structure is exemplified in the first sentence of the dissertation which is a quotation that does not fit into the prescriptions of a conventional structure.

For the sake of the flow of the dissertation the following technical boundaries of descriptive methodology have been used:

- \* references included in the beginning of the dissertation.
- \* the use of colloquial language.
- \* an author's note rather than a list of contents.
- \* a chapter structure has not been utilised, appropriate headings are used as context markers.
- \* appendices are included where they occur and not at the end.
- \* inclusion of photographic frames and framed pages in order to create the gallery section.
- \* the use of 'participants' as well as 'voices'. 'Participants' are used as the protagonists in an open dialogue while the 'voices' only exist within the context of a specific section. 'Voices' and a 'gallery epistemologist' are introduced in order to set them apart from the preceding participants.
- \* no foreword is given on the participants as this will pre-empt a work in progress.
- \* the structure of the dissertation is one of dialogue in which various typefaces have been used to reflect the distinct perspectives of each participant.
- \* a uniform typeface has been utilised to reflect all the voices and participants in the gallery in order to establish its separate context.

## SUMMARY

This is a postmodernist dissertation contextualised within the new epistemology.

✓ The dissertation's descriptive methodology mirrors a personal journey from intrapsychic to ecosystemic psychology which operates within the domain of language and narrative discourse. As such it is founded on the principles of ecosystemic rather than Newtonian thinking.

✓ A conversation between various participants constructs the dissertation through polyphony and academic dialogue. This is then deconstructed through the use of metalogue thereby allowing the dissertation to operate simultaneously on a number of different levels.

As it is a postmodernist text, the structure is in a sense an 'anti-structure' in that it is indirect while it is still acknowledged as a construction. In this way it is constructed and deconstructed in terms of its own premises.

Expectations in terms of conventional dissertation formulae are challenged without negating academic requirements.

## KEY WORDS

Epistemology, ecosystemic, cybernetic, postmodernism, descriptive methodology, dialogue, metacommunication, narrative, metalogue, polyphony, context, construction, indirect, paradigm shift, social constructionism, self-referentiality, positivism.

"IN PSYCHOTHERAPY DISCOURSE IS BOTH THE  
MAJOR THEORETICAL OBJECT AND METHOD OF  
PRACTICE"

R. Lowe, 1991



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THE CONVERSATION BETWEEN—  
PARTICIPANTS ON A JOURNEY BEGINS

EPISTEMOLOGIST: Why am I here?

ZAHAVA: You are participating in this dialogue.

EPISTEMOLOGIST: I was under the impression that I would be participating in a Masters dissertation.

ZAHAVA: Well, actually, you are participating in a Masters dissertation, because I have created you as one of the participants in the dialogue. This is a postmodernist dissertation ✓ about a journey, in the form of dialogue; in the genre of narrative discourse.



EPISTEMOLOGIST: That is quite a task you have set for me. I can tell already that my job is a difficult one. You have introduced at least three areas which I immediately can see need elucidation, namely postmodernist dissertation, dialogue and narrative discourse, if the description of this journey is to meet the academic requirements of a Masters dissertation.

ZAHAVA: You are quite right and my supervisor, who you will meet presently, would whole-heartedly agree with you. In fact, she has already informed me that it will be necessary to pinpoint narrative and descriptive methodology historically, and motivate dialogue as a way of discourse, both in terms of psychotherapy and as the methodology of a thesis, to mention but a few of our responsibilities. But just for the moment, I would like you to hold on to those theoretical descriptions, while I continue to construct this introduction. I am still in the process of evolving a structure which will be able to encapsulate the multilayered and interconnecting levels of description necessary for a dissertation of this type.

EPISTEMOLOGIST: Yes, but I will not be able to remain quiet for too long, as I am quickly growing into my co-constructed character and I am itching to move into the realm of metacommunication. According to Bateson (1979), metacommunication is “differentiation between action in context and action or behaviour which defines context or makes context intelligible” (p. 128).

**SUPERVISOR: Talking about metacommunication, Zahava, perhaps you could be more explicit here about your plan in terms of the structure of this dissertation. I say this because I assume you have a plan, and if so, let's hear it.**

ZAHAVA: I believe that in order for this dissertation to be epistemologically sound, the structure needs to be consistent with ecosystemic psychology. For me, this provides an opportunity to create a work which is alive. I intend to present a work which offers the construction of voices who speak in a way which also invites participation in the co-construction of meaning. All the voices, and all the extracts will eventually come together to

evolve into a narrative which is impossible to pre-empt because it is a living thesis, which is in the process of becoming.

This reminds me of the work of Maturana and Varela (1987), who speak of structure being 'plastic' (see p.112) or malleable, therefore having the flexibility to incorporate the fact that there is no 'instructive interaction' (see p.112). It is through the process of 'co-drifting' (see p.112) in the 'domain of language' (see p.112) that we find our meanings and reality.

EPISTEMOLOGIST: Maturana and Varela (1987) were referring to living systems, but you are applying this terminology to the dissertation itself.

ZAHAVA: Because we are busy co-constructing this dissertation as a living system.

SUPERVISOR: Additionally it is crucial for you to talk continually about your thinking. This way you will be demonstrating how through the structure of your work, as well as the content, you are presenting a paradigm shift. ✓

ZAHAVA: This is the shift from intrapsychic psychology to ecosystemic psychology, which is an example of the flow from positivism to the new epistemology. This example also suggests to me the shift in the broader movement of modernism to postmodernism.

EPISTEMOLOGIST: Yes, I can see that the structure of the dissertation itself reflects this paradigm shift. By moving away from a lineal, positivist conception of structure to an interacting dialogue within the new epistemology, a paradigm shift has been shown. ✓

ZAHAVA: And I am aware that I need to talk about my thinking continually, throughout this work, in order to reveal my epistemological presuppositions. It is my intention to consistently remain true to ecosystemic thought and psychotherapy through the ✓

process of 'self-referentiality' (Keeney, 1983). Self-referentiality refers to the inclusion of the self in any context.

EPISTEMOLOGIST: I think it will also be necessary to justify the way you are presenting this journey. Is it scientifically justifiable to use dialogue within postmodernist construction? Isn't your academic department grounded in ecosystemic epistemology? How will you motivate the relationship between the presented narrative discourse of dialogue, postmodernism and ecosystemic psychology?

ZAHAVA: I know it is a lineal notion to propose that I can predict outcomes. I do know one thing, and that is that I will be battling these questions to substantiate many issues already raised and to be raised. I also know I will be repeating myself by saying 'trust me, we will come to it'. I cannot say when or how, as you all have as much to do with that process as I. I have some ideas, but to share those explicitly now will be an attempt to preempt and control, a restriction that will not be very ecosystemic.

EPISTEMOLOGIST: And you want to make sure that we keep reading, so that we continue participating in this narrative, so you are also keeping us in suspense!

CONSULTANT: **NARRATIVE! METACOMMUNICATION! SOCRATIC DIALOGUE! METALOGUE! POLYPHONY! POSTMODERNISM! ECOSYSTEMIC EPISTEMOLOGY! THIS IS DEFINITELY GOING TO BE FUN! OH, EXCUSE ME, I JUST ENTERED WITH NO INTRODUCTION, AND EXPLODED WITH A RUSH OF CONCEPTS I FELT WOULD FIT THE CONTEXT. I AM THE POET, ALIAS THE FAMILY THERAPIST, ALIAS THE NEUROBIOLOGIST, ALIAS THE JANITOR, ALIAS THE UNDERCOVER DOCTORAL STUDENT, ALIAS BRAD K (KEENEY, NOLAN & MADSEN, 1990B).**

ZAHAVA: It is interesting that one of the main sources from which these ideas sprang, was from some of the articles in the publication The Systemic Therapist.

CONSULTANT: **LET ME GUESS! YOU MET THE JANITOR (KEENEY ET AL., 1990B).**

EPISTEMOLOGIST: The janitor, for those of you who have not read 'Conversation on not writing a dissertation', was once a doctoral student, who, tired of the trivialities too often generated by academic rituals, pretended to drop out and become a janitor. This way, as an undercover scholar at the university, he has had access to documents, conversations and observations which no scholar could dream of having (Keeney et al., 1990b).

ZAHAVA: Well, I have tried to take his advice, which was not to take it all too seriously.

JANITOR: Even more importantly, I asked you to make a list of what you care most deeply about with regard to the topic and your beliefs about dissertations in academia (Keeney et al., 1990b).

ZAHAVA: I tried to imagine the kind of dissertation I would want to share with everyone I care about. At this point I also remembered something that my supervisor once wrote to me - that I

have the gift of creativity, and I should share it with the world and not just keep it to share with my loved ones.

**EPISTEMOLOGIST:** The juxtaposition of these two above descriptions --- offered by the janitor and your supervisor, this double description, complexified your understanding, and moved you to another level of description (Bateson, 1979), in that you now conceptualised your dissertation as a potentially creative act that could reach out to those you care about as well as to the academic community of which you are a part.

**JANITOR:** More like writing a book or a story than a dissertation, like most aspiring academicians, who hope their dissertation is good enough to get published as a book (Keeney et al., 1990b).

**CONSULTANT:** **AND KEEP IN MIND THAT THE RICH COMPLEXITY, UNCERTAINTY, AND UNKNOWN MUST BE ACKNOWLEDGED AND RESPECTED, OR YOU MAY BE SEDUCED INTO MAKING LAZY GENERALIZATIONS ABOUT THE OBVIOUS (KEENEY ET AL., 1990B).**



ZAHAVA: But right now I am quite confused about what is obvious to me that may be unknown to you, or what is simple to the epistemologist that may be complex to me. And what is unknown to me may be obvious to you.

JANITOR: Once you write something down, you get a hint of what you know, and you write in order to see what you have to say (Keeney et al., 1990b).

EPISTEMOLOGIST: So when you asked me to hold on to my theoretical metadescriptions for a while, it was because you were waiting a while to see what you had said, in order for all of us in your construction to react, interact, and commune with the text of which we are all a part (Keeney et al., 1990c).

ZAHAVA: Yes, you are all a part of the text which has become the 'other' who I have invited into a relationship. Now we are all participating in this narrative discourse.

EPISTEMOLOGIST: And writing down what we have to say about what we've said invites our interactions again and again (Keeney et al., 1990c). And this means you began writing in order to start the motion of knowing. The interplay of author and reader in a kind of intertextual conversation creates a knowing you cannot have without submitting yourself to participate in this process (Keeney et al., 1990c).

JANITOR: It is also important to let everyone know that some statements, ideas and notions are more obscure than others.

EPISTEMOLOGIST: That is where the idea of metacommunication comes in, which will give a continuous reading on the vast darkness of the subject. I need to reiterate that I have quite some work to do here. Too many not so obvious ideas are being bantered about, and I wonder when we will get round to the actual nitty gritty of the academic rituals, so much a part of this dissertation?

ZAHAVA: Please wait just a while more, I am not ready to co-construct the deconstruction of what has been said in order to substantiate academically just yet. Trust me, we will come to it.

And, in case you are not aware of it, you, and all of us, are already in the process of metacommunicating. Are we not juxtaposing different descriptions and meanings, creating differing levels of descriptions and meanings? You will see as the dissertation evolves, how the conversational and monological modes dance in a dialectical relationship. The narrative constructions and the dissertation's academic requirements will co-exist in a complementary way.

**CONSULTANT: IT LOOKS TO ME AS IF YOU ARE KEEPING THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE DISSERTATION ITSELF INDIRECT, OR 'IN THE DARK'. THE CONSTRUCTION THEN BECOMES AN EXAMPLE OF ITSELF (KEENEY ET AL., 1990c).**

**EPISTEMOLOGIST:** The writing of this dissertation, in the form of constructivist narrative discourse, is an example itself of what you are setting out to achieve! I'm interested to see how it will unfold. It is as if you are trying to show and demonstrate your integration of theory through your manner of presentation. Your epistemology, which we know is ecosystemic, ✓

is revealed through your presentation. Additionally, how this epistemology then influences you as a therapist becomes relevant. So, your view of therapy as social constructionism is also highlighted through the actual nature of the dissertation.

- ✓ ZAHAVA: These are some of the reasons for creating a dissertation that invites people to participate actively in a narrative discourse. And for me, this is about telling stories about my journey. One of these stories is the conversation in which we now find ourselves.

S

EPISTEMOLOGIST: Which is being written by the conversation that has captured us. (Keeney et al., 1990c).

CONSULTANT: YOU TALK ABOUT NARRATIVE DISCOURSE, STORY, CONVERSATION AND DIALOGUE. I'M FASCINATED AT PRESENT WITH DIALOGUE (KEENEY ET AL., 1990c). IS DIALOGUE NOT THE ALTERNATIVE TO AUTHORITATIVE, AUTONOMOUS MONOLOGUE? BUT WHAT IS THIS, SOCRATIC DIALOGUE OR DOSTOYEVSKIAN DIALOGUE?

EPISTEMOLOGIST: Socratic dialogue, being an academic voice, often means a conversation between a teacher and a student where one has all the answers and the other all the questions. Dostoyevskian dialogue, being a polyphony of voices, is where none has the final word. Each voice has an opportunity to be heard, textualised, contextualised, and decontextualised (Keeney et al., 1990c).

ZAHAVA: I don't see how this dissertation can have the structure of only one of these forms of dialogical discourse. I propose that we do what we so often ask clients to do, and that is to live with complexity and to hold differences and contradictions in our minds all at once.

CONSULTANT: I AGREE. WITH RESPECT TO DIALOGUE, CAN YOU IMAGINE HAVING A CONVERSATION WITH SOMEONE WHO WOULD NOT DISAGREE? YOU WOULD BE CAUGHT IN A MONOLOGICAL MIRROR (KEENEY ET AL., 1990c).

JANITOR: So a polyphonus context allows any voice, but no final authoritative voice?

✓ EPISTEMOLOGIST: As long as none of the voices are pushed forward as the final word about the whole dialogical context? (Keeney et al., 1990c).

CONSULTANT: **RIGHT. ANY OF US CAN CLAIM TO UTTER THE FINAL WORD, BUT THE CONTEXT SHOULD NOT GIVE PERMISSION FOR THE FINAL WORD (KEENEY ET AL., 1990c).**

EPISTEMOLOGIST: What about Bateson's metalogues? He wrote metalogues which were conversations where the pattern of the discussion was itself a demonstration of what was being talked about (Keeney et al., 1990c).

ZAHAVA: *And this then relates to what we earlier referred to when we spoke about keeping the construction of the dissertation indirect. This is what I am obviously trying to do! I can see*

clearly that what is obvious to me is not so obvious to you and I need continually to talk about my thinking to reveal myself.

JANITOR: At varying points the dissertation could be seen to be a metalogue, a polyphony, or academic dialogue. I prefer what the Buddhists call the 'middle way' (Keeney et al., 1990b), and I will take the voice of balancing these three forms of dialogue, as they pertain to Zahava, her stories along her journey, and her dissertation.

## ✓ ALONG THE WAY, A CONVERSATION ABOUT STORIES

ZAHAVA: As an aspiring psychotherapist, I believe very strongly in the value and importance of personal experience, in whatever unique form that takes. It has been sad for me to witness how the field of psychotherapy, both theoretically and practically, has for so long been entrenched in the cold world of empirical science. The human face, with his or her heart, mind, soul, and relationships, has been shut down for too long.

Fortunately, in the last couple of years, I have had the privilege of being exposed to the epistemological premises of people like Bateson, Keeney, Tyler, Maranhão, Anderson, Goolishian, Hoffman, Auerwald, The Milan school, White, Maturana, Varela, etcetera. I have been allowed to sample other ways of viewing the world, a liberating and empowering experience for me. One of the major forces of this exposure has been the



✓ educational and enriching elements of other peoples' stories--

✓ Psychology may be many things to many people, but one thing that cannot be disregarded is the existence of storytelling in human communication, and human beingness.

EPISTEMOLOGIST: RD Laing depicted a journey through human consciousness of mental landscapes in which thousands of readers would identify their own experiences (Capra, 1989). "It is through the communication of experience that we reveal ourselves to one another, and which gives meaning to our lives" (Capra, 1989).

ZAHAVA: I have a story to tell. One which I believe people will care about, people close to me as well as people in a therapeutic relationship with me and those in the academic community of which I am a part.

I am well aware that the preceding pages have raised concepts which need further discussion and I intend to offer that

discussion when the time is appropriate. This dissertation will move  
 ✓ in and out of various levels of description, in a dialectical,  
 complementary relationship, just as the narrative interweaves its—  
 conversation. The content and the methodology of the dissertation  
 will influence each other in a mutually reciprocal manner.

✓ EPISTEMOLOGIST: I know I repeat myself, but my academic interest  
 ✓ is stimulated. This multi-faceted discussion will have to focus on narrative—  
 discourse (stories and dialogue) as descriptive methodologies within  
 postmodern theory as well as psychotherapeutic practice. How these  
 descriptive methodologies fit into ecosystemic epistemology and  
 postmodernism, on which your premises are based will lead us to a discussion  
 about the 'scientific' utility of this dissertation. Many of the terms and  
 concepts freely voiced thus far need further substantiation. I am waiting to  
 find the space in which I can participate in this circle of words.

ZAHAVA: We have already dialogued about dialogue, and  
 because this dissertation is constructed as conversations and—  
 stories along my journey, I would now like to move into a  
 conversation about the concept of 'story' as it is contextualised

in the new epistemology. Following that I will move into a narrative account of my personal story. Further than that is impossible to predict.

**CONSULTANT: YES, BUT SURELY THIS CONCEPT OF STORY IS ANCHORED WITHIN THE AREA OF NARRATIVE DISCOURSE. HOW DO YOU DECIDE WHERE TO BEGIN? WHY WITH STORY AND NOT NARRATIVE DISCOURSE?**

ZAHAVA: All I have decided to do is to choose an arbitrary place to begin. What will unfold from there is an evolutionary process. The interconnecting domains of narrative discourse and story, will no doubt make their entrances into the text when their time is right. Just the same as the theoretical substantiation we spoke of previously. For example, I mentioned the new epistemology just now, and I know that for the academic domain of the dissertation, it will be necessary to offer adequate discussion of any term or concept mentioned for the first time (as

our good friend the epistemologist is so keen to remind us). How all of this will fit together remains to be seen, not dissimilar from a family system weaving its story with the therapist in family-therapy.

JANITOR: I am tired of all this polyphony. What about your story?

EPISTEMOLOGIST: I insist on first telling you a bit about Gregory ✓  
 ✓ Bateson and stories. He considered stories, parables and metaphors to be —  
 essential expressions of human thinking (Capra, 1989). The important role of ✓  
 stories, in Bateson's thinking, is intimately connected to the importance of  
 relationships. Perhaps the most central aspect of ecosystemic thinking, is the  
 shift from the objective to the relative. Therefore a language of relationships—  
 would be the best way to describe this living world. This is what stories do.  
 ◦ "According to Bateson, stories are the royal road to the study of— S.  
 relationships" (Capra, 1989).

ZAHAVA: I see my personal story as one of the connecting roads to my relationship with psychotherapy and becoming a psychotherapist.

CONSULTANT: I WOULD ALSO LIKE TO ADD MY BIT HERE. MUCH OF WHAT I WILL BE SAYING COMES OUT OF ONE OF MY OWN BOOKS (KEENEY, 1983), BUT I BELIEVE IT IS RELEVANT NOW.

"STORIES PROVIDE A WAY OF BUILDING DOUBLE DESCRIPTIONS AND ENABLING HIGHER ORDER PATTERNS TO BE DISCERNED" (KEENEY, 1983, P. 196). BATESON (IN KEENEY, 1983) SUGGESTS THAT A STORY IS "A COMPLEX OF THAT SPECIES OF CONNECTEDNESS WHICH WE CALL RELEVANCE. BY TRANSFERRING OUR STORIES FROM SITUATION TO SITUATION, WE CREATE CONTEXTS THAT PROVIDE MEANING AND STRUCTURE FOR WHAT WE DO" (P. 197). STORIES REVEAL HOW PEOPLE PUNCTUATE THEIR WORLD AND THEREFORE PROVIDE "A CLUE FOR DISCOVERING THEIR EPISTEMOLOGICAL PREMISES" (KEENEY, 1983, P. 197).

ZAHAVA: The knowledge of one's epistemological premises and their importance to psychotherapy is a crucial notion. I would like to talk about a personal story along the journey, which will reveal some of my punctuations of the world, and how they pertain to my training as a psychotherapist.

CONSULTANT: THE THERAPIST CAN UNDERSTAND AN INDIVIDUAL'S EXPERIENCE ONLY BY OBSERVING HOW HIS OR HER SOCIAL CONTEXT IS PUNCTUATED. "THE THERAPIST MUST HAVE A WAY OF PUNCTUATING THE CLIENTS PUNCTUATION" (KEENEY, 1983, P. 198). AN EPISTEMOLOGY ABOUT HOW OTHERS COME TO KNOW AND PUNCTUATE THEIR WORLD IS NECESSARY (KEENEY, 1983). THE THERAPIST IS INVOLVED IN A PROCESS OF CONSTRUCTING A WAY OF KNOWING, WHILE SIMULTANEOUSLY BEING AWARE OF HIS OR HER OWN KNOWING. IN KEENEY (1983), IT IS WRITTEN THAT KUAN TSU ONCE SAID, "WHAT A MAN DESIRES TO KNOW IS THAT (IE THE EXTERNAL WORLD) BUT HIS MEANS OF KNOWING IS THIS (IE HIMSELF). HOW CAN HE KNOW THAT? ONLY BY PERFECTING THIS" (P. 200).

ZAHAVA: What I am trying to say is that as a therapist, some of my presuppositions will be revealed to myself and others ✓ through my personal story. In offering my story as a theme in a narrative discourse I encourage double, even multiple descriptions and open feedback loops, which according to ecosystemic theory enable change, complexity and contextual understanding. Are change, complexity and contextual understanding not crucial elements of psychotherapy and the therapeutic relationship?

EPISTEMOLOGIST: Let us leave that question open for the time being. I would like to continue with a discussion of the ideas of White and Epston (1990) who would agree with what you have just said.

White and Epston (1990) speak about the "multiplicity of ways in which the written word may be employed therapeutically" (p. 20). They write letters to their clients after almost every interview. The content of the letters is carefully selected in order to reveal distinctions that may be heuristic and to ✓ promote the kinds of stories that have healing potential. The conceptual framework in which they place their work is one of 'narrative texts', wherein

they compare therapy to a process of 'storying' and 'restorying' the experiences of the person presenting problems (White & Epston, 1990). ✓ 35

ZAHAVA: Yes, and what I would like to add with reference to a therapist's epistemological awareness, is that a therapist's story can be as important as a client's. The postmodern ✓ assumption of multiple, evolving realities (Hoffman, 1990) is— S useful as an invitation to the potential healing qualities that a story can offer.

EPISTEMOLOGIST: Not only do we, as humans, give meaning to our ✓ experience by storying our lives, but we are also empowered to 'perform' our ✓ stories through our knowledge of them (White & Epston, 1990). Most of us— S have a multiplicity of stories available to us about ourselves, others and our relationships, which can be liabilities as well as assets. "Some can be reassuring, uplifting, liberating, revitalising or healing. The particular story that prevails in giving meaning to the events of our lives, determines to a large extent, the nature of our lived experience and our patterns of action" (White & Epston, 1990, p. 36).



- ✓ White and Epston (1990) are inviting us to ask ourselves: "how can we enable the writing of personal and collective stories that liberate and heal, when the dominant stories are so problem saturated?" (p. 40). S
- ✓ JANITOR: Estes (1993) believes that there are stories which instruct, renew, and heal. S

These will provide vital nourishment to peoples' lives that cannot be obtained in any other way. Stories reveal over and over again the precious and peculiar knack that humans have for triumph over travail. They provide all the vital instructions we need to live a useful, necessary, and unbounded life - a life of meaning, a life worth remembering. (p. 18) S

ZAHAVA: I am offering my personal story as an example that can liberate and heal. Stay with the journey...

## A PERSONAL STORY ALONG THE JOURNEY

ZAHAVA: Looking back now, through the lenses of a trainee ecosystemic therapist, I acknowledge that wherever I begin is a decision made by my own system of distinctions and punctuations.—

This story begins in 1976, when I was 11 years old. My father was, at this stage, a successful and highly respected advocate. One day the doorbell rang, and when I answered it and saw my father in the middle of the day, flanked by two men, I knew something was wrong. Why was he ringing the doorbell, instead of coming in through the garage? Why was he home so early and who were these two men?

He told me to call my mother and to go to my room. I shared a room with my sister and the two of us sat there, fearfully

wondering what was going on. What seemed like a lifetime later, my mother called us, and we went into my parents room, where my pale and shaken father stunned us with the news that he had been arrested for sending jewellery out of the country illegally. He would be spending the night in prison and hoped to come out on bail the next day. My brother was in the army, and would only be coming out on the weekend, and it was my eldest sister's 20th birthday - September 9th. My thoughts and feelings then were probably as opaque as the represented memories are now. The next clear memory I have is of my brother coming home on the weekend, and being taken aside to be told of these shattering new developments in our lives.

My father did come out on bail, and the next few months went by in an emotional sandstorm. It was the following year when the courtcase finally began and I had started high school at a private Jewish school in Johannesburg. I always felt as if people were talking about me. The courtcase went on for a week, and I

was not allowed to attend it or to miss school. I was certain that everyone was staring at me and talking about me in undertones.

The day before the verdict, we were told to expect the worst - that my father may spend ten years in prison. His sentence was three years, but he would probably only serve two. I remember that my stomach was always very sore and I developed chronic spastic colon attacks. It was some time in early May when he actually began his sentence. Saying goodbye to him that morning was one of the most difficult things I had ever done in my young life. He asked me to forgive him and I remember saying that I forgave him before anything happened, trying to say that it was not an issue of forgiveness, that he is my father and I love him. Little did I know that this was the start of enormous pain and difficulty between us that would go on for many years to come.

Going to visit him in prison was traumatic. Visitors day was on a Saturday and so my weekends became quite miserable and confusing. My relationship with my brother suffered terribly, we

fought incessantly. My mother, in all her strength and stoicism, became unpredictable in her moods. My middle sister became more and more intense and serious. In the second year of his imprisonment my eldest sister contracted Lymphoma, a type of cancer. I could not concentrate on my schoolwork very well, and began to be sick increasingly often, missing a lot of school. I was very insecure with my friends, feeling paranoid and confused most of the time.

Yet, at the same time, I forged very strong connections with some of my friends outside of the family. I had always been by far the most sociable member of my family. Often the heat got too bad at home, especially between myself and my brother. I would run away, usually hitchhiking to my friends or just running blindly. At times the fights between my brother and myself would get so bad that he would slap me, physically overpower and intimidate me. I felt emotionally and physically abused

This period occurred smack in the middle of my early adolescence, creating further confusion, where I did not know who I was. I was interacting with circumstances way beyond my years. I was expected to be an adult in coping with it, yet I was not allowed to be an adult by never being included in the discussions of what was going on. According to them I was too young to understand. In my opinion, this was the beginning of an all-pervasive double bind within which I found myself living for many years. It was "you are too young to know or understand any of this"; and "grow up Zahava and pull yourself together". This later evolved into some kind of interaction where I felt my sense of reality was denied...

Eventually it was time for my father to be released from prison, early 1979. I was now beginning standard eight at school. I had grown into a young woman physically, although emotionally and intellectually I felt like quicksand. My description of my father's view of me was that he had left an 11 year old child,

and here was this young woman who was still an 11 year old child. My description of him was of a man who was my hero, but who now crawled crushed beneath the very pedestal I created. We set each other up even then as we glared into eyes filled with expectation and disappointment. The excitement of his return ended abruptly because to me it was so clear how much he hated himself, felt ashamed, a failure, guilty, angry. He could no longer practise as an advocate, his one daughter had cancer while his youngest daughter was extremely difficult, creating more and more problems for this family already cracking under the strain.

We began to fight very badly, and verbally abuse each other. At times it would get so bad that he too would slap me. Although this physical abuse may not have been severe, for me it was huge. The fact that it was swept under the carpet, treated as if this was acceptable, or even treated as if it wasn't happening, became extremely difficult for me to cope with.

My brother became overly protective of my father, while the conflict between my brother and myself escalated. My sisters formed their own subsystem. My mother remained somewhere in the middle of everyone. I felt increasingly alone and alienated, nobody could understand me, and everyone was against me.

My eldest sister with cancer was working as a teacher at the school I attended and she had moved out of home. Twice a month when she had chemotherapy and became very ill, she would come home for a couple of nights. My room had two beds in it, and she would stay with me. She was fighting for her life, and I became suicidal in an attempt to get the attention I so desperately needed. I remember one night pushing a wardrobe over myself so I wouldn't have to write an exam the next day. A few weeks later I swallowed about sixty headache tablets. I was hospitalised for a few days and assigned a psychiatrist, Dr F.



The only response and attention I received from my family was fury. I wanted love, care and compassion. I needed everyone to see how sore and hard and confusing life was for me. Couldn't anyone see me? But they all felt the same - no-one in the family could help anyone else. The more I needed love and attention, the more anger came my way.

✓ The more I perceived my father as hating himself, the more he thought I hated him. Because I hated myself for needing help, I could never ask for it in a way that would ensure getting it. This in turn invited my father to feel even more helpless and inadequate. And so the circle turned, in a vicious cycle of hurtful interaction.

I began to see Dr F once a week, and I was sent off for a whole lot of psychometric tests. I was told I was gifted and underachieving, and put under even more pressure. I could see—

only darkness and feel only fear. Adolescence is difficult in the best circumstances, and this complicated one was no joke. Dr F's presence threatened my family, yet confirmed for them that I was the one who was sick. He also prescribed medication for me, but something inside me resisted, although recreational drugs became appealing. The situation at home got worse and worse. I began to fail at school, my insecurity and paranoia became so bad that I walked around in permanent 'angst' and 'hysteria'. I believe if psychiatrically labelled, psychosis might have been the one chosen. Later, maybe toxic psychosis with panic disorder thrown in, and a bit of depression - they could have thrown the book at me!

Around this time, I was introduced to marijuana by some friends, and here was a way for me to escape, lose myself, laugh, walk around in a daze and rebel all at the same time. But, as in all substance abuse, paranoia increases eventually, as does depression, lack of motivation and apathy, appetite

instability, self hatred - you name it. It was not long before I was spiralling down yet another vicious cycle, proving more and more that the label that was hanging from my neck was accurate - "poor Zahava, so much potential and look at her, mentally and emotionally unstable, throwing her life down the gutter. And her poor family - they've been through so much, they don't need this too!"

My matric year was excruciatingly difficult, I rarely went to school and when I did I would hang out in the toilets smoking cigarettes or joints, moving along in some type of trance - falling between extreme depression, binge eating, drug induced paranoia, confusion, anger, exhaustion, terror, rage, rebellion, self-pity and self-destruction. I was running rampant, at home and at school, alternating between vicious, abusive fights with my father and brother, or the headmaster. Eventually I was expelled, but because of the closed and complex organisation of the Jewish

community in Johannesburg, I was allowed to write the final exams at the school.

I basically scraped through matric, to this day I don't know how I succeeded at that. I continued to travel my road of destruction, fluctuating between the highs of youthful sex, drugs and rock and roll, and the lows of those things in conjunction with the pain and confusion inside me, all around me. I only knew the emptiness and meaninglessness of this tiny little self who could find no context in which to grow. A will o' the wisp, crusading down a spiral of self-destruction, at 17 years old.

My father was busy travelling his own journey, unhappy in the only work he could find, facing only his guilt and sense of failure in his reflection each morning, spiralling too, I thought, down into the depths of self-recrimination.

While studying for my undergraduate degree which took four years to complete, the darkness began to close in on me. I started symptom hopping as the drug abuse increased. I behaved as an agoraphobic, I felt depressed and paranoid in a way that had to tell me or someone else that something was very wrong. I deregistered, reregistered, left home, went back, and became almost non-functional.

Somewhere during this time I began to see a psychologist, Gail. From the outset, she did not label me. And in return I will not label her. I cannot say she is an ecosystemic therapist, nor a gestalt, a psychodynamic, or transactional analyst, whatever. If I use the term eclectic it might lead us to an epistemological debate. Our relationship served as the most useful and valuable relationship I had yet experienced in my life. This is not to say that our journey together was smooth or easy, and I still managed to land myself in hospital with anaphronil and lexotan running through my veins.

✓ Our therapy was a long term one, and somewhere in our co-construction of meaning, we agreed on viewing my situation as contextualised within my family system. This meaning was probably the most critical shift for me. Sure, I first went through a stage of completely blaming my family for everything, almost like a backlash against all those years of living out all the blame within myself.

Simultaneously, I had begun to study psychology honours at Unisa. This course introduced me on a theoretical level to first and second-order cybernetics, family therapy and ecosystemic epistemology. On the emotional, behavioural and intellectual interface, my way of being was shifting. Interactionally, in terms of my relationships with others, I was moving along that tightrope of balance where I had to begin living these alternative ideas ✓ and feelings. Yet it was so much more comfortable to remain how I always had been. I must confess that I fell off that tightrope on many occasions. All this occurred during about a two or three

year period, and major shifts were going on in the rest of my family organisation. My father had found himself a work position which affirmed him and allowed him the intellectual autonomy he craved, as well as the financial rewards he deserved. My brother met the woman he was to marry and moved out of the unhealthy (my description) situation of living at home past the age of 30. My sisters grew closer and closer, although one was living and studying in Boston while the other was living in Johannesburg. My mother became riddled with physical complaints that no doctor could find reasons for. I also met the man I would marry, and moved in with him.

It was around this time that I was coming to the end of my therapeutic relationship with Gail. Together we had reached a point where we could both see my family organisation in a way which I now understand as ecosystemic, but which then was just a way of understanding which was critically useful for me. I had ✓ come to realise that I am a part of the family system as much as

anyone else. I had made the decision not to cut free from my family. I knew I could not deny their existence because of my understanding of what love is. Therefore in order for me to live ✓ my life constructively, with fulfillment, I had to acknowledge my part in the system. I had to understand how all of our existences mutually and reciprocally form a part of each other. For a while, the way I did this was to metaphorically shrink the entire family system and allow it conscious expression through me only on my baby toe of my right foot. In this way I acknowledged our mutual existence in a way that seemed manageable and healthy for me.

I no longer need to use this metaphor of shrinking my family system and have reached a point where I have a lot of forgiveness for all of us. At times this metaphor still serves an important function for me, and through that, probably for all of us.



I am able to draw on all of these experiences in my therapeutic relationships, in ways which go beyond the scope of this dissertation. Suffice it to say that this is my story and you can take from it what you will, in true postmodernist participation.

I think this is where I choose to end this story, as I am tired of my own voice now. It is time to call on all of you again, to help co-construct the deconstruction of this story through dialogue, or shall I say polyphony and metalogue.

JANITOR: So, you are one of those success stories. In a psychotherapeutic relationship you came to a point where you could find a place for yourself in your interpersonal context, a place you could name 'healthy'.

ZAHAVA: Yes, I can live in this world feeling empowered to trust my own meanings and the flexibility to share meanings with

those around me. I am able to live with complexity, have diverse behaviours and emotions which can shift and change so they are juxtaposed and balanced (Keeney, 1983). I have found congruence between my own demands and resources, and the demands and resources of other levels in my ecosystem (Keeney, 1983).

All of this has given me the faith I need in psychotherapy in order for me to practise as a psychotherapist with commitment and animation. In my mind, it is no coincidence that I studied for this degree at Unisa, where ecosystemic epistemology is taught. The synchronicity of that is deeply valuable to me. Here, in a formalised way, I was taught about a therapist's use of self in therapy, about reflexivity. I learned about the relationship between epistemology and psychotherapy, as well as the relationship between epistemology and life (Keeney, 1983).

One of the most important things I learnt in my therapeutic relationship with Gail was how useful it can be to bring oneself into the therapy as a therapist. This ability and openness to show one's own 'truth' creates space for the client/s, it allows the relationship of trust to grow, and it offers the opportunity for the therapeutic relationship to be an important one in terms of connective emotional and/or interpersonal experience. I began to learn those lessons then, and in training as a therapist, I continue this journey. I know how crucial it is for me to really listen to clients, to understand that we together have to co-construct the relationship and meanings for each particular context and experience.

Most of all, I understand that without the willingness to bring myself and all I have learned into the relationship, without this use of myself, I cannot expect clients to be open and willing to meaningfully share their selves.

The inclusion of my personal story has been for these reasons. I am tired of psychotherapy being discussed as if it were a machine, a cold factual object. It is alive and filled with people and their stories, it is creative, textured and intertextual. My training as a psychotherapist began then, with my experience as a person moving through this peopled world, exploring the patterned balance of contexts within contexts.

## OTHER THEORETICAL PARTICIPANTS JOIN THE JOURNEY

CONSULTANT: **BEFORE WE ALL TAKE THE LIBERTY OF USING YOUR PERSONAL STORY AS CO-CONSTRUCTED DECONSTRUCTIONISTIC BAIT, I WOULD LIKE TO HEAR SOME OF THE AXIOMS UNDERLYING THE TWO PSYCHOLOGICAL THEORIES OF CHOICE, NAMELY INTRAPSYCHIC (POSITIVIST) AND ECOSYSTEMIC (NEW EPISTEMOLOGY). DON'T WORRY, I UNDERSTAND THAT YOU CHOOSE FROM YOUR OWN REPRESENTATION OF THE WORLD, PUNCTUATING WHICH AXIOMS ARE IMPORTANT TO YOU AND TO WHAT YOU ARE TRYING TO EXPRESS. BUT BECAUSE WE ARE PARTICIPATING IN THIS PROCESS, WE WILL INFLUENCE THIS CHOICE. THE PARTICIPATION OF THE ACADEMIC THEORISTS WILL OBVIOUSLY BE INFLUENTIAL.**

ZAHAVA: *As I mentioned earlier, the dissertation's academic requirements will co-exist with the conversational narrative constructions in a complementary way. I think now is a good time to introduce a positivist, Newtonian theorist and juxtapose that*

point of view with an ecosystemic theorist, so that we can talk about their theoretical underpinnings. I believe they should be allowed to select the particular axioms which they think are most relevant to the assumptions of this dissertation in terms of its mode of descriptive methodology.

**POSITIVIST THEORIST:** What I intend to do is to advocate the primary tenets of Newtonian positivist epistemology, namely lineal causality, reductionism and objectivity of observation. This mechanistic and atomistic view is based on the assumption of neutral and rational objectivity, the premise that reality can be reduced to elementary units (Schwartzmann, 1985). This paradigm has been the dominant world-view in western civilization for many years and focuses on empiricism, with its assumptions about external forces of prediction and control. The assumption is that there is a real world 'out there' and if we are rigorous enough in our observations, we will be able to obtain an accurate and objective map of reality (Atkinson & Heath, 1987).

I will discuss the above tenets in more detail now. In terms of a mechanistic view of reality, I believe all human and material matter is composed of discrete elements or particles that have independent

status. There is no relationship between them, and they are seen as permanent in a world external to the knower. As a scientist, my analysis of reality should strive to be objective and value-free, and should be restricted to the essential properties of material values which can be measured and quantified (Schwartzmann, J 1985).

✓ Additionally, I hold an atomistic view of society, whereby all phenomena are understood by analysing their separate components. Reality is static and conceptualised through the process of reductionism. Consistent with the either/or concept of dualism, human behaviour is conceptualised, like all knowledge, through objectivity and lineality. Human behaviour is perceived as independent of context and as the result of lineal causes and effects (Schwartzmann, 1985). By analysing the forces which act on the independent parts, we scientists make deductions about the behaviour of the whole.

✓ This view locates the causes of human behaviour as lying within the person alone, and is thus an intrapsychic perspective. Hence the concepts of unidirectional influence, purpose and goal are meaningful within this line of enquiry. The focus of therapy is therefore to label the individual intrapsychically, to the exclusion of context, with the therapist as an objective observer who has the

ability to cause a desired effect (Schwartzmann, 1985). My paradigm emphasises value free, objective descriptions of reality, and aims to predict and control future behaviour.

The Newtonian paradigm has been likened to modernism (Lax, 1992) and can be seen as privileging the subject in the construction of meaning while assuming positions of expertise and authority.

CONSULTANT: WE ARE NOW LIVING IN A TIME WHERE THE EMERGING TREND IS TO MOVE AWAY FROM THIS MODERNIST, EMPIRICAL, NEWTONIAN WESTERN PARADIGM OF KNOWLEDGE. THE WORLD IS SHIFTING TO THE NEW EPISTEMOLOGY - AN EMPHASIS ON INTERRELATION, CONTEXT, ECOLOGY, RELATIONSHIP AND A SENSITIVITY TO HOLISM AND COMPLEXITY (KEENEY, 1982). THIS NONLINEAL EPISTEMOLOGY CHALLENGES NEWTONIAN EPISTEMOLOGY WITH THE RELATED APPROACHES OF ECOSYSTEMIC EPISTEMOLOGY, CONSTRUCTIVISM, SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM AND POSTMODERNISM.



ZAHAVA: My first taste of the new epistemology was from reading Keeney (1983), who in my understanding has been greatly influenced by Gregory Bateson.

ECOSYSTEMIC THEORIST: *I would like to offer a more detailed account concerning ecosystemic theory, constructivism and social constructionism.*

○ *I will begin with Bateson (1979) who maintains that there is no fixed objective reality and that we cannot claim final knowledge of anything, but will rather always be exposed to an infinite number of alternatives. Connected to Bateson's (1979) notion that there is no objective reality, is the idea first introduced by Korzybski that the map is not the territory and the name is not the thing named. In all thought, perception or communication about perception, there is a transformation, a coding between the "thing" and the "thing named" (Bateson, 1979, p. 205). The process of perception is a subjectively created experience and a process of transformation where reality is constructed.*

○ *Following this, Bateson (1979) acknowledges language as a vehicle through which all meaning is created. According to Bateson (1979) language stresses only one side of any interaction and it is through language that we transform reality in order to construct explanations. The arbitrary nature of language is a subjective description of a reality that*

*can never be objectively known. Language is a social construction which offers us meaning. Any understanding or co-constructed meanings that we do come to, are 'arbitrary punctuations' and 'partial arcs' of a complete recursive whole. Bateson (1979) discusses how 'double description', the combination of diverse viewpoints, provides depth, relevance, and greater understanding. The concept 'context' refers to that which enables us to achieve a holistic understanding. "Context is linked to another undefined notion called 'meaning'. Without context, words and actions have no meaning at all" (Bateson, 1979, p. 24).*

*Keeney (1983), influenced by Bateson, has postulated an ecosystemic epistemology founded on the principles of ecology, systems theory and cybernetics. This theory involves seeing patterns of relationships rather than objects and things, and seeing the whole relationship in which the parts are embedded rather than dividing the world into dualisms. This involves a shift from focusing on substance to seeing form and using metaphors of pattern, information, and organisation (Bateson, 1979). Events are seen as organised by recursive feedback processes and a way of discerning the patterns of organisation is offered.*

*Cybernetic epistemology is a higher order of recursion that provides a way of discerning and constructing alternative and more complex patterns in the ecology of our experience (Keeney, 1983). It is a way of acknowledging the observer's inclusion in the system (Keeney, 1983) and of emphasising the self-referential nature of any description. To recognise the recursive and reciprocal nature of all interaction means realising the*

objective

*importance of oneself as part of one's client system. One cannot view oneself as an objective observer who is independent from the system being examined. One must recognise the importance of acknowledging the impact one has on the systems one encounters.*

JANITOR: Thus the entrance to a radically different world of description is accessed, the world of description in which this dissertation resides.

ECOSYSTEMIC THEORIST: *Let us now discuss the constructivistic approach of Maturana and Varela (1987) who see cognition as an ongoing bringing forth of a world through the process of living itself rather than as a representation of the world 'out there'. Maturana and Varela (1987) believe all cognitive experience involves the knower in a personal way, bound in his or her biological structure. They conceptualise the creation of meaning in language in biological terms with reference to the nervous system as a closed neuronal network (Efran, Lukens & Lukens, 1990).*

*These views move us away from lineal causal sequences towards the appreciation of complexity and autonomy (Anderson & Goolishian, 1988). Maturana and Varela (1987) provide a further contribution to the notion of illusory objectivity by their conclusion that the nervous system is an informationally closed neuronal network. This network responds*

✓ *to the environment in a manner determined by its own self-referring organisation and structure rather than in a way specified by external stimuli. Perception can only be seen as an internally generated process which does not involve a transfer of information from the environment to the brain.*

*Following this notion of informational closure, we cannot perceive an objective reality.*

✓ *Statements and descriptions of an observer can then only be a commentary about that observer's own organisationally closed system (Efran et al., 1988). As observers, we always remain within a descriptive domain that is relative to our own self-referential organisation, and thus reality is always subjective (Maturana, 1975).*

✓ *Maturana (1975) believes that the use of language is the fundamental characteristic of human systems, and language results in the establishment of consensual domains.*

✓ *Words imply meaning in the domain of description rather than denoting a concrete objective reality (Anderson & Goolishian, 1988).*

*Another approach challenging the lineal causal sequences of positivist, Newtonian science and modernism is the postmodern paradigm. Hoffman (1991) views postmodernism as replacing objectivist ideals with a tradition of criticism of all productions of the human mind, in which normalised beliefs are demystified and in which the traditional conception of objective, individualistic and ahistoric knowledge is challenged. Postmodernism involves "dismantling the philosophical foundations of*

✓ *Western thought" (Hoffman, 1990, p. 63). The individual is considered within a context of social meaning rather than as an intrapsychic entity, and scientific knowledge yields to an emphasis on communal beliefs (Lax, 1992). McNamee and Gergen (1992) see the integrative vehicle for the challenges against traditional modernist views as being constituted by social constructionism which confronts the traditional subject-object dualism, avoids the traditional position of authority and concerns itself primarily with relational networks (Nash, 1990).*

CONSULTANT: THE ABOVE DISCUSSION HAS HIGHLIGHTED CONTRASTS BETWEEN THE NEWTONIAN PARADIGM AND THE NEW EPISTEMOLOGY. WITHIN THE NEW EPISTEMOLOGY THERE ARE VARIOUS THEORISTS AND APPROACHES, BUT THEY ALL SHARE AS THEIR ESSENTIAL CORE THE MOVE AWAY FROM POSITIVIST EMPIRICISM AND A CONCERN WITH INTER ALIA THE NOTIONS OF RECURSIVENESS, SELF-REFERENTIALITY, ECOLOGY, AUTONOMY, CONTEXT AND COMPLEXITY.

EPISTEMOLOGIST: Generally speaking, Bateson, Keeney, Maturana, Varela and the social constructionists all challenge the assumptions that there is a real world 'out there' that can be known with objective certainty.

✓ Additionally, all share the notions of the self-referentiality of description and explanation, the inclusion of the observer in the observed, and the idea that reality is the product of active, subjective constructions existing in the domain of language. The importance of context is acknowledged, as well as the idea that meanings and descriptions are uncertain and constantly evolving.

All these theorists propose holism and ecology, particularly the recursive, reciprocal interactions that constitute whole systems and relational forms. Lastly, the shared assumption that 'mind' exists not in the brain of the individual but in the social domain of language and conversation, illustrates the similarities in these approaches in terms of the move away from the Newtonian paradigm in favour of the new epistemology.

✓ ECOSYSTEMIC THEORIST: *Let us continue with our discussion of postmodern thinking, which frequently focuses on ideas regarding text and narrative. 'Text' and 'narrative' attend to the importance of dialogic and multiple perspectives, self-disclosure and process (Lax, 1992). In terms of methodology, as well as the psychotherapeutic process, Zahava has attempted to demonstrate the above notions. She does still insist on not giving direct answers to questions, as she believes that because we are still in the middle of an epistemological revolution, it would be unrealistic to expect definitive answers to every question posed about constructivistic approaches (McNamee & Gergen, 1992). She remains within postmodernism, where a narrative text is not something to be interpreted, but is an evolving process (Lax, 1992).*

CONSULTANT: AND WITHIN POSTMODERNISM IS THE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM, WHICH VIEWS IDEAS AND KNOWLEDGE AS A SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION ARISING IN SOCIAL INTERCHANGE AND MEDIATED THROUGH LANGUAGE (HOFFMAN, 1991). DESCRIPTIONS FROM THIS PERSPECTIVE, AS MENTIONED PREVIOUSLY, ARE SEEN AS SOCIAL PRODUCTS EMERGING IN A CONTEXT OF COMMUNAL CONSTRUCTION (LAX, 1992) RATHER THAN AS OBJECTIVE ACCOUNTS. OUR DESCRIPTIONS ARE GUIDED BY SHARED CONVENTIONS OF DISCOURSE OR TEXTUAL HISTORIES (MCNAMEE & GERGEN, 1992). THESE TEXTS OR NARRATIVES ARE SEEN NOT AS INDEPENDENT OF PEOPLE BUT AS PRODUCTS OF RELATIONSHIPS. HUMAN ACTION IS SEEN AS TAKING PLACE IN A REALITY OF UNDERSTANDING THAT IS CREATED THROUGH SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION AND DIALOGUE (MCNAMEE & GERGEN, 1992).

EPISTEMOLOGIST: Anderson and Goolishian (1992) believe that we live and understand our living through these narratives that give meaning to and maintain the organisation of our experiences. The development of narrative is a recursive process. Defining who we are therefore recursively interacts with others' perceived understanding of us. Lax (1992) proposes that we shape the world in which we live and create our own reality within a context. This shaped narrative is created not only through discourse with others, but is our discourse with others. White and Epston (1990) speak of

- ✓ life as being the “very performance of these texts” (p. 9), since we live our lives through these stories. It is impossible to have privileged access to the
- ✓ naming of reality, since all we can know are the stories through which lived
- ✓ experience is interpreted. Anderson and Goolishian (1992) emphasise the continually changing, evolving and dialogical basis of the stories themselves.

- ✓ **CONSULTANT: THE DESCRIPTIVE METHODOLOGY OF THIS DISSERTATION CONCURS WITH THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONIST PERSPECTIVE, WHERE COMMUNICATION IS SEEN AS A RELATIONAL PROCESS IN WHICH INFORMATION IS SOCIALLY EMBEDDED AND CONSTRUCTED. THUS THE UNFOLDING OF MEANING ARISES THROUGH INTERACTION BETWEEN INDIVIDUALS (CECCHIN & LANE, 1993) IN A PROCESS OF CO-CONSTRUCTION. THE RECOGNITION OF THE ACTIVE ROLE OF THE OBSERVER IN ANY DESCRIPTION LEADS TO THE NOTION THAT THERE ARE NO INCONTROVERTIBLE TRUTHS, BUT ONLY STORIES ABOUT THE WORLD THAT WE TELL OURSELVES AND OTHERS, DIFFERING VIEWS AVAILABLE TO EACH READER, BASED ON EACH READERS' IDIOSYNCRATIC PERSPECTIVE (HOFFMAN, 1991). KNOWLEDGE IS THUS SEEN AS PARTICIPATORY (EFRAN ET AL., 1990).**



✓ ZAHAVA: Hoffman (1990) believes that we organise the world into stories or packets of meaning which constitute our reality. These meanings are created through dialogue and are constantly changing. Narratives exist in the telling, and these are constituents of relational forms (McNamee & Gergen, 1992). Meanings and understanding are socially constructed by persons in conversation (Anderson & Goolishian, 1988).

Drawing on Hoffman's (1991) work, I would like to move into a conversation about dialogue as both descriptive-methodology for a dissertation and its relevance for therapeutic practice. Hoffman (1991) encourages people to play with stories, and offers some of her own, which she admits tend to be positive and transformative. According to her, this playing with associative forms, like stories, has always been a part of therapy. It is only now, however, that it has a foundation in one of the descriptive human disciplines, which is what she takes social constructionism in its widest form to be. Where

appropriate, she would share stories from her own life, as I have done in this dissertation. She would openly assume responsibility if the client had a complaint about the therapy, without treating it as evidence of resistance. There is above all, a reflexive loop between therapist and client, that includes the therapist's own working philosophy.

✓ Most therapists have a story about how problems develop and are solved or dis-solved (Hoffman, 1991). Without awareness and acknowledgement of this, many alternatives may be shut out in the therapeutic process. Hoffman (1991) continues with her observation that linguistic play is widely emphasised and the social and linguistic process that forms new fields of study will wind its way through time (Hoffman, 1991).

✓ Postmodernists replace the lineal notion of the objective observer with the idea of a collaboration, in which no one has the

✓ final word. Postmodernist conversation privileges 'discourse' over 'text', therefore foregrounding dialogue to monologue and emphasising co-operation and collaboration. Instead of the 'observer-observed' distinction, there is mutual dialogical production of discourse, of a story of sorts (Hoffman, 1991). Suggested here is an ethic of participation which is now emerging in social thought and action. Applied to therapy, our aim should be a critical stance that favours awareness of the power relations hidden within the assumptions of any social discourse, including 'critical discourse' itself (Hoffman, 1991). It is not just our theory, but our practice as well, which should reflect an awareness of hidden assumptions.

JANITOR: If Zahava is to take these principles of social constructionism seriously, these principles have had to be applied ✓ to herself, as therapist and in her research. I believe that the research process itself is the social construction of a world through

an evolving multiple description. She certainly has been included in the body of her research (Steier, 1989).

CONSULTANT: SZASZ (IN MARANHÃO, 1990), HAS SUGGESTED THAT PSYCHOTHERAPY BE UNDERSTOOD IN TERMS OF THE STRUCTURE OF RHETORIC, NOT IN TERMS OF MEDICAL INTERVENTIONS. KEENEY (IN MARANHÃO, 1990) SHOWS HOW ECOSYSTEMIC THERAPY FULLY UTILISES THE RHETORIC STRUCTURE OF THERAPY AND BUILDS UPON THE UNDERSTANDING THAT THERAPY IS PRIMARILY WITHIN THE DOMAIN OF DISCOURSE. WHAT EMERGES IN ECOSYSTEMIC THERAPY ARE STORIES AS WELL AS STORIES ABOUT STORIES. AS PREVIOUSLY MENTIONED, STORIES REVEAL HOW PEOPLE CONSTRUCT THEIR WORLD AND THEREFORE PROVIDE CLUES FOR KNOWING THEIR EPISTEMOLOGICAL PREMISES (KEENEY, 1990B). IN GENERAL, THERAPY IS A PROCESS OF WEAVING STORIES BETWEEN THERAPIST AND CLIENT SYSTEMS (MARANHÃO, 1990).

KEENEY (1990B) CONTINUES TO EXPLAIN THAT FROM A CYBERNETIC PERSPECTIVE, WHEN AN EXCHANGE OF STORIES IS

STRUCTURED IN TERMS OF FEEDBACK, SELF-CORRECTION AND ADAPTIVE CHANGE BECOME POSSIBLE. THE STORIES PEOPLE LIVE AS WELL AS THEIR STORIES ABOUT THOSE STORIES ARE ALL A THERAPIST HAS TO WORK WITH. THERAPY IS THUS DIALOGUE, A CONVERSATIONAL EXCHANGE OF STORIES.

KEENEY (1990B) CONCLUDES THAT AN ECOSYSTEMIC VIEW OF COMPLEMENTARITY ENABLES ALL RESPONSES OF A CLIENT SYSTEM TO BE USED GENERATIVELY. ANY PARTICULAR RESPONSE CAN BE SEEN AS A DESCRIPTION OF A MORE ENCOMPASSING PATTERN, ENABLING DIALOGUE IN THERAPY TO BE GENERATED. ECOSYSTEMIC THERAPY LIES WITHIN THE DOMAIN OF RHETORIC, DIALOGUE AND CONVERSATION.

RATHER THAN SOLUTIONS, AN ALTERNATIVE REALITY CAN BE BUILT WHICH TRANSFORMS THE MEANINGS OF THE PEOPLE WHO ARE A PART OF IT. THESE INCLUDE CLIENT SYSTEMS, FAMILIES, THERAPISTS, THEORISTS, WRITERS AND READERS (MARANHÃO, 1990).

## A CONVERSATION ABOUT MY THINKING

JANITOR: Without further ado, I want to participate in the stimulating, exciting, and most of all, ethical, process of thinking about Zahava's thinking.

SUPERVISOR: Yes, I agree. It is time to devote a whole section, or should I say a substantial 'partial arc' (Bateson, 1979), to Zahava's thinking. Up to now she has offered some perspectives on her own thinking, but more within keeping the construction of the dissertation itself in the dark than an explicit expression of her and our thoughts about her thoughts.

CONSULTANT: AS ZAHAVA WELL KNOWS, IN ORDER TO BE CONSISTENT WITH ECOSYSTEMIC EPISTEMOLOGY - BE IT FIRST, SECOND, OR THIRD ORDER - THE DIALECTIC OR LET'S SAY COMPLEMENTARY LOOPS OF DIFFERENT LEVELS OF RECURSION MUST CONTINUALLY EVOLVE. THE CONSTRUCTION HAS BEEN AN EXAMPLE OF ITSELF FOR

THE MOST PART UP TO NOW, THUS IT IS TIME TO COME OUT OF THE CLOSET, SO TO SPEAK.

✓ ZAHAVA: Yes, yes, I hear you all. I understand that whatever I say or don't explicitly state, is revealing of my epistemology. It will be useful now to punctuate my personal story which I have told you and use it as a window into myself and how I think, as well as how over time, my thinking has evolved.

✓ I have learnt in the last couple of years that my epistemological premises are revealed through my punctuations of the world, and that psychotherapy and epistemology exist mutually and inextricably together. The interconnections between the story of my evolution from childhood to adolescence to adulthood within my family and social context, are inseparable from my epistemological premises, which are in turn inseparable from myself as a therapist. In fact, they all reciprocally co-construct the other.

CONSULTANT: AS BATESON (1979) AND KEENEY (1983) DISCUSS, BOTH THERAPISTS AND CLIENTS EMBODY AN EPISTEMOLOGY THAT GOVERNS THE WAY IN WHICH THEY CONSTRUCT AND KNOW A WORLD OF EXPERIENCE. "KNOWING ABOUT AN EPISTEMOLOGY ALSO INVOKES AN EPISTEMOLOGY AND CAN SERVE AS A PARADIGM FOR THE VERY PROCESS OF EPISTEMOLOGY" (KEENEY, 1983, P. 142).

✓ LOOKING AT THAT PROCESS, WE CAN SEE THAT KNOWING A WORLD REQUIRES DRAWING A DISTINCTION. "SINCE DRAWING A DISTINCTION IS A WAY OF CONSTRUCTING A WORLD, KNOWING AND CONSTRUCTING ARE INSEPARABLE" (KEENEY, 1983, P. 109).

PSYCHOTHERAPISTS ARE EPISTEMOLOGISTS IN THAT THEY EMBODY PATTERNS OF KNOWING AND CONSTRUCTING A THERAPEUTIC REALITY. IN ORDER TO BE AWARE OF HOW WE KNOW OR CONSTRUCT A REALITY, A KNOWLEDGE OF HOW WE KNOW THINGS IS NECESSARY. THIS THEN REQUIRES A DIALECTIC BETWEEN CONSTRUCTING AND SEEING. IT IS IN THIS WAY THAT EPISTEMOLOGY CAN BE SEEN TO BE A RECURSIVE PROCESS.



THEREFORE A THERAPIST WHO FINDS "HER EPISTEMOLOGICAL KNIFE WILL APPROACH THE CLINICAL WORLD IN A RADICALLY DIFFERENT WAY.

✓ SUCH A THERAPIST WILL REALISE THAT WHAT IS REAL, WHETHER IT BE PROBLEM OR CURE, IS ALWAYS A CONSEQUENCE OF A CONSTRUCTED WORLD OF EXPERIENCE" (KEENEY, 1983, P. 143). SINCE HE OR SHE JOINS HIS OR HER CLIENTS IN THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF A THERAPEUTIC REALITY, HE OR SHE IS ALSO PARTLY RESPONSIBLE FOR THE WORLD OF EXPERIENCE THAT IS CREATED (KEENEY, 1983).

ZAHAVA: I couldn't have said it better myself! What better way of discovering my epistemological knife than cutting through an autobiographical description of some of my experiences.

JANITOR: That was quite an earful! Parts of it reminded me of Zahava's final year presentation which was also part of her Masters degree in psychology.

ZAHAVA: There was a part in my final year presentation on 'gallery' (see Appendix C, p. 116) which was very similar to what the consultant has just spoken about.

JANITOR: I liked that gallery, and I think that it has a lot of relevance to this dissertation as a whole because it can be seen as another story along your journey.

ZAHAVA: I think it would fit quite well here, but then it will interfere with this conversation about my thinking. Even though that gallery includes much about myself and my evolution as a therapist as well as the evolution of my thinking and epistemological premises, I think I would prefer to find another place for it in this dissertation, as at this time I would like to talk about my thinking as revealed by my personal story.

JANITOR: I will begin with how you have begun your story. Immediately it is clear to me that it is important to you to present yourself as currently belonging to the ecosystemic worldview. Once you have made that clear, you move into a time when you were much younger, and held quite different beliefs about life.

ZAHAVA: It also seems to me that at this point I struggle between a desire to seduce my readers with content while at the same time steering clear of self-indulgence at any cost. I understand this in the light of the fact that I am writing all of this from where I am in the world now, yet I cannot fully extricate myself from the way I lived in the world then. Who I am, this concept of self, is all a part of a complex web of time past and present. It is my context then and now, the construction of a reality as it moves and evolves through time, places, people. As I was then, I would have done anything to pull people towards me through the sad content of my story. As I am now, to be self

indulgent in that way hinders my looking for the process beyond the content.

✓  
EPISTEMOLOGIST: Perhaps the younger Zahava was so concerned about her sad content, and so desperate to pull people towards her because she was not being heard by anyone. You, now the older Zahava, perhaps have found the voice people can hear. This movement from not being heard to finding a voice in a context can be seen to parallel your movement from intrapsychic to ecosystemic thought. I think it is therefore crucial at this point to introduce two more participants, to give form to your shifting perspective, namely an intrapsychic therapist and an ecosystemic therapist.

ZAHAVA: That is a good idea. These two participants can help reveal the presuppositions behind my shift from psycho-therapeutic points of view.

INTRAPSYCHIC THERAPIST: **Zahava was not heard because of her acting out of her unmet needs in ways which would attempt to elicit sympathy from others.**

ECOSYSTEMIC THERAPIST: *I prefer to begin my 'deconstruction' of Zahava's story by talking about how the re-storying of experience— "necessitates the active involvement of people in the reorganisation of their experience" (White & Epston, 1990, p. 53). The re-storying of experience is coupled with activities which create an awareness of the process in which they are simultaneously the performers and the audience. "A consciousness of one's production of one's productions, provides for a context of reflexivity" (White & Epston, 1990, p.53). This context allows for new alternatives regarding oneself and one's relationships.*

INTRAPSYCHIC THERAPIST: *Well, I am busy conceptualizing Zahava's story in terms of how her unconscious was made conscious, and how this intellectual insight did not change the forces responsible for her intrapsychic conflict. I wonder if Dr F utilised transference and interpretation to instruct and re-educate her ego (Harris, 1973).*

JANITOR: *Whew, I must say that right now it is rather evident to me that the two therapists commenting on Zahava's story are pretty much missing each other. I would name their*

interaction as a relationship characterised by each not speaking to the other, but rather each one speaking and neither one listening.

**EPISTEMOLOGIST:** Remember, the ecosystemic therapist speaks from the framework of the new epistemology, while the intrapsychic therapist propounds the positivist, Newtonian epistemological framework. Let us participants not adopt a dualistic position regarding choice of paradigm, as neither voice is more valid or useful, both have their value and purpose in terms of particular contexts. As we discussed earlier, the context should not allow one voice to be the final authoritative truth. Take note of this, if you want to be able to work usefully with families or client systems in therapy.

**ZAHAVA:** Yes, I agree. But, right now, this deconstruction of my thinking as revealed by my personal story, is not going in a direction that I particularly want. I am now going to attempt to perturb this conversation, and hopefully it will shift direction.

**CONSULTANT:** **PERHAPS THE BEST WAY TO DO THAT IS FOR YOU TO BEGIN BY SHARING YOUR THOUGHTS ABOUT YOUR THINKING IN YOUR**

OWN VOICE FOR A WHILE, AND LET US HEAR WHERE YOUR 'TRUTH' IS  
AT THIS PARTICULAR JUNCTION.

ZAHAVA: I'll try. For starters, let me tell you where I am actually sitting, and what is going on around me. I have taken some leave from work as an intern psychologist in order to do some work on this dissertation.

I am seated at my dining-room table surrounded by books, journal articles, papers, photocopies, pens, computers, and general thesis paraphernalia. I am lonely and really feel like having the janitor with me to lighten my load a bit. I am at a point where I am not able to not take it all so seriously, and am therefore finding myself getting lost in all these books and in the academia of the thing. I want to talk about what I have said, think about how I think and have thought, I want to show you all the process involved and yet I am stuck.

JANITOR: To unstick the stuck try your luck with the ice-cream truck! Go away now for a while, when you return you'll have a new style.

ZAHAVA: You're right. Goodbye.



## LATER

EPISTEMOLOGIST: What Zahava is struggling with is how difficult it actually is to talk about one's own thinking. Coming to know your own epistemology, be it revealed through deconstruction of narrative, metacommunication, dialogical dialectic (Maranhão, 1990), whatever, is no ✓ easy process. Zahava realises that as a therapist, ethically it is of great importance to know her own epistemology because this epistemology is what she as a therapist brings with to the therapeutic relationship. Therefore, not only does she want to share how her personal story pertains to her journey as a therapist, but also how epistemology and psychotherapy are linked to her process of life itself.

CONSULTANT: **BECAUSE THIS PROCESS IS A DIFFICULT ONE, IT IS NO WONDER ZAHAVA HAS BEEN REVERTING TO HER PILES OF BOOKS AGAIN. YOU CAN RUN, GIRL, BUT YOU CAN'T HIDE! IT IS IRRELEVANT TO ME THAT YOU HAVE STUMBLER UPON READINGS ABOUT PSYCHOANALYSIS AND NARRATIVE. ALTHOUGH WHAT YOU HAVE READ REINFORCES HOW PSYCHOANALYTIC EPISTEMOLOGY LOCATES STORIES WITHIN THE INDIVIDUAL AND HER PERSONALITY ORGANISATION, IT ALSO DRAWS YOUR ATTENTION TO SOME REMARKABLE SIMILARITIES BETWEEN RECENT THESES OF PSYCHOANALYSIS ON THE ONE HAND AND**

NARRATIVE ON THE OTHER. YES, I AGREE THESE ARE INTERESTING INVESTIGATIONS, BUT THEY GO BEYOND THE SCOPE OF YOUR DISSERTATION, AND WOULD I'M SURE BE GREAT READING MATERIAL FOR SOMEONE ELSE'S THESIS. YOU FORGET THAT THE MORE YOU TRY AND HIDE IN ALL THESE REAMS AND REAMS OF WRITING, THE MORE YOU REVEAL YOUR FEAR TO COMMIT YOURSELF TO THE STUDY OF YOURSELF!

EPISTEMOLOGIST: Are you afraid that although you are attempting to present this story in as unbiased a way as possible, your alliance with ecosystemic premises is undeniably present.

ZAHAVA: I am not trying to hide my alliance to ecosystemic epistemology. As long as I continue with the both-and stance, with the openness and inclusive, inviting animation of polyphony, as long as I maintain this, I believe I am not contradicting myself, and that I am being true to my epistemology.

JANITOR: Why don't you try again, this time you begin the process of deconstruction and then see what the two therapists do with the starting point.

ZAHAVA: All right. Firstly let me say that my personal story is only one version of many possible versions. It is through this acknowledgement that I do begin from a point where I hold an ecosystemic thought system. Early in the story, I talk about paranoia and psychosomatic symptoms. These were understood by myself then as intrapsychic defence mechanisms and neurotic behaviour, although I don't think I had that terminology then.

**INTRAPSYCHIC THERAPIST: Yes, I believe it is possible to conceptualise your situation in that way. Your ego strength was inadequately integrated, and your relationships with others maladaptive.**

ECOSYSTEMIC THERAPIST: *Even though Zahava subscribed to this way of thinking then, I would still like to comment on how I conceptualise it. I don't want to look for the 'locus of maladaptation' within Zahava, but rather want to leave the 'notion of maladaptation' altogether. I choose to see the situation as one in which she is beginning to show symptoms as a metaphor for an ecology of relationships, within her family as well as perhaps her broader social context. Somewhere within her system there was functionality for her symptomatic behaviour.*

ZAHAVA: I feel that I have to be as honest as I possibly can now, and I need to admit that I feel frustrated and quite stymied.

SUPERVISOR: You remind me of a time in our Wednesday clinic when you would sit with clients and find it difficult to change mindset sometimes. They would change track and instead of always going with the process, you would try and remain with the planned direction.

CONSULTANT: ZAHAVA, I THINK YOU ARE UNDERMINING HOW DIFFICULT IT ACTUALLY IS TO DECONSTRUCT YOUR DESCRIPTION OF

**YOURSELF. PERHAPS BECAUSE OF THIS, YOU ARE CLUTCHING AT PRECONCEIVED IDEAS, LIKE INSISTING ON NOT ONLY REVEALING YOUR EPISTEMOLOGY, BUT ALSO ON IMPOSING THE SHIFT FROM INTRAPSYCHIC TO ECOSYSTEMIC THOUGHT ON YOUR PERSONAL STORY.**

ZAHAVA: That makes a lot of sense. Wasn't it I earlier on who waxed lyrical about the impossibility of prediction, and the importance of uncertainty? But I can't get away from this dissertation remaining a construction, no matter how flexible that construction is. I can say that I do plan a structure, yet at the same time it is just not possible to 'really know' in what way this structure will pan out. I think I need to forget the title I have chosen for the meantime, perhaps it too will change. Presently it is 'the journey of a trainee therapist: from an intrapsychic to an ecosystemic description'. I don't know why I have already given this work a title, as although it is a guideline, it is also becoming limiting for this postmodern endeavour.

EPISTEMOLOGIST: If I were your therapist, I would ask about meanings around 'avoidance' for you. How you have avoided in your life, and perhaps how your family organise themselves around avoidance. I say this because not only are you avoiding the difficult yet fascinating task of deconstructing your story, but it is also clear to me that you struggle with stating the obvious. I know this about you and it also comes out in the way you continually leave the construction of the dissertation indirect.

ZAHAVA: *Yes, but look at how this whole work up to now is in fact a deconstruction of my thinking. The invitation to all of you to participate and juxtapose perspectives, is all about my thinking; is it not?*

CONSULTANT: **YES, YOU ARE MOVING BETWEEN DIFFERING MODES OF COMMUNICATION. REMEMBER, EVEN THOUGH YOU ARE INVITING US TO COMMENT, IT IS THROUGH METACOMMUNICATION, WHICH MIGHT REVEAL YOUR PRESUPPOSITIONS WITHOUT THEM BEING OBVIOUS. BUT WHAT INTERESTS ME IS THE DIFFICULTY YOU ARE HAVING WITH THE MOST PERSONAL PART OF YOUR JOURNEY.**

ZAHAVA: I think it is about the preconceived trap of trying to fit my title. I am struggling with what Maturana (1975, 1987) taught me, in terms of the domain of experience and the domain of description. It is not possible to consciously be in both domains at the same time. Where the struggle is coming in, is in terms of the intrapsychic-ecosystemic shift which the title imposes. What seems to be happening is that at the time of writing the personal story, I was obviously in the domain of description, as I am now. At that time, my epistemology was already strongly grounded in ecosystemic thought.

As I re-read time and time again the personal piece, I am struck by the overall ecosystemic nature of it. I therefore feel as if I am 'drawing blood from a stone' as I attempt in the domain of description to deconstruct my story (which is also in the domain of description) in terms of a shift from intrapsychic to ecosystemic thought. But the shift had already occurred at the time

of describing the experiences. In other words the story was written when the shift had already taken place.

So what is highlighted is that although the experiences embodied a shift from intrapsychic to ecosystemic thought, the description of the experiences only really embodies ecosystemic thinking. However, when I experienced many of the experiences described, my epistemology was not ecosystemic. I had not made that very difficult epistemological shift Bateson (in Keeney, 1983) refers to as Learning 111 (see p. 99). I lived my life intrapsychically, walking determinedly into every label I could hang around my neck. The shift did begin during that time and what is brought out in the domain of description is an ecosystemic point of view that is reminiscent of the time when the shift was taking place.



CONSULTANT: SO ARE YOU SAYING THAT YOU CAN TALK ABOUT THE SHIFT IN TERMS OF THE TWO DOMAINS OR IN TERMS OF THE TWO THEORIES, I'M NOT SURE WHAT YOU MEAN?

ZAHAVA: I am trying to say that when I was in the domain of experience (the experiences used as the heart of the description), I lived an intrapsychic worldview which was supported by my context in that we all organised ourselves within a cause-effect world, filled with blame and closed internalised rigidity. During those experiences, I, through my psychotherapeutic relationship with Gail (someone outside my rigid system), was able to find a flexibility to shift in a way appropriate for me to open to alternatives.

This shift in a recursive way shifted my family organisation and certainly shifted my epistemological premises. Therefore, throughout those experiences, I underwent a journey from an intrapsychic way of being to an ecosystemic one. Thus I wrote the

description of the experience after the shift had already taken place. What strikes me most when reading my story, is how my movement from first-order cybernetics to second- and third-order cybernetics is revealed more than any other shift. Shortly I will present my final year gallery, which goes into this in more detail.

EPISTEMOLOGIST: This reminds me of Bateson's (in Keeney, 1983) notion of the acrobat. You learnt to maintain stability by continual corrections of your imbalance. Your family's reorganisation around these movements of yours, shows how a change in any part of the system will create change throughout the system.

ZAHAVA: The difficulty I have been experiencing in these last few pages has really opened me up to the demands I must often hand out to my clients. Is therapy not about helping people learn about how they think, and thereby about how they are in the world?

JANITOR: I've been thinking about how when you go to the river and fill a bucket of water, you have a bucket of riverwater but you don't have the river.

ZAHAVA: Perhaps this is enough for now about my personal story. You are all participating in this process anyhow, so why not make your own meanings from now, you decide for yourselves where you think I shifted and how...

JANITOR: It would please me greatly if you would show your ✓ gallery now. I subscribe to the idea of you using the gallery as another story along your journey illustrating your fundamental shift from intrapsychic to first- and then second- order cybernetics. It also serves to further expand on the link between this shift and your development as a psychotherapist. ✓

CONSULTANT: I AGREE. IT IS ALSO A DEMONSTRATION OF DESCRIPTIVE METHODOLOGY (HOFFMAN, 1991). ALTHOUGH THIS ENTIRE

DISSERTATION IS STRUCTURED AS DESCRIPTIVE METHODOLOGY, IT IS

USEFUL TO OFFER A SMALLER EXAMPLE WITHIN THE LARGER CONTEXT.

THIS WAY WE CAN PUNCTUATE THE GALLERY AS A PARTIAL ARC WITHIN  
THE LARGER CONTEXT OF BOTH CYBERNETICS AND DESCRIPTIVE  
METHODOLOGY.

ZAHAVA: *Alright, here goes...*

✓ You are all cordially invited to attend my gallery, which I see as  
another story along my journey to become a psychotherapist. S

## MY GALLERY AS ANOTHER STORY ALONG THE JOURNEY

GALLERY EPISTEMOLOGIST: Let me remind all of you that I have been written in to this script by Zahava, who has created this Batesonian type metalogue (Bateson, 1979) as a construction of her own perceptions and meanings. I should emphasise though, that according to the assumptions of this workshop, there is no 'real' meaning. Meanings and understanding are socially and intersubjectively constructed (Anderson & Goolishian, 1988) and co-evolved. All of us here today are beginning our co-drift through the medium of language (Maturana, 1975), and many meanings may be generated around the descriptions offered by Zahava of her reality. Any agreement we may come to about what we are experiencing here, is fragile and continually open to renegotiation.

ZAHAVA: I have created a metalogue for a few reasons. The evolution of my 'therapeutic self' has been a process that for me is more like a co-evolution. I can therefore only refer to my therapeutic self in context, and the pattern of meanings in this context can best be depicted through various relationships in 'conversation'.

I will present descriptions, and then descriptions of those descriptions. This use of double description can only be hypothetical, because the voices interacting and punctuating are my creation and not two or more separate individuals offering their own 'real' perceptions to co-evolve binocular vision. My intention is to show how if an observer combines the views of more than one participant, a sense of the whole, larger system or ecology will begin to emerge (Keeney, 1983).

GALLERY EPISTEMOLOGIST: Some of the ideas of Maturana (1975, 1987) and Bateson (1979) have been introduced here. A discussion of these is beyond the scope of the present purposes (see Appendix A, p. 112 and Appendix B, p. 114).

It is important to elucidate how the word 'epistemology' will be used throughout. Zahava has taken Bateson's (1979) explanation of epistemology, which means the study of how particular organisms know, think and decide; the study of the necessary limits of the processes of knowing, thinking and deciding; the basic premises underlying action and cognition. How this is connected to her therapeutic self, will unfold as the gallery moves toward the notion of 'observing systems' (Keeney, 1983).



ZAHAVA: All the following photographs were blown up to A3 size and pasted onto cardboard posters. I arranged the room so that they were all in a circle, simulating an art gallery.

FIRST VOICE: I see that you have presented your gallery in a circle. Where is the beginning and end?

ZAHAVA: The beginning of something, or its end for that matter, is only an arbitrary punctuation in that it is an idiosyncratic, subjective drawing of a distinction. I have punctuated the beginning of my evolution as a therapist with this particular 'frame' (see Appendix C, p. 116, for a discussion of 'frame'), which for me is a significant starting point (see p. 95a).

GALLERY EPISTEMOLOGIST: Zahava's process of evolution as a therapist is part of a larger, more encompassing whole system. When whole systems are punctuated into distinguishable parts, these drawn parts are arbitrary approximations of the whole system from which they were abstracted. Bateson (1979) would call this the partial arcs of whole circuits, and the pragmatic advantages are that the drawing of a difference between, for example, beginning and end has the potential to enable observers to orient their behaviour or descriptions.



FIRST VOICE: I see the body of a woman, who has six arms, and she is growing into the bark of a tree. The tree has faces on it, and there are fingers trying to break it open, or perhaps they are holding on to the tree. I have tried to describe what I see (p. 95a), but it is impossible for me not to reveal some of my own meanings. The act of describing will always reveal part of one's epistemological assumptions.

ZAHAVA: The body with the many arms represents for me the Dance of Shiva. According to Hindu belief, all life is part of a great rhythmic process of creation and destruction, and Shiva's dance symbolises this eternal life-death rhythm which goes on in endless cycles. The cosmic cycles of creation and destruction, and the daily rhythm of birth and death is seen as the basis of all existence. At the same time, Shiva reminds us that the manifold forms in the world are not fundamental, but illusory and ever-changing, as they are created and dissolved in the ceaseless flow of the dance of Shiva. The superbly balanced and yet dynamic gestures express the rhythm and unity of life (Capra, 1983). I have chosen this figure to represent my epistemological roots and to represent my epistemological movement as it has danced through various sequences of knowing and not knowing. This link will become clearer as the process unfolds.

In this first frame (p. 95a), I have superimposed the bark of the tree with various faces on it to show how at that point, my epistemological roots

were moving into a growth process with alternative perspectives offered. This is the way I perceive myself at the moment of entering the Unisa context as a trainee therapist. I had my particular set of epistemological premises and I realised that I was entering a domain of new alternatives, a new context, from which I would grow in some unpredictable way.

FIRST VOICE: You had completed your honours degree at Unisa, so you already had an idea about ecosystemic thought. But I remember how right at the beginning you spoke about the difficulty you were having with letting go of intrapsychic and lineal beliefs.

GALLERY EPISTEMOLOGIST: In adopting an ecosystemic perspective, the capacity to shift from a reductionistic to a holistic orientation is essential. In this process, there will often be a struggle to develop perceptual and conceptual skills that are more circular and recursive (Keeney, 1983).

ZAHAVA: Let's move our lenses to the sequence of photographs in the next frame (pp. 98a & b). This is metaphorical of myself in the context of the first few weeks of the course. In the beginning, I saw myself as really tiny, almost invisible in relation to the expanse of this unknown, exciting context. I then ventured out eagerly, but in the face of this novel way of perceiving and interacting, I withdrew somewhat, with feelings of uncertainty.





SECOND VOICE: It seems to me as if you weren't expecting such enormity of change in ideas and that your expectation was for someone to take your hand and reassure you, create some structure and safety for you. Once you didn't receive this, you withdrew. The more you withdrew the more you were left to your uncertainty.

GALLERY EPISTEMOLOGIST: The discomfort necessary for the process of epistemological shifting is prevalent here. The deepest kind of change that human beings are capable of demonstrating, is epistemological change, which Bateson (in Keeney, 1983) refers to as Learning III. A change in epistemology means transforming one's way of experiencing the world. The first act of a teacher is to introduce the idea that the world we think we see, is only a view, a description of the world. Accepting this seems to be one of the hardest things one can do. The dilemma of master and pupil, as well as therapist and client, is that this kind of deep change can seldom be accomplished in a straightforward way. One of the methods of inducing change, involves introducing confusion. The jump from one world of experience to another requires an ample supply of illogical and confusing experience (Keeney, 1983).

SECOND VOICE: In the next photograph (p. 98b) I see you shift, and move towards some object which captures your interest. You look intent,

curious and fascinated, but at the same time you are quite distanced from it. As if it is something 'out there'.

ZAHAVA: The sculpture is symbolic for me of ecosystemic therapy and theory. It is interconnected and recursively organised, like a family system for example. I do believe I shifted slightly after that time of confusion and discomfort. But the distance between myself and the symbol of ecosystemic life represents an isolated, intellectual shift. I still see myself and my observations as separate. I think I had taken some steps towards a first-order cybernetic understanding in that I could now view systems with some understanding, but always as an observer outside of the system.

SECOND VOICE: If that sculpture were a client system, you believed you could unilaterally change the system's organisation. As if you, from the stance of the 'expert', could heal without becoming a part of the systemic wisdom of the larger, more encompassing system.

THIRD VOICE: You look both contemplative and sad in the first image of the next frame (p. 100a). I'm not sure how you relate it to the second image in that frame (p. 100a) where to me you seem motherly, reaching out to claim your 'baby'.



ZAHAVA: I wasn't trying to show sadness at all, it just reinforces how there is a multiverse of possibilities and alternatives which can be taken out of each frame or sequence of frames, corresponding with the perceivers' view. I wanted to show how I felt I had to re-evaluate my presuppositions, especially how they influenced therapeutic context. I then tried to reach out more meaningfully in terms of understanding ecosystemic epistemology. I can see what you mean though. When you say 'motherly', in a sense I was still holding fast to lineal assumptions as if I had control over what happens in therapy.

At the same time, I felt distantiated from the clients I was seeing and through that I must have introduced this distance into the relationship. How could they not remain 'out there' themselves?

GALLERY EPISTEMOLOGIST: In terms of the double description put forward here by Zahava and the third voice, the notion that we live in a multiverse is introduced. There are as many ways to describe or perceive something as there are people who are subjectively describing or perceiving.

In therapy, the juxtaposition of different perspectives and relational descriptions can open up various alternatives for the therapeutic system. This is relevant as much for the therapist as it is for the client. An enriched



perspective is gleaned from the juxtaposing of different descriptions (Keeney, 1983).

ZAHAVA: Let's move on.

THIRD VOICE: Your shadow has an interesting part to play in this frame (p. 102a). You are pointing at the picture within the picture, and in a strange way your shadow is then in the picture pointing out at you.

ZAHAVA: After my last shift, I see myself as having come a bit closer to ecosystemic understanding. I began to realise that as a therapist, not only do I see clients as an observer, but I affect the entire system - there is mutual, reciprocal interaction, and I began to understand the second-order cybernetic notion of the "observing system" (Keeney, 1983, p. 80).

GALLERY EPISTEMOLOGIST: This idea more fully attends to the recursive relation between client and therapist, a perspective which avoids the premises of objectivity. It is here where I bring in the link between Zahava's therapeutic self and epistemology. Once she understood that she is an active epistemological operator, she realised that she is always participating in the co-construction of a world of experience. The view of a participatory



✓ universe, suggests that ethics, rather than objectivity, is the foundation of ✓  
✓ psychotherapy (Keeney, 1983). Zahava is responsible for contributing to the  
construction of therapeutic realities, there is no such thing as an 'observer-  
free' description of a situation that can be objectively addressed. In this  
recursive process, Keeney (1983) proposes that

✓ what one knows leads to a construction, and what one constructs leads to  
a knowing. What we perceive, is drawn by how we behave, and how we  
behave, follows the constraints of what we perceive. The observer is in  
the observed, the therapist in the clinical problem, the reader is in what is  
read. (p. 95)

ZAHAVA: That takes me to the next image in the frame (p. 102a), in  
which I try portray another period of confusion and discomfort. This is  
symbolic of my relationship with the new epistemology as well as with the  
training system.

GALLERY EPISTEMOLOGIST: For trainees it is as important to  
interpret the supervisors' talk as it is to interpret the clients'. Supervisors are  
often indirect, using a kind of Socratic questioning which from the mouth of a  
good supervisor is little different from therapy itself. Additionally, the  
'confusion technique' can be used as a means of perturbation in order to

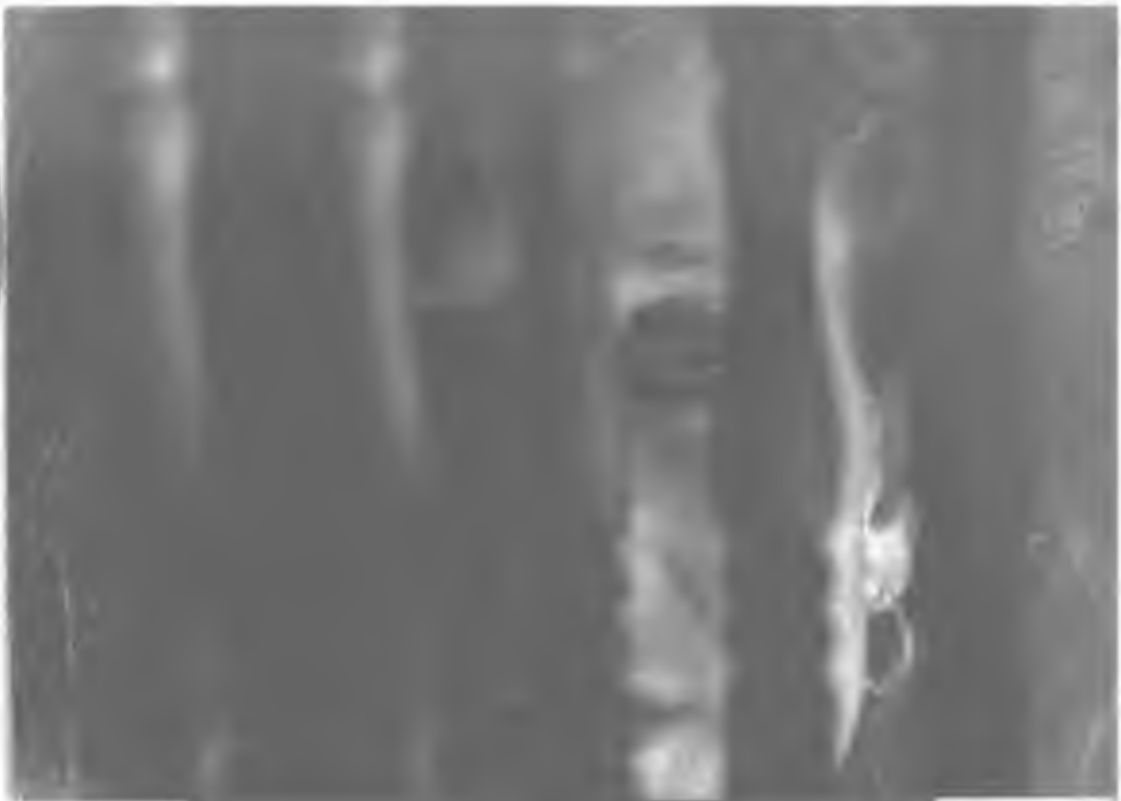
prompt a shift. For many trainees, ecosystems theory is more like a rather enigmatic parable, having only a dimly understood connection with what happens in the therapy room (Tyler & Tyler, 1990).

FOURTH VOICE: This next sequence of frames (pp. 104a, b &c) is quite complexly organised. I have some idea how the photographer fits into the organisation and how the reflections in the mirror are connected to each other recursively, fitting with the ideas of observing systems and self-referentiality. The image representing your epistemology as you said earlier, is turned sideways, meaning more confusion perhaps? The rest is quite obscure to me.

ZAHAVA: Well, my description of your description of the photographer and the recursive mirror images have some similarities. I will elaborate though. By introducing the image of the photographer who co-created this gallery with me, I take cognisance of the idea that his 'lens' cannot be separated from the descriptions presented. The notion of the observer's lens affecting and becoming a part of what is portrayed, is extended not only to the photographer's lens, but also to all of you and your lenses. This is a crucial element of how I as a therapist become a part of the therapeutic system.







FOURTH VOICE: I see how that relates to the picture of the mirror images infolding upon themselves. The notions 'recursiveness' and 'self-reference' connect to the idea of observing systems. "All worlds of experience are in-formed and self-referential. As a therapist, you cannot search for what is 'really' going on with clients, what is real is always a consequence of a constructed or co-constructed world of experience" (Keeney, 1983, p. 107).

ZAHAVA: When I realised that I will always affect and become-a-part of any client system in therapeutic relationship with me, the importance of the part I play in this dance became starkly evident to me. Whoever or whatever I describe will reveal as much, if not more, about myself and my own epistemology. This new understanding created a time of even greater confusion and perturbation for me. I saw this happening throughout my life, and especially in the therapy room, which was further emphasised by the presence of the one-way mirror and reflecting team.

The 'obscure' pictures, as you described them, depict the many times I felt trapped, tied, paralysed, and locked into my own confusion - if what I see has as much to do with me as with what I am constructing, how can I be certain of anything?



FOURTH VOICE: So the Shiva figure, or your epistemological assumptions are turned sideways (p. 104a).

ZAHAVA: What is real and what is not real? What is true and what is not? Is what is real inaccessible to me, or does it not even have an existence outside of me?

GALLERY EPISTEMOLOGIST: There is quite a lot at this point that I would like to comment on. Firstly, the insert of the photographer makes it appropriate now to talk about the use of the photographic image throughout this gallery, as a metaphor for Zahava's evolution as a therapist.

Zahava has used the photographic image in a way which is congruent with Bateson's (in Keeney, 1983) statement that the map is not the territory; it is the drawing of a distinction - distinguishing an 'it' from the background that is 'not it'. Processes of perception are inaccessible, it is only the products which are conscious (Bateson, 1979). Therefore the photographic image is a symbolic representation of Zahava's perceptions and ideas. A whole range of our presuppositions are incorporated into the image which is then manufactured in the mind. From the notion that "all perception operates upon difference" (Bateson, 1979, p. 103), the transference of a message of difference becomes an image in the mind representing what was perceived.

Zahava and the photographer co-constructed these representations of the images in her mind - and that is what they are, a map of the territory which is largely inaccessible. "In all perception there is transformation, a process of coding between the thing and the thing reported" (Bateson, 1979, p. 105), that is Zahava's perceptions and ideas, and the photographs as a symbolic representation of that.

ZAHAVA: Let's move on.

FIFTH VOICE: I see you thinking and concentrating in the next frame (p. 107a), possibly about ways to move out of the impasse? These thoughts somehow serve as a bridge, taking you into the next sequence (p. 107b) where you are covering yourself with a mask and books. You then show yourself tied again (p. 107b), or are you just wrapped up in your own 'self-organisation'? (Maturana, 1975).

ZAHAVA: I like the way all the different perspectives enrich and complexify the sequences. The interaction between my own awareness and the feedback from others in my training context helped me realise that I was stuck in my own epistemological confusion. I then knew I was close to a

107 a





fundamental shift. Simultaneously, I wondered if clients may feel something similar when their meaning systems become unstuck.

I threw myself into a reliance on intellectuality and technique, and I grabbed 'circular questioning' (Selvini-Palazzoli, Boscolo, Cecchin & Prata, 1980), built 'structural subsystems' (Minuchin & Fishman, 1981) and 'read feedback' (Keeney, 1983) voraciously. All this was not so much to elicit relational connections from or introduce diversity to my clients, as much as it was to save myself. Suddenly I realised I was trapped in my own double bind, tripping over my own paradoxical interventions. And how much was my supervisor influencing this process in order to perturb me towards a shift? How was I ever going to balance aesthetics and pragmatics (Keeney, 1983).

GALLERY EPISTEMOLOGIST: Zahava became rigid in attempting to be resourceful through technique and by remaining on the intellectual level only. If she continued to hide behind this mask of intellectuality, she was not showing her 'real' self to her clients or being creative. In turn, how could she expect them to show their selves and not hide?

FIFTH VOICE: ✓ So once you realised you had to drop your own mask (pp. 109a & b) and 'get real', it seems you became even more perturbed. Where to from here?

GALLERY EPISTEMOLOGIST: It is interesting to see how the flow of the frames in the gallery is more and more complex and interconnected as ✓Zahava's understanding complexifies. The interconnectedness between the two different descriptive modes (photographs and words) reveals assumptions of interconnectedness and context (Keeney, 1983). Earlier on, the organisation of the gallery, as well as the assumptions being presented, were more lineal and disconnected.

FIFTH VOICE: Now this next sequence (pp. 109c & d) shows you throwing off the mask, and landing up confused again. I'm beginning to feel confused!

ZAHAVA: I need to add my description to yours in order to explain what I mean. Once I threw off the mask and realised it is ME, my self, who is the therapist, I reached a point of fluctuation and amplified all the perturbations I had experienced before. I realised that as well as technique, the use of my own self in therapy is crucial. And to do this, I also realised, involves opening up to learning from clients.

— The diversity and flexibility so important to Keeney's (1983) notion of health can only be resourceful for my therapeutic relationships if I am able to move with clients towards their own evolution. A balance in the organisation











of the larger pattern began to peep through this time of fluctuation and panic. I need to find a way to utilise my personal wealth of experience and creativity, and to learn to put myself on the line in therapy. Remaining open to what clients will teach and show me, is also paramount. All this, together with the appropriate use of technique, for me is the starting point of a more balanced view of the therapeutic context.

But let's move to the next sequence (pp. 110a & b) as I think I may preempt some of the frames.

SIXTH VOICE: Here it looks to me like you're 'stuck to your chair' in therapy. Your epistemology is also upside down again. Perhaps you thought a hot bath would help? Then it looks like you can't decide whether to sit on the chair or put your mask on again.

ZAHAVA: What I meant to portray was more along the lines of the trainee-supervisory relationship, a relationship which I consider valuable and meaningful. I agree that it is me 'stuck to the chair', but taken further, I am trying to show the imbalance felt when perturbed in relation to my supervisor's interventions. She would not accept the mask and once I was exposed, she would not cover me. My epistemology kept swirling. Somehow the parameters of safety and unsafety were balanced in a way





which ultimately empowered me. This moves us to the following sequence of frames (pp. 111a & b).

I am now able to move out of the chair, to find my own balance. Somewhere along that process, the enormity and complexity of ecosystemic thought and how it applied to psychotherapy and life, became clearer than it ever had (p. 111a). My epistemological transition, I believe, had truly begun.

SIXTH VOICE: As R.D. Laing captured it in The Politics of Experience (Capra, 1989), "the really decisive moments in psychotherapy, as every patient or therapist who has ever experienced them knows, are unpredictable, unique, unforgettable, always unrepeatably, and often indescribable" (p. 121).

ZAHAVA: At this moment of empowerment, I jumped up into the air and fleetingly held the dialectical interaction of stability and change (p. 111b). And here I am now, closing the circle at the beginning again (p. 95a). I move on, with my altered and enriched epistemology, to a new context - into the world of interns. I begin a new process of co-evolution; hopefully beginning a time of much experience wherein clients and myself will be recursively connected, showing each other the many possible doors to balance and diversity.







Maturana (1975, 1987) introduces the notion of autopoiesis or self-production which is the name given to the fundamental process by which a system can be indicated as living. From this follow the concepts of structural determinism, non-instructive interaction, structural coupling, perturbation, objectivity in parenthesis and consensual domains.

Structural determinism is how a system is determined by its own organisation, in terms of living ecosystems being informationally and organisationally closed. Non-instructive interaction refers to the way a system responds to information from within itself. According to Maturana (1975), there is no input or output, only perturbation. Living systems survive through structural coupling, and because of their plastic structures, can fit with one another in a medium. Systems interact or "co-drift" in such a way that the behaviour of one becomes a function of the behaviour of the other (Leyland, 1988).

Structural changes occur in systems as they are exposed to perturbations in their medium (Efran, Lukens & Lukens, 1988). Maturana (1975) believes that use of language is the fundamental characteristic of human systems. Language, which develops out of structural coupling, results in the establishment of consensual domains. Words imply meaning in the domain

of description; linguistic and semantic domains, rather than denoting a concrete objective reality (Leyland, 1988). Observers punctuate their reality in co-constructed domains of description.

Maturana and Bateson's (in Keeney, 1983) ideas are related in that both talk about how descriptions and relations of descriptions are generated by an observer's drawing of distinctions. These distinctions create an epistemological net ready to catch and identify phenomena. Furthermore, both introduce the notions of the recursiveness of whole systems (Keeney, 1983). However, Maturana's (1975, 1987) work is more radically constructivist than Bateson's and Maturana only acknowledges the existence of a physical world 'out there' with no transfer of images from the outside world to the brain. Bateson (1979) recognises that there is an external reality, but postulated that we can only perceive subjective representations of it.

✓ When Bateson (in Keeney, 1983) talks about drawing distinctions, he is referring to the observer first distinguishing and then describing. Any distinction is drawn by an observer.

What we perceive always follows from an act of making a distinction or what he also calls punctuation. There is a recursive operation when we ✓ draw distinctions in order to describe what we observe. Descriptions are —themselves the drawing of distinctions upon what we observe. An enriched perception is gleaned from the juxtaposing of different descriptions. Bateson (in Keeney, 1983) asserts that the combination of diverse pieces of information seems to give the perceiving organisms' information about the world around itself or about itself as a part of that external world. The value of multiple versions of reality being viewed concurrently is clearly evident in the fact that it takes two somethings to create difference: ✎

To produce news of difference, ie information, there must be two entities (real or imagined) such that the difference between them can be immanent in their mutual relationships; and the whole affair must be such that news of their difference can be represented as a difference inside some information-processing entity, such as a brain. (Bateson, 1979, p. 105)

To reiterate, Bateson (1979) argues that the combination of diverse pieces of information offers greater access to the "pattern which connects" (p. 8), the focus of a cybernetic perspective.

## APPENDIX C

Keeney (1990a, p. 41) likens psychotherapy to the construction of stories that have a beginning, middle, and an end. A major difference is that in psychotherapy, the story created includes "the contribution of all participants interacting in real time". The therapeutic story is improvised and created as the flow of the conversation moves along.

With this in mind, Keeney (1990a) offers a practical method to assist therapists in "keeping track of the story in which he or she is participating" (p. 41). Using therapeutic frames and galleries as a method of scoring conversation in therapy, assists in giving therapists immediate visual access to the whole context of the therapeutic conversation.

The notion of a frame as the basic conceptual tool used in scoring therapeutic conversation indicates the contexts a client and therapist offer each other. (The term frame as a name of context was first proposed by Bateson). Following the notion of frames, the notion of gallery is introduced (Keeney, 1990a), which indicates a class of frames.

Keeney (1990a) explores how "therapeutic conversation is contextualised by frames and classes of frames called galleries" (p. 42).

A CONVERSATION ABOUT THE STRUCTURE OF  
THIS JOURNEY AS ITS DESCRIPTION DRAWS TO  
AN END

JANITOR: Don't forget that we still need to comment on the various creative devices that Zahava has employed as symbolic demonstrations of what she has been setting out to achieve.

CONSULTANT: I WOULD LIKE TO COMMENT ON THE WAY YOU BEGAN THIS DISSERTATION WITH THE REFERENCES IN THE BEGINNING WHICH ARE SUPERIMPOSED ON THE PHOTOGRAPHIC IMAGE OF THE 'SHIVA' FIGURE. THIS IMMEDIATELY DRAWS ATTENTION TO THE WAY YOU ARE METAPHORICALLY TURNING POSITIVIST EXPECTATIONS AND REQUIREMENTS ON THEIR HEAD. YOU HAVE CHALLENGED THE READERS' CONVENTIONAL EXPECTATIONS BEFORE WE HAVE EVEN BEGUN.

ZAHAVA: Yes, I struggled a lot with the contradiction involved in presenting a dissertation describing and subscribing to

the new epistemology, while at the same time being constrained by the old pattern of lineal formulation and structure. This is my construction, with subjectivity acknowledged throughout, and I am making the point that I have followed an evolving process all along. What was it that I did in the very beginning? I read. Widely. Therefore, it made sense to me to show this. The references are the starting point, and have served as a root system. The image of myself depicting the dance of Shiva, an image earlier referred to as part of my root system, further reinforces this starting point in the symbolic structure of the dissertation. This is the first pictorial and structural metaphor illustrating the work as being presented on the edge of a paradigm shift.

JANITOR: The next striking element is the use of different fonts or typefaces. The multiple versions of reality as depicted through polyphony is symbolic, as well as the differences

--highlighted through the double description and metacommunication of metalogue.

ZAHAVA: I also attempted to characterise each speaker in a way that I would imagine their handwriting to reveal their epistemology.

The one which turned out most astonishingly, in my opinion, is the positivist theorist. This participant is not immediately audible (legible), and the idiosyncratic feel insists that the reader work and participate in the process of the dissertation. Additionally, I used this font because it is old fashioned and inaccessible, both adjectives I would personally ascribe to positivism. Through choosing that particular font, I revealed my feelings about his epistemological base. This implicit metacommunication acknowledges my subjectivity and does not impose an authoritative position. This is a glaring example of how I constructed the structure of the dissertation indirectly. I revealed presuppositions



through metaphorical and metacommunicative devices rather than stating the obvious.

All participants are also invited then, to take some responsibility for their own meaning systems which are interacting with the conversation. As Barthes (in Maranhão, 1990) reminds us, the reader has to become an active producer of the text and bridge the gaps in meaning through direct participation in the creative process.

JANITOR: Looking at my writing, you obviously perceive me as rather eccentric and off-the-wall. Perhaps you can use me in the therapeutic process to initiate these techniques as they can be applied in therapy. That way, the client systems don't have to regard you as off-the-wall.

**CONSULTANT:** YOU SEE ME AS CREATIVE, PASSIONATE, WITH A PROPENSITY TO MAKE BOLD STATEMENTS.

ZAHAVA: Do you see how I set the context for what kind of communication we all employ throughout - as the consultant, from the beginning I welcomed your passion and creativity, influences I hold close to my heart. Similarly, the theorists were set up as academic from the start, with the epistemologist's constant questioning revealing the underlying assumptions.

My own handwriting needed to express freehandedness and personal inclusion. The ecosystemic context I created for the participants allowed all of us to be real characters, who only have relevance and meaning in context. If we had to remove the participants from this context, all meaning would be lost.

**SUPERVISOR:** Your inclusion of my voice has demonstrated how alive the process of your work is. You

have inserted the very words I used, and incorporated them into your constructed conversation.

ZAHAVA: Except these last words. They are fictitious. I am exercising my right of creative licence within a valid context, as I am now in the process of critical discourse of critical discourse.

JANITOR: And remember that each time we spoke of the process of deconstruction, we were busy in the process of our co-deconstruction. You were trying to ensure that the entire dissertation concerned itself with the process of thinking about your thinking, as we all engaged in an examination of our own activity.

EPISTEMOLOGIST: I appreciate the way you are functioning in terms of the both-and stance, in that you still at times conform to the traditional dissertation formula. For example, some technical aspects such as referencing (for the most part) were based on the APA editorial system, your title page is set out in the way it is 'meant' to be according to that system, your text is

vertically printed on A4 size paper, and your binding is done in the conventional way.

ZAHAVA: This was not a straightforward easy road. I was torn between not wanting to follow the constraints of a particular requirement (one which I believe adheres to Newtonian empirical research and is inconsistent with my ideal of ecosystemic research) and knowing that ethically I have to acknowledge all the authors on who I have drawn heavily.

Additionally, it is also important to me that this work is accessible to those who read it, and through adopting a both-and stance with regard to the relationship between empirical academic formulae and ecosystemic structure, I believe I can offer a work which is accessible to readers.

JANITOR: Because much of this dissertation is original, I understand that you could have toyed with the idea of an original editorial system.

CONSULTANT: I ENJOYED THE WAY YOU DEMONSTRATED THE THERAPEUTIC UTILITY OF PARADOX (SELVINI-PALAZZOLI ET AL., 1990). THE ONE TIME I AM REFERRING TO PARTICULARLY IS THE INTERCHANGE YOU HAD WITH THE JANITOR ABOUT 'STUCKNESS'. IN TELLING HOW YOU WERE STUCK ARTICULATED AN 'UNSTUCKNESS', IN A SENSE. IT IS AS IF THE PARADOXICAL DESCRIPTION OF STUCKNESS IS WHAT UNSTICKS YOU.

✓ ONCE SOMETHING IS ARTICULATED, YOU HAVE A DESCRIPTION TO JUXTAPOSE, WHICH THEN OPENS YOU TO ALTERNATIVES.

ZAHAVA: I felt that to make use of the concept of paradox would be one way of moving away from the mould of conventional empiricism. I have tried to consistently challenge the readers'

expectations and exposed and subverted conventions which are usually taken for granted.

EPISTEMOLOGIST: The narrative structure, which serves as the descriptive methodology, has certainly nudged you out of that mould. The evolving process as the dissertation has developed, carries a resonance beyond the immediacy of the denotative meanings of the words. This too is what you have been taught to look for in the therapeutic process.

JANITOR: The reader who approaches this postmodern dissertation with the same expectations with which he or she would confront a 'classical' text, will be confounded and bewildered. He or she will not find a unified, coherent and recoverable meaning emanating from this discourse, nor will he or she find conventional dissertation formulae. Instead, he or she, according to Ryan (in Maranhão, 1990) will find a work which is plural and playful, one which denies its reader the satisfaction of a total meaning.

ZAHAVA: By the way, can anyone tell me where the end of a journey is...?