shouldn't hit his mother and followed it up with twenty hours of community service. When Jeanne told us this, Judy and I gave a sigh of relief, but the incident showed the power of the record. The police knew all about Jack, even though it was three years since he had been in a single fight.

After this meeting, we sent Jeanne a Certificate of Appreciation commending her and the family for all their good work and listing their joint and individual accomplishments in detail. In this we were copying White and Epston (1990), who had been using similar documents as part of their effort to create "counter-stories" for people. Not long after that, PBA suffered the fate of many agencies serving poor families in the Massachusetts hilltowns: it closed down. Jeanne lost her job, which left her in a difficult situation because her degree did not allow her to be reimbursed by insurance. She also lost touch with Lori and Jack, because the family had no telephone and had moved. However, Judy sent a copy of her article to Jeanne, and Jeanne wrote a letter back, thanking Judy and saying,

> You also made it sound like my work had meaning, even if it wasn't immediately apparent (for how will we know how Jack turns out until he's fully grown?). I'm so grateful to you for evoking the warm feelings that originally went with this work. By the time it was over, the chaotic dysfunction of the agency & the inhumane demands of managed care, covered what was once sacred & good with a veil of such negativity that it became impossible to see if anything we did or thought had any value whatsoever. There are so many lost boys like Jack in the world. Your paper gives a real sense of hope that there are answers that can be evoked.

In ending this story, I want to repeat what I said above about the idea of using the reflecting process to further a new kind of communal work. Our team was not attempting to influence the community in a social action sense; instead we wanted to make a more communitarian event out of therapy. Conventional psychotherapies—individual, group, family—seemed to distance people rather than bring them together. Jeanne's letter reminded us of "the loneliness of the long distance therapist" and made us glad that we had become witnesses who could appreciate her work.

12

Unforeseen Speech

The Social Web

Harlene Anderson's *Conversation, Language and Possibilities* (1997) was one of the first books that attempted to link the ideas of the postmodern philosophers to family therapy practice. In this book, Anderson is like a gifted painter who has built a beautiful gallery to house the work of a larger community. This community includes the revolutionary thinkers in social psychology and linguistic philosophy who are leading the challenge to the essentialist outlook of modernism (Gergen, 1994; Harré, 1984; Shotter, 1993b). Anderson's book has joined this conversation, providing an account of how the Houston-Galveston group has translated concepts like postmodernism and social construction theory into what she and Goolishian have called a collaborative language systems approach.

The questions of postmodernism put words to many of the doubts I had about the field of psychology. Having grown up with a background in the arts, I intuitively felt that there was something wrong with the flatness of psychological language. I loved Haley's early (1963) examples of meaningless descriptors like "needs," "drives," "affect," and so forth, which he wanted to ban from the vocabulary. Psychology itself was a mystifying term: what was a "psyche" anyway? How could the "logos" of a "psyche" be treated? I had long thought that therapy of the psyche was an especially meaningless descriptor, and that just as no self existed outside its intimate community, there was no psychotherapy that was not social.

This is why social construction theory appealed to me. Not only did it challenge psychology's love affair with the freestanding individual, but it also validated the idea that therapy was always about relationship. Or rather, it did and it didn't. Anderson points out that the move in therapy from the individual to the family merely shifted the unit one level up; you were still looking for disorders and dysfunctions and you were still the expert who knew how to cure them, but the role of the professional was now itself being deconstructed. Under the circumstances, it seemed natural to turn to a new metaphor. Instead of the "system," with its assumptions of stability and functionality, we were looking at interactions that were constantly in motion, from the stylized motions of a country dance to the more random passing of strangers in a city street. If there were "patterns" in this flow, they were products of our social and linguistic negotiations, not forms or essences existing on their own. Kenneth Gergen's *Invitation to Social Construction* (1999) explores the history of this challenge to "essentialism" in a particularly friendly way.

As a branch of philosophy, Gergen tells us, constructionism came out of the American practical philosophy movement called pragmatism. Its ancestors were social thinkers like William James, Charles Pierce, and Herbert Mead, but it was Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann's book *The Social Construction of Reality* (1966) that turned a loose group of theories into an intellectual movement and now into a candidate for a paradigm. My own opinion is that constructionism, which has taken shape around a socio-linguistic template, is a better basis for a postmodern psychology framework than cognitive theories like constructivism, which may cast doubt on the possibility of being objective, but are narrowly located in brain biology. To show the difference between essentialism, constructivism and constructionism, here is the well-known Three Umpires joke.

FIRST UMPIRE: I calls 'em as they are. (essentialism)
SECOND UMPIRE: I calls 'em as I sees 'em. (constructivism)
THIRD UMPIRE: They ain't nothing till I [or we] call 'em. (constructionism)

Translated into therapy, the essentialist looks for the cause of the problem, which exists in "the world out there," and tries to fix it. The constructivist says that the experience of a problem is always filtered through the nervous system and tries to change the way it is perceived or acted upon. The constructionist moves to the social web, believing that she is at the same time one of the weavers and one of the threads. Her hope is to set up the conditions that evoke, as Schoen puts it (1984), "the situation's potential for transformation."

If constructionism is indeed a useful metatheory, we might feel that the word "psychology" has outlived its usefulness, being too weighed down by its attachment to the individual mind. In that case, the newcomer field of communication could be the area that constructionism might represent. Its research arm would be represented by forms of qualitative research (Leeds-Hurwitz, 1995; Olson, 2000). Its applied methodology would include postmodern therapies like the collaborative and narrative approaches, and would find further applications in organizational consulting and mediation. Kenneth Gergen and his research partner, Sheila McNamee (2000), have been pushing for this extension of constructionism to many kinds of relationship counseling (see chapter 15). Of course, constructionism might also end up as just another corporate structure on Sixth Avenue, but whether it does or not, it has been very useful to me. In this chapter, I hope to tell you how.

Two Sleeping Beauties

With the demise of my niche in the Massachusetts hilltowns, I began to take my reflecting theater all over, and wherever I went I would use its participatory format. I stopped showing videotapes because they were "dead" material, preferring the impact and unpredictability of the live experience. I was at this time attending "The Dartington Event" in England each year, and from there I got invitations to give workshops in many countries. For the first time, I felt that I was bringing something of my own rather than a product invented by someone else. The reflecting process had set free my improvisatory gifts in a way other methods never had.

The first time I experienced this particular lightness was in Thessaloniki, where I had gone to take part in a seminar on cultural genograms (Hardy, 1995). I had not used genograms in some time, not since leaving New York, because I didn't know how to weave them into a postmodern approach. However, the seminar leaders who were expected by the workshop leader failed to show up, so I was pressed into service. I simply turned the cultural genogram into a reflecting consultation, asking people from the audience to serve as my reflecting team. In addition, I set up a group of "as if" listeners, an idea that Harlene Anderson used in her presentations and had shared with me. My version was to ask several people to become "floating identities," that is, to move in and out of the viewpoints of persons in the story that was being told, and then report on the experience.

I did my first cultural genogram with a woman of Greek ancestry whose family had suffered at the hands of the Turks in Albania and who had recently moved back to Greece. This went so well that the other seminar asked me to perform for them too. When I asked for a volunteer, an

American woman came forward and introduced her sister as well. I suggested that we do a "relational genogram" (an invention of the moment) and I would interview the two of them together. In a way, I was seeking to deconstruct the genogram as I knew it. Then Luigi Boscolo, who was one of the faculty, came in to watch. I was a little nervous, because I was not sure how he would react to my new not-knowing style.

The interview was intriguing. The sisters were in their forties—cultured, intelligent, handsome, both with families of their own. The younger of the two already had an M.A. but said that she wanted to go back to get a doctorate. On the minus side, she would have to commute to the university and her daughter was only sixteen, so she worried about spending so much time away from her family. The older sister had not one but two M.A.s, and she too had dreams of becoming a Ph.D. They told me that if either of them had been born a male, they would have gone on to higher education, but in their Jewish family, the daughters weren't expected to aim so high. They had already pushed the envelope with their three M.A.s.

This was a cultural issue right there. However, instead of pursuing it directly, I took a right-brain tack and asked the older sister what legend or fairy tale came to mind in regard to the other one. She said, without skipping a beat, "The Sleeping Beauty." I asked the same question of the younger sister and got the same answer. So I had twin Sleeping Beauties. One reason for working in this more associative way was to elicit images for us all to work with. I had been finding that painted language served to expand the power of connection, and I wasn't disappointed here either. The reflecting group acted as thoughtful voices in representing the dilemma of the sisters and used the Sleeping Beauty story in their comments. But it was the "as if" listeners, speaking out of their floating identities, who threw in the wild card.

In this instance, they brought in a big charge of energy. The woman who listened as the mother said she was torn about her daughters' ambitions, since it was unusual in her milieu for women to aspire to academic degrees, but she wanted whatever would make them happy. The "father" regretted not having had a son, but said his daughters more than made up for that and that they had his blessing to go forward. The "daughter" of the younger sister came on strong, telling her mother that if she got the Ph.D., she would set a pioneering precedent for her daughter. All of a sudden there appeared one more floating identity who said he was the unborn Jewish son. He thanked both women, saying that in pursuing their dream of higher education, they were giving him life.

The reaction of the sisters was interesting. The younger said the reflections from the "as if" persons made her feel much more positive about going ahead with her plans, but the older one, despite staunchly backing her

sister, held a sadness in her face. I thought to myself that, since their age-difference was so small, they might well feel as twins often do: if one moves on too fast, the other will be left behind. That could hold back both of them. So I asked her, "Do I have to worry about you?" She looked startled, then reassured me, saying, "I'll be okay." She said she was keeping her options open. Both sisters said they enjoyed the way I worked and that it felt very congruent with their own ideas. I said I would call them in Chicago in the fall to see where they were.

I subsequently lost these sisters' phone numbers, and I regret that. In doing consultations away from home, I usually promise to do a follow-up. I like to think that the future layering of a phone call reinforces my effect as a witness. But there was an immediate coda to the event. I had asked Luigi Boscolo to comment on the interview, explaining that he had been one of my teachers. So he gave a beautifully reasoned, systemic interpretation of the situation. I wasn't surprised at what he said, but I was surprised at my reaction to it. Boscolo, whom I admire enormously, had superimposed a knowing template on my not-knowing interview. This experience acted like growth markings on a doorway, showing how drastically my therapeutic attitudes had changed. I saw in a way I never had before how different from conventional therapy a not-knowing conversation really was, and to what degree I was beginning to escape the flybottle of my own training.

The Wings of Stone

In the late '80s, Goolishian and Anderson were often invited to conferences in Norway by Tom Andersen, and many ideas were passed back and forth. Although Anderson does not use a reflecting team per se, she sees her innovation of "as if" listeners as filling a similar space. First, she will select a trainee to present a case. Then she will ask who is in the "cast of characters" and divide the listeners into groups representing each role: mothers over here, fathers over there, and so forth. Next she asks the presenter what she wants from the listeners. The listeners' mandate is to listen to the presenter and, when she is done, to tell her with the voice of the character they inhabit what they would like her to know and what they would like her to do.

Anderson refrains from maintaining a heavy presence during the exercise and gives the presenter ample time to tell the audience about the family she has been working with. If she thinks the audience wants to see her in action, she herself will interview the presenter, but if she does so, her aim is only to clarify her agenda, which is to treat the family as the source of knowing. After this stage, the participants will then move into the "as if"

clusters and decide what it is they want to say to the therapist. The consultant will put these ideas down on a flipchart. This procedure gives a professional audience the experience of thinking outside of the expert position and in this sense does the same job as a reflecting team.

I was fascinated by Anderson's invention and began to adopt it in my own workshops. A particularly compelling example was a reflecting consultation I did at a conference in Mexico at the end of the '90s. The day before, I had attended a workshop given by Anderson and her co-presenter, psychologist Sylvia London. I had heard about, but had never seen, an "as if" exercise, and thought it was a brilliant way of deconstructing both professional and client roles. So I told her I would like to use her idea at my workshop and asked her and Sylvia London to join me at the end and comment on their experience.

On the morning before my workshop, an elegant psychologist from another city in Mexico had come up to me and introduced herself. Her name was Maria Eva. I had mentioned Virginia Satir in a positive way during a talk I had just given, and Eva (her preferred name) told me that she had met Satir when she came to Mexico and had attended some of Satir's workshops in the U.S. At the end of our talk, she said she was coming to my workshop, so it did not surprise me that when I asked for someone who would be my partner in the consultation, the person who offered herself was Eva. I was glad she came up, despite my worry that she might be expecting another Virginia Satir.

Next I asked four people to be a reflecting group, and another three to be "floating identities." I had already explained the job of being members of a reflecting team in my earlier talk, but the "as if " exercise was unfamiliar to most of my audience. I told them that I wanted them to listen while Eva told her story and then comment as if they were speaking in the voices of one or another of the persons that she had talked about. But this was not a role play. The "as ifs" were to respond to what they heard Eva say, and then tell the consultant (me, in this case) their reactions to what they had heard. I also assigned "as if" roles to the audience, as Anderson and London had done the day before, so that everyone there would have a chance to feel, speak, and be heard. We had four audience groups: mothers, fathers, brothers, and aunts. I told the "as ifs" that they could float in and out of these identities as they wished, but the rule about floating did not apply to the large groups, who were assigned static roles.

After the hand mikes were distributed and the translator was in place, I started. I usually take a moment to arrange my mind, so there is a bit of silence. After this, I tell my partner that the way I begin this process is to think of a bowl with very wide sides, a bowl that can hold whatever falls into it. Alternatively, I will imagine that I am a big beach—the waves will

come up but they will also go down, and the beach will still be there, except maybe for some new pebble or shell.

Then I looked at Eva and asked her if there were some issue or concern she wished to tell me about. She said that someone had asked her how she was feeling during the break, and she said that she had felt calm, like that big beach. Then she said she wanted to thank me for being "the woman you are, a woman I like, admire." Referring to herself, she said she was trying "to be more fluid, to have less fear." She said, "Today I started to feel more spontaneous, to function in each moment instead of asking, 'How can I do this?'" I asked her, using an image that comes from what I call the deep well, "As if you might not have your safety wings on?" She said, "Yes. I haven't spoken about my family, but I do want to go there. Just now, when you said wings, I thought 'wings of responsibility,' as if they were made of stone, like the ones on a Greek statue."

This was such an unusual, kinesthetic image that I decided to leave the world of talking. I asked Eva to place her hands in my palms, and I held them gently, as if I were weighing them, and said, "Yes, they are very heavy—I can't lift them." I dropped my hands to show the weight, and hers followed. After a while, I lifted her hands up again and said, "I wanted you to know I can tell that you are under a real weight." Truth to tell, I surprised myself by this gesture. I wondered if it was because Eva had made Virginia Satir the link between us. It was as if I had asked, "What would Virginia do?" and the answer had come at a body level. In any case, my idea was to do something that would confirm the heaviness, so that Eva would know that I knew what she was experiencing.

Eva then said, "In the break, something small but significant happened. I was talking to Harlene and she asked my name and then asked where Eva came from. I told her that I was named Maria, after my mother, but chose the name Eva when I was six years old because my father's family was in the war, and he and his sister, who was called Eve, were the only survivors. I asked my father, 'What is Eve in Spanish?' and he said 'Eva.' I didn't meet my Aunt Eva until I was age 12." I asked Eva what the name meant to her father, and she replied, "It meant that my father lost everybody and had only his sister left." I said, "You became another Eva?" She said yes, and that what she, the second Eva, meant to her father was "the only piece of life." She said, "My mother never understood what it meant to my father to be Jewish, even though she knew it was frowned upon in a Mexican Catholic society, because she had to get permission from the church to get married."

Eva continued: "I felt I carried my father. I needed to have very big wings to give my father life, so I was a good student. I danced, I was gracious, I did everything well." I said to her, "I have the image of a stream that is being joined by other streams until there is too much water and it

overflows its banks." I think I felt that the image of the stone wings was too solid, so I changed to a more fluid one. Then I asked, "How long have you been feeling like this?" She answered, "Until this morning. I am now feeling more relaxed."

This initial conversation had taken only nine minutes. However, many weighty (pun intended) issues had surfaced in a very short time, and I wanted to move us out from under. First I asked her if there were any other people I should know about. She said, "My father, who is dead, was named Abraham. My aunt is dead too. My mother is alive, but she doesn't share in my sorrows, and I'm ten years younger than my older brother." I said, "So in your generation, you are alone. Are you a practicing Jew?" She said, "No, but I'm religious." At this point, I asked her if it was all right to break for the reflecting team.

Why did I choose to break so early? Again, I was puzzled. Michael White (1995) has come up with something that might explain it. He too is bothered by the hierarchy built into the therapeutic relationship, but instead of asking therapists to deconstruct their expertise, he offers the concept of decentering (see chapter 13). One way to decenter is for the therapist to hand off some of her activity to others. I think that is partly why White found the reflecting team so valuable and it was perhaps why I turned to it at this moment. The wings of stone were on my shoulders too. I think I wanted the reflecting group and the "as-if" persons to share it with me.

The Reflections

With the help of a translator, I now joined my reflecting group, all four of them women, and asked them for their impressions. I had previously told them about my wish to move away from clinical language toward associations that were more personal or story-like. All the same, I was surprised by the directness and freshness of their responses. The only time I had to meddle was when the first reflector spoke directly to Eva, who was sitting outside their circle. I said it was important that the reflector direct her comments only to us, so that Eva could overhear but would not have to respond.

The first reflector said that she knew Eva personally and admired her courage in coming forward. She said that what Eva had told us about her part in carrying the stories of her father and mother, as well as being the daughter of a mixed marriage, explained why she was so flexible and open to new ideas.

The second said that she started crying while listening to Eva's story. She said she had tried not to think, only to find out what Eva was feeling. When I took Eva's hands, she felt that Eva was with someone safe, who could help

her, and she began to feel less anguished herself. She said, "Now I feel peaceful and I see her peaceful—I see that it is possible for her to feel better."

The third reflector said that what impressed her was this weight that Eva had borne for so long, and how in this session, "when the talking was removed," Eva could feel how heavy it was. Now, after living with this hidden pain, she could begin to open her heart. She made a big change when she changed her name, when she was so young, too, and that was when she decided to live her life as a survivor.

The fourth reflector said that she could identify with Eva's story. Her father too was a survivor of the war. She felt that a part of Eva's heart had been taken away, so she had gone into her head. The problem was how to recover those fragments, those little parts of her heart. Now, at last, she could begin to put them back together and recover her identity. In doing this, Eva was honoring her father, and also honoring herself.

After thanking my reflectors, I went and sat with the small group of "as if" listeners (two men and a woman), and asked which voices they were choosing to speak in. The first woman spoke as the mother, saying that she regretted the distant relationship she had with Eva but explained that she had been jealous of Eva's closeness with her father. One of the men spoke as the older brother and said that he often resented Eva because she got more attention and favors than he did. Then the other man spoke as the father, or at least I thought he was going to, but instead he launched into a long, emotional account of having lost his own son.

This production, though sincere, threatened to take over the event. I remembered White once saying that if reflecting persons get too carried away with their own story, it will compete with the story of the persons who are the focus of the consultation. So I broke in and apologized for misleading him, but said that I meant to ask him to speak in the voice of Eva's father. I asked, "What message would you give your daughter now?" So he told Eva how grateful he was to her for her support and love. He reminded her that he had been strong enough to survive the war and that he was proud of her for showing so much courage. I then asked if he could speak for the aunt, and in doing so he gave thanks to Eva for being a standard-bearer for the lost family. At this point, I thanked everyone and we had a break.

The Lost Sister

After this second break, Eva and I sat together in front of the audience and debriefed each other. When I was listening to those negative statements from the "as if" mother and brother, I had some trepidation about the effect

on her. I asked her, "What was the most hopeful thing you heard?" and then added quickly, "or the least?" She answered, "All that was said by each person today was for me silence. Listening, I felt that a little piece of me was always going around inside me, in my inner thoughts." I asked, "The silence was in you?" and she said, "Yes. In my house, nobody talked. When I was growing up, people criticized my father because he was strange —a Jew. Even though he was a good friend of the Bishop, even though he was well respected, there were social occasions we couldn't go to. I've held all these things in my head. There were times I couldn't sleep, when the voices I heard expressed here visited me at night in my dreams."

She continued, "I believe that today I understood what this social constructionism is. When you asked people to talk, I felt at ease. I thought, they will tell me many things, but all are pieces of the puzzle in my mind or heart. In the past, if I felt like crying, my tear ducts were blocked. This experience unblocked them. Before, I felt I had to live my life keeping the pain inside. The role you played here meant that I didn't have to feel it alone." I asked, "What were you able to take away?" She said, "Everybody put in a clear piece of my reality so that I didn't have to bear it in silence. They said very important things and it didn't matter if some of them said they resented me or hated me, the whole event was like a collective unconscious.

Eva continued: "One coincidence was when a person in the audience talked about a sister who died. All at once I remembered that my father wanted to give me the name of his own mother, but he couldn't because it had been given to my sister, who died before I was born." Surprised by this new information, I asked, "What was the name of your sister?" She said, "Rachel, the name of my father's mother. I couldn't be named that, so I was named after my mother. And here, when the colleagues were crying and sympathizing, I started to miss Rachel and wish that she were here. I felt that many of the people who spoke were sisters of the soul, very pure and tender."

Eva went on to say to me, "There were many things you did that were tender, too. For instance, I heard you trying to speak Spanish with some of the groups. I thought, 'Lynn is making a great effort.' In the break, you said, 'I will bring you a glass of water.' I felt that you brought me freshness." I asked Eva, "If you could bring one person back, or if you could bring Rachel back, where would she be in the club of your life?" (another one of Michael White's ideas; see chapter 13). Eva said, "The club of my life is here today. I feel a very deep peace. I am very thankful." We stood up and I hugged her. I said, "For the moment, I will be Rachel."

It was now time to ask the audience to take part. I asked them to stay in their groups and share with each other what they wanted me, and indirectly Eva, to hear.

This small group exercise was important, not just because it allowed the audience a face-to-face experience, but because they could speak in Spanish. I had no other way to honor their language, since I was communicating via a translator. I gave them about twenty minutes, then asked the spokespersons to tell us the ideas of each group. I wrote these comments down, but clumsily, on a flip chart, with my back to the audience, mistakenly thinking this was the way Harlene did it. I didn't keep these notes, but gave them to Eva to take home, and she told me she still has them.

After all the groups had spoken, it was time to for Harlene and Sylvia to come forward. The three of us now sat together in front of everyone. Harlene said, "The first thing that comes to mind is unpredictability. You never know where a conversation is going and how important it is to take every conversation seriously. I'm thinking of the very casual conversation Eva and I had at the break, in terms of what that meant for Eva." Harlene then told us that that her grandmother had died when her mother was seven years old, and that in response to this death her mother had also changed her name. To my surprise, I saw that Harlene was struggling with tears. I was afraid I had upset her in some way, but I said nothing.

After she recovered, Harlene went on: "So it's the multiple conversations, people speaking from their own experiences, the many voices, that is so powerful. You used the word 'cumulative.'" (She was referring to my term for the layering effect of the reflecting process.) "I would use 'generative.' The process is not so much additive as transformative. The powerful experience of the listening position is that you're on hold, you can talk with yourself, or with the voices inside you. Anytime you are having a conversation, you never know what the other person is doing with that. That's what's so interesting." At this point, Harlene talked about my struggle with the flip chart, telling me that she usually asks someone else to do that because it interferes with her connection to the audience. I thanked her for the suggestion because she was only too right.

Sylvia then said that she was interested in Eva's idea of the silence and how the voices of the speakers represented the spaces taken by the silence—as each voice came in, the silence went out, and when the silence went out, the pain went out. She said she was reminded of how many women have been silenced, and how the stream I had talked about was like the community Eva carried with her from the past. The silences had flowed into the community we created here, so there was a link between the past and the future. Listening to Sylvia, I was interested that my stream metaphor, which had not been picked up before, had resurfaced here.

Sylvia went on to say that she noticed that I became a shield for Eva. She said, "It is so different when people are not looking at you. You are free to connect with the inner voices; then you can connect later with the voices

outside." She also mentioned the words Eva used to describe my role as a therapist: "tenderness," "freshness," and "caring." I added that when the "as if" listeners used loaded, negative words to describe their relationship to Eva, I was amazed that this didn't upset her. Sylvia said, "Because she could go in or out, or play with it." Harlene said, "Because you're not having to defend yourself or comment," and Sylvia added, "You're free to be what you want to be." I then said that the consultant can do the same thing by handing over the work to the community. Harlene said, "I call that shared responsibility," and Sylvia said, "You don't have to control the discourse, you can let the process flow."

A Rolling Conversation

For me, this was a watershed event, as it seemed to express so many aspects of the improvisatory, layering kind of work that now interested me. Six months later, the Houston-Galveston Institute held a Galveston Symposium (called that because Goolishian had organized the first one in a Best Western Hotel in Galveston in 1991), and Eva and I both came to it. I played the tape of the interview we had done in Mexico City while Eva presented a running commentary, and Harlene and Sylvia contributed their own impressions. I thought of calling this extended exchange a "rolling conversation." Eva had sent her comments on the tape in a letter to me before the conference, so I will summarize some of the points she made.

Speaking about the first conversation we had, she said her confidence in me was an echo of her confidence in Satir. She was also extremely surprised to find that she only had to talk about herself for a few minutes, in contrast to her many years of therapy, where she had always had to talk a long time to be understood. In thinking about the reflecting team, she was glad that it was composed of women, because the gender support meant so much to her. She had heard their voices as if she were listening to her own unrecognized voices, and she was amazed that they were able to give her their thoughts without any effort on her part; it was like a present.

Eva said that this first group gave her enough security to hear the "as if" members. She liked my asking the "father" or "aunt": "What would you say to Eva now?" She also liked it when I clarified the statements of the "as if" people or asked them to reword their reactions so that she could "hear" them better. She said that hearing words of gratitude and forgiveness from her imagined father and aunt left her with a deep peace. She felt appreciated at last and could stop feeling guilty.

She was also glad when the "as if" family members told her honestly what they were thinking, in contrast to the silence from her family in the

past. The messages from her mother and brother, though negative, allowed her to imagine how she might restore these relationships. She said that the work in the large groups of "as if" listeners had moved her deeply and she was grateful that people were willing to work so hard to understand her family and herself. Even when the stories had no connection to her, she could select out words like "persecution" and relate to them.

With regard to my actions as therapist, she said, "I must insist on how protected I felt by Lynn during these conversations." She liked the fact that I blocked people who tried to talk directly to her, so that she could listen without having to respond. She particularly mentioned the part where the "as if" listener told the story of his own son's death. She said this was jarring, because she felt no connection to this experience, and although she sympathized with the man, she was glad that I had interrupted him.

Eva also said that the part where we debriefed each other gave her an opportunity to process what she had taken in and opened a space to bring Rachel into her life instead of always thinking of her death. Interestingly enough, she made a link between Rachel, me and some of the other women who had spoken, as if to create a new alliance. She was particularly struck by the significance of the conversation with Harlene. An outsider would have said it was trivial, but she was impressed by how meaningful, touching, and in a deep sense affectionate it was. Harlene had merely asked about her name, but that conversation was the "nucleus" of the entire session. She said she also appreciated Harlene and Sylvia's capacity for theoretical elaboration.

After the session, she said, many people came up to her to give her affection and to share similar issues from their own lives. When she went home, she had a "deep conversation" with her brother about this experience, their story, and questions of gender, and they became closer through this talk. Her mother is ninety years old now, but she feels she has been taking care of her in a different way and is opening doors for mutual feelings. As for her professional life, she was interested in moving in a collaborative direction and said she wanted to improve her skills as an "every moment creation" therapist.

Looking back on the story of Eva, I think I understand why it was right to stop the initial conversation in spite of having so little information. Perhaps I didn't have to know about the sister who died; perhaps it didn't matter that Eva did not mention her until later. This type of knowing could be laterally distributed among everyone present. Harlene "knew," Eva "knew," others had spoken of similar experiences, so perhaps it didn't much matter if I knew or not. And the way they knew was similar to the Biblical "carnal knowing." They knew in a bodily sense, through shared, sensed memories of their own.

There was another piece of knowing that surfaced. At the time of the interview, I was puzzled by Harlene's tears, but didn't want to pry into them. I wrote her later to ask whether I had upset her. She wrote:

> The tears were not about the similarity in the story. The tears were about the conversation —how humbled and aware I was that the smallest, most casual and seemingly insignificant conversation is never that. And how important it is to be present and take seriously any conversation that we are engaged in. We never know what the listener takes from it, how they perceive us, how the conversation can itself be transformative. How many times might I have participated in such a brief exchange that might not have had such a transformative outcome because I was not fully present.

This event was indeed a good example of the fact that you can never tell beforehand how any conversation will turn out. I had just been reading a book by French philosopher Gaston Bachelard called *The Poetics of Space* (1994), in which he writes that "poetry renders speech unforeseeable." Struck by this phrasing, I shared it with Harlene. We particularly liked the idea that therapy is "unforeseen speech."

I have continued to keep in touch with Eva and have recently sent her a copy of this chapter to look over. She is still living in Mexico and maintains a private practice, as well as teaching and supervising family therapy and occasionally attending conferences. This story stands as a record of her impact on my work and thought. It clarified for me how much a relational view is characterized by an awareness of the avenues of influence between all participants and the resonances among them.

Therapy by the Lake

I want next to include an example of one of Anderson's consultations in the public sector. Goolishian and his group (MacGregor et al., 1964) had been involved with public agencies from way back. After Goolishian died, Anderson continued to engage in consulting work, giving it her special twist. This particular consultation started when Anderson was asked to put together a presentation on her work in the juvenile justice system. She asked Victor, a young therapist in one of the agencies she worked with, if she could interview him. She had been impressed by Victor's optimistic attitude in contrast to the impression of burnout she had encountered in so many other settings. To find out what fed Victor's enthusiasm, she asked people from his agency to meet with her too. This group included the director, a psychiatrist, some therapists from the staff, and a few clerical workers. She asked them to divide into three clusters, randomly, and then

she gave each cluster some questions about how they perceived their work. She and two of her colleagues sat in on these small groups while the participants spoke together. Then, during the debriefing in the larger group, she wrote down the ideas each cluster came up with on a flipchart.

Anderson told me that she was amazed at how energetic and positive the responses were. For instance, one of the therapists told of taking his dog with a backpack full of supplies like magic markers, pads, and a water bottle, to a school he was visiting, and introducing the dog as his co-therapist. When Anderson got home, she collated all the comments and sent them back to the agency with some new questions. These were answered in writing by some of the participants, and Anderson collated them and sent back the responses as before. I was struck by the layering of viewpoints that this format allowed, so similar to a reflecting team.

Then Anderson decided that her presentation needed a story and got permission from the director of the agency to attend and videotape the meetings of the next new case Victor was assigned. The first interview, attended by Anderson and one of her colleagues, included Victor, an adolescent boy called Mike who was in trouble for setting fires and robbing a school, his grandmother, and two psychology interns, Andre and Fabienne, who were asked to be observers and do the taping. During the first interview, Victor asked the boy to do a drawing, but he had his writing arm in a sling and his grandmother suggested that maybe one of the interns could help him. Andre went over to assist Mike, and they got into a conversation about the Swiss watch Andre wore. At the end of the meeting, Andre and Fabienne were both asked to reflect, and did so, even though they said they had assumed that this was against the rules.

During the next session, Victor and the boy were playing a "feeling cards" game and the boy asked the interns to join in. Mike had refused to cooperate with three previous therapists, but he spoke so positively of this session that the grandmother said she wanted to attend the next one. The result was that she too joined the "feeling cards" game. One day the boy arrived to find the interns picnicking across the lake from the site of the meeting. He suggested to Victor that they join them, and they all ended up having the session, and future sessions as well, by the lake. Home and school visits were made, too, involving some of the other persons connected with the case. Mike's behavior improved strikingly in a relatively small number of sessions.

While this went on, Anderson told me, she was on the sidelines, coaching and observing and getting feedback. At the same time, she was trying to shift herself out of the central role. Her aim was to make everybody researchers. When a producer of documentaries she had just talked with suggested that the boy videotape and narrate a documentary of the case

himself, she went ahead with this idea. She had noticed how much interest Mike took in the taping, and he was only too happy to oblige.

As background to his narration, the boy shot views of the interns' car, the parking lot, the lake, and questioned the various participants on their views. The grandmother said in her interview how happy she was that the therapists felt comfortable enough to come to their house. She was glad that they didn't just concentrate on her grandson but tried to help the family as a whole. In listening to this story, I saw that a key feature of Anderson's work was to open the doors to the resources that were implicit in the scene and let them do the work.

World Building

This brings me to a favorite idea of mine that I call "world building" (distinguished from Nelson Goodman's [1984] "world making" by the fact that his is a cognitive operation and mine a systemic one). I got this concept from the writings of architect Christopher Alexander (1979) who, in *The Timeless Way of Building*, invokes a time when there were no blueprints or architects and the art of building depended on a "pattern language" going deep into the past. He says that these patterns have a folk feel and are intuitive rather than mechanical. As examples, he cites elements like "farmhouse kitchen," "child caves," and (for the garden) "sunny corner."

Alexander then asks, "What is the difference between a place we instinctively enjoy, and one that seems empty or sad?" He notes that there is a "quality without a name" that gives a house, a town, or a courtyard its sense of beauty and worth, but he cannot put his finger on the exact description. After considering attribute after attribute—"whole," "eternal," "exact," "comfortable," "free,"—he finally chooses the word "aliveness." A house we enjoy visiting is in some mysterious way "alive."

I liked this emphasis. Even though I never believed I could or should predict a specific outcome for therapy, I did have one goal: to build together the kind of small local world where everyone feels "more safe, more free, and more alive" (Hoffman, 1993). Let me end this chapter with one of Alexander's attempts to explain "the quality without a name":

> It is never twice the same, because it always takes its shape from the particular place where it occurs. . . . In one place it is calm, in another it is stormy; in one person it is tidy; in another it is careless; in one house it is light; in another it is dark; in one room it is soft and quiet; in another it is yellow. In one family it is a love of picnics; in another dancing; in another playing poker; in another group of people it is not family life at all. (p. 26)

I have included this passage because it is so close to the way the Houston-Galveston group has always worked, deferring to a particular guiding quality, rather than following specific methods and techniques.