

CHAPTER SEVEN

EXPLORING THE FLOW

One should stop worrying about whether what one believes is well grounded and start worrying about whether one has been imaginative enough to think up interesting alternatives to one's present beliefs.

(Rorty, 2000, p. 34)

Accounts of "experience" seem more adequately understood as the outcome of a particular textual/cultural history in which people learn to tell stories of their lives to themselves and others. Such narratives are embedded within the sense-making processes of historically and culturally situated communities. (Gergen & Gergen, 2000a, p. 1027)

This chapter begins with a summary of The Flow to this point. The Story in chapter one presented what can be referred to as the perturbation for the study. This was the experience of the author as a young trainee trying to implement theory as she found it in a context foreign to the theory – as she found it. Her further and later experiences as a psychologist in the township context developed into a conviction that mainstream theories of psychology of the present had to be modified to fit the context in which she found herself practising. These experiences are reported on in Other Stories in chapter three.

Chapter four presented a critical discussion of mainstream psychology in the present, while chapter five presented ecologies of ideas in the literature around *African* notions of psychology and meaning of being African as reported on by some African writers.

Chapter six explored some research possibilities that may be useful to non-western contexts.

The question thus arose as how to make sense of working as a psychologist in a non-western and in particular an *African* context. The author found herself seduced into positioning herself on the western – non-western continuum whilst realising that this approach was not useful. Taking a position as such would serve to further reify the polarities of the continuum rather than finding a way forward in terms of a more universal approach that is able to take account of socio-cultural contexts.

The author then sought a language that could discuss something approaching universalities for the discipline of psychology in describing and understanding human behaviour and human problems. The language of psychological theories presented problems in achieving this without re-entrenching the discussion in dialectic. In her search for what could be termed a *meta* position (or possibly more aptly an ‘other’ position) from the west-non west continuum, the language of ecological processes seemed to provide this. Theorists who have integrated studies of ecological processes from the natural sciences into explorations of dynamics in the social domain include Fritjof Capra, Werner Heisenberg and Humberto Maturana – often together with Francisco Varela. The biologist/ anthropologist Gregory Bateson has contributed to this discourse with his ideas on ecology and evolution in human systems. The works of these authors, especially those of Capra, Bateson and Maturana, are largely drawn on in the following discussions.

Tools for Analysis

This chapter sets out to examine the stories of the participants in this study using ecological descriptions from the writings of the authors mentioned above. Since ecologies are dynamic and evolving continuously, it is difficult to consider processes ecologically without touching on the accompanying evolutionary processes. The interplay of ecologies and evolution will be

discussed to the extent that it is necessary to make sense of the ecological view in terms of its complexities.

The very process of describing psychological phenomena from the meta (or other) position of an ecological perspective, de-reifies symptoms, mental illness, and psychological disorders from whatever paradigm they may have been originally described in. This will be made explicit in the following analyses of the texts presented in the document so far.

Generally, the approach of the analyses will be to read the presented texts ecologically: to see behaviour as a text within a context presented for deconstruction (Derrida, 1981). The purpose of this will be to arrive at a narrative structuring and meaning interpretation as envisaged by Kvale (1996) and referred to in chapter six of this study. The reader is invited, together with the author, to engage in movement towards a dialogical exploration of the texts, rather than a more restricting dialectical analysis. However, the stories presented in the literary way as they have been, also speak for themselves to the reader, as has been suggested possible in chapter six. Thus, no final interpretation of the stories is considered necessary to the process of this study.

Reflecting back to a statement made in chapter two, an attempt is made here *to use a different set of tools which may not be tools at all in any conventional sense in psychology.*

Making the Shift

According to the typical approach in psychology, the psychologist starts at the presenting problem with a definition, or diagnosis (in the case of psychotherapy), and moves out to view the context – to a greater or lesser extent. In most well recognised models of psychology the psychologist holds the power, expertise and control through acquired academic knowledge. This dynamic of power relations is also very much the pattern applied in the medical model.

As can be expected, this was the approach taken by the medical practitioners in both Alice's and Thabo's stories. This may be seen to be an appropriate approach for a medical model, which makes a scientific examination of the biological ecology of the human body and does this generally effectively by approaching the human body as a closed system. This approach could be said to belong to the realm of what Heisenberg (1959) referred to as practical or dogmatic realism and holds a valid and as yet essential place in the natural sciences. However, as was shown in the dialogical exploration (The Narrative), different information provided a view into an ecology beyond the physical body with which to work and intervene, using a different paradigm. There are inherent dangers in isolating particular aspects of living systems in trying to understand them, as was done in the diagnostic analyses. Unfortunately for scholars of the human sciences there remains a far stronger emphasis on and recognition for studying entities in isolation rather than networks of relationships (Bateson, 2000).

The networks of relationships around living systems and parts of living systems include the observer. Thus, one of the dangers implied by isolating entities under study revolves around the idea put forward here that perception is an active rather than a passive process (Berger & Mohr, 1982; Keeney, 1979; von Foerster, 1976; von Glasersfeld, 1988), and thus, what we observe in nature is not nature itself (Capra, 2003; Gribben, 1996; Heisenberg, 1959; Maturana, 1988), "it is a part of the interplay between nature and ourselves; it describes nature exposed to our method of questioning" (Heisenberg, 1971, in Capra, 1997, p. 39). As mentioned above, when dealing with living systems and trying to *understand* them, the focus is on *meaning*, and in human living systems what becomes important in the study of them is the embodied meaning in social structures (Capra, 2003).

According to an ecological picture, the psychologist reads behaviour in an ecology of existence that holds meaning for the client. Meaning emerges from a context of interpretation and does not exist in and of itself (Capra, 2003; Fals-Borda & Mora-Osejo, 2003). Gergen (1998, p. 119) refers to an

“interpretive community” and “conventional understandings” in a similar argument for recognition of the influence that frameworks have to bear on meanings extracted from texts. This process requires the collaboration of the client to interpret the ecology of the context as the client conceives and perceives it. Understanding the stuckness, or problem which the client brings, entails the event-in-context being brought into the consciousness of both the client and the psychotherapist. Maturana’s meaning attached to consciousness is referred to here:

According to Maturana, we can understand human consciousness only through language and the whole social context in which it is embedded. As its Latin root – *con-scire* (‘knowing together’) – might indicate, consciousness is essentially a social phenomenon. (Capra, 1997, p. 283)

The extended narratives presented in *Other Stories*, allows for such an interpretive process between psychotherapist and client, or between research participants. Contrasting with this is the medical model or positivist view that ends the therapeutic conversation with the psychotherapist’s (or doctor’s) pronouncement of how the problem may be interpreted. Bateson, (1985, p. 436) suggests that this approach embodies inherent dangers: “the error of purposive thinking... disregards the systemic nature of the world with which it must deal.”

From an ecological perspective, the stuckness or problem resists taking on a value but is read as a punctuation in the ecology. The punctuation, however, is sometimes experienced as psychic pain in individuals. The problem becomes identified not as an error per se, but more as an indication that something no longer *fits* in the context. Ernst von Glasersfeld (1988), with a focus on cognition in the theory of Radical Constructivism, has described this process as a failure to *assimilate* in the Piagetian sense. Here the focus is rather on the ecology than the cognitive processes of the individual.

The ecology is disturbed, and because ecologically and evolutionarily, changes initiate with disturbances, the challenge lies not so much in identifying the problem ecologically, but in identifying the solution ecologically in order to facilitate that change (Eskell-Blokland, 2001) – but not necessarily to stop it. This sentiment echoes that of other authors writing from non-western cultural contexts (Fals-Borda & Mora-Osejo, 2003; Mariotti, n.d.). In discussing social problems Bateson comments, (1985, p. 437): “The problem is systemic and the solution must surely depend upon realizing this fact.”

Systemic Punctuations

In this section, the Stories are discussed and in each case the problem is viewed as a systemic event punctuating the ecology in evolution. The “purposive” or diagnostic approach is contrasted with the dialogical alternative.

The systemic punctuations revealed in the stories presented in this study include Lesaka’s physical assault on his two year old brother (The Story), and from Other Stories: - Alice’s allergic asthma, Thabo’s high anxiety, Cabangile’s ambivalence, Founder’s struggle with his practice, and the young healer’s physical pain. The individuals in each case found themselves in ecologies that mismatched their own personal ecologies of knowing, or consciousness. In order to interpret meaning from the stories presented, the psychologist needs to deconstruct the story from within the ecologies of both the client and the context. The solution may be found in discovering a way forward comprising ecological meaning for the client and ecological fit with the context.

Because not all the stories presented in chapter three are client cases, stories are discussed below as appropriate.

The Story

In Lesaka's case it is possible that his psychotherapist failed him. Perhaps the failing was not as severe as it could have been if, for example, he had been sent to prison by the justice system. The psychotherapist may have been too passive in engaging with the ecological context in which Lesaka found himself. As the story is told here, she was focussed on helping him meet the demands of the social environment so that he could "get on with his life" in terms of finding employment and all that goes with it. Her thinking was purposive. On the surface, this was what was required.

The psychotherapist did not get to know Lesaka's personal ecology of ideas. Thus her explorations with him went no further than her own western approach to life – the need to be a registered citizen with an education and a job, a place to stay and a social circle. Through the process of working with Lesaka, she learned some lessons about the way of life on the streets and the potential role of interpreters in psychotherapy. However, her own lack of knowledge about Lesaka's ecology left her disconnected from him and resulted in her feeling disempowered and more like a social worker than a psychologist.

Alice and Doozy

Alice's medical treatment for asthma did not have the desired long-term effect. Perhaps the point here is not whether it was asthma or not, but that just as the body becomes ill in a context so the body must heal in a context. This is especially so in the case of psychosomatic disorders. The context includes both the physical environment and the ecology of thought or mind (Bateson, 1979). The psychotherapist's challenge is to find the dis-solution of the problem within the ecology of the client.

The psychologist who dealt with Alice, was able to put aside the meanings of the punctuation as they appealed to her own epistemology. She began by asking questions about Alice's ecology, which may have had answers

from Alice's epistemology. This opened up the possibility for dialogue characterised by a focus on ecologies, thus facilitating the emergence of her client's epistemology for the psychologist to read.

Ideas from Alice's epistemology that proved to be useful in initiating a therapeutic dialogue included: involving a broader community than her individual self; the African tradition of the naming ceremony; and a possible calling to *thwasa*¹. The bringing of these ideas to the dialogue facilitated a "knowing together" for client and therapist. This process of "knowing together" distinguishes the diagnostic conversation from the therapeutic dialogue. The meaning emerging from Alice's ecology is important for psychological healing without reifying the ideas themselves.

The reader is referred back to a discussion on the significance of the naming ceremony in chapter five, as an idea providing meaning within some traditional African ecologies. Kokomogo was the name that Alice was given at her naming ceremony. This was, according to her cultural traditions, the person she was expected to be, this was the name that validated her existence in her ecology. With the history of name changes she had experienced, it could be expected that Alice was experiencing some kind of identity confusion.

Alice languaged around her name changes as the punctuation of what she was experiencing in her world. Among all her multiple identities (Gergen, 1991; Lincoln, 2000), there was at least one which she was not yet ready to encompass. It did not fit at this point into her ecology. Addressing this issue seemed to be paramount to her healing process.

The calling to *thwasa* is raised here as a possible interpretation of Alice's dream. This interpretation of the dream is facilitated given the context of the family from a community rich in traditional healing practices and by the grandmother, now an ancestor, who was a sangoma. The offering of a tray of

¹ Thwasa: refer to chapter two

objects could be seen as symbolic of Alice being called to take over the traditional healer role. This interpretation as a possible factor in Alice's illness was kept open between client and therapist. The reader is also reminded of the strong connection between illness/healing and spirituality in traditional African thinking discussed in chapter four. Whether thwasa was an aspect of the problem here would be a matter to sort out between Alice and her sangoma.

Here the focus has been on discovering ecological values (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000a) in an attempt to find a dis-solution ecologically. Denzin and Lincoln refer to the significance of ecological values in conducting research:

The emphasis on inquiry that reflects ecological values, on inquiry that respects communal forms of living that are not Western, on inquiries involving intense reflexivity regarding how inquiries are shaped by our own historical and gendered locations, and on inquiry into "human flourishing", as Heron & Reason call it, may yet reintegrate the secular in ways that promote freedom and self-determination. (p. 185)

Thabo

In the case of Thabo, the psychologist used a similar approach to that used in Alice's case. PTSD is a well-recognised disorder in the western epistemology and excellent ways of handling it have been devised. This helped Thabo up to a point, but if the treatment had stopped there, his progress, as Alice's was with medical intervention alone, may have been superficial and possibly temporary. The symptoms of PTSD came as a punctuation of his disturbed ecology which became the focus of work in psychotherapy.

The reader is referred back to the discussion in chapter four, on the way a sense of self has been explained in the view of many African peoples. For Thabo it was not enough to gain a sense of achievement as an individual. It seemed as if his sense of self was inextricably linked to his community. Thus,

he felt obliged to sit with his black peers at work, he clung to the notion of his success being the success of his community: - not his alone. Without community recognition, his achievements would mean little to him. He experienced the assault as a strong message of rejection and alienation from his own community. Thabo feared that this was a process that was now irreversible. His healing lay in finding a way to rediscover and reconnect with community to bring back a sense of congruence to his ecology.

A Young Healer's Story

The young healer experienced herself struggling to match her own western epistemology and her personal ecology of ideas, with the ecology in which she found herself training. The tensions created within herself manifested in psychosomatic pains.

An interesting aspect to this story is that the prophet's method of communicating to his client (the young healer) could be said to be purposive, diagnostic and employing a power relation with the young healer. However, the ensuing relationship between the two of them, allowed a connection that dissolved boundaries such that a new ecology of relationship was formed. This new ecology took on a flavour of communicating and discovering each other's different ecologies. This process of relationship required an acceptance and entering of the other's ecology of mind. Once again the reader is reminded that an ecology of mind has been defined as a socio-cultural construction. With the trust that served to connect the prophet and the young healer, they each became open, responsive and receptive to each other's meanings to enable this process. From a "knowing together" a therapeutic relationship evolved and tensions and anxieties for the young healer dissolved.

With regards to how the prophet 'knew' her illness, this is something that neither the young healer nor the author found a satisfactory explanation for in words outside the prophet's ecology of ideas. It seemed to the young healer that he had an ability to connect in ways other than spoken language.

Communication, Consciousness and Human
Adaptation (mind in ecology)

And in life, meaning is not instantaneous. Meaning is discovered in what connects, and cannot exist without development. Without a story, without an unfolding, there is no meaning...when we give meaning to an event, that meaning is a response.

(Berger & Mohr, 1989, p. 89)

In contemplating the role of *consciousness* in human adaptation, Bateson (1985) considers consciousness as an important component in the coupling of three homeostatic systems: - the individual, society, and the larger ecosystem. He suggests that errors may occur when these are divorced from each other. He also warns that human consciousness in itself is not infallible and it is through human consciousness that information about systemic events is processed, and then used for further adaptation. Distortions of view in consciousness may lead to destructive thinking and behaviour (Bateson, 1985; Capra, 1997, 2003; Maturana & Varela, 1987).

The diagnostic approach to the stories presented, tends to focus on the individual system at the price of ignoring the social system to some extent, and the larger ecosystem to a greater extent. It has already been stated above that including considerations of the social -and larger eco- systems may yield bigger pictures, but the question is whose social- and whose eco-system? Epistemologies, personal or otherwise, assist us in seeing the world and making sense of it, but also determine the content of cognition and consciousness. The recognition of Maturana's notion of consciousness (referred to above in Capra, 1997; Maturana & Varela, 1987) as being a collaborative affair, assists in the avoidance of epistemological dominance.

Similarly, Capra (2003), in addition to viewing consciousness as a biological phenomenon, views it as a social one. This recalls Bateson's (1985) proposal that mind and consciousness are processes, in opposition to the earlier Cartesian view of mind as *a thing* (Capra, 2003). Like Bateson, Maturana focussed on the processes of mind, consciousness and cognition, describing cognition as "the process of knowing" (Maturana & Varela, 1987). According to Capra (2003) consciousness is a complex state of cognition. Maturana, together with Varela formulated the Santiago Theory of Cognition whereby the processes of cognition are identified as the processes of life itself (Capra, 1997, 2003; Kenny, 1989).

To take the argument of the previous section forward, it can be said that the clients in the Stories formulated their descriptions of their problems in a language which emanated from their cognitions or consciousness of their ecosystems. To impose an alternative meaning, divorced from context, to the punctuations brought to the psychotherapist could result in alienation of the client at least, or damage to the client at worst, especially if the psychotherapist assumes a position of authority at the level of epistemology. The experience of psychosis is one in which the individual finds no consensual validation for his/her experiences. Because there is no difference to the individual between the immediate cognitive experience of an hallucination, and an experience which others share (sometimes called 'reality'), to have any of one's experiences invalidated is surely a psychotic event and potentially damaging.

If the client has previously experienced a lack of validation of his/her cognitions about his/her world, the client is likely to be hesitant to bring these cognitions to the conversation. This is apparently what Alice's experience had been with the medical practitioners prior to her encounter with the psychologist. Once she realised that information as she knew it about her systemic events could be consensually engaged with, she entered a dialogue in an engagement of consciousness with the psychologist. This was similar to the process which occurred between the prophet and the young healer. A "knowing together" emerged and allowed for a therapeutic conversation.

A sharing of consciousness did not occur in *The Story*. The psychologist remained unaware of the significance of epistemological differences (or even that there were such differences) in the understanding of a series of events. However, she opened her own ecology of ideas sufficiently to allow a perturbation to occur and which led to further thinking about her practice in a context different from her own.

Cabangile found herself attempting to bridge two very different worlds of cognition as she spanned the divide between the western consciousness of the academic world of Judeo-Christian saturated psychology and that of the African spiritual domain of ancestors and witchcraft. She experienced what we call ambivalence. This is apparent in Cabangile's renunciation of the African spiritual domain of ancestors and witchcraft and yet her obvious simultaneous recognition of its power both in her own life and in the lives of others.

Thabo's traditional African epistemology included his sense of self not separate from his community. His consciousness of himself in his ecology was shaken when this was invalidated by the assault event which informed him that he was no longer perceived as part of that community. He was alienated from his ecology by the event, resulting in acute anxiety and presenting in classic symptoms of PTSD according to the DSM classification.

Founder recognized the need to change his cognitions about his practice in order to meet the consciousness of the people he came to work among in the township. Unless he was able to do this he would not have been able to meet the community in useful dialogue. The questioning of his own consciousness was experienced as a struggle.

For Alice, the validation of her own existence, her self-consciousness was connected to her culturally formed cognitive understanding that this came to her through her name. The changing of her name perturbed her knowing of herself to the extent that her sense of being in the world was threatened.

In each of the cases above an adaptive process was demanded by the disturbances in consciousness and cognitions. To different extents each was challenged and some managed more than others to achieve a measure of adaptation. Those individuals who presented themselves to the author in her role as psychologist, entered a process of ecological adaptation through communication.

The Relationship Between Evolution and Ecology

Bateson (1985) discusses the implications of form, substance and difference in evolutionary processes within ecology. Prior to the development of theories of evolution, the world of living organisms was conceived of as being hierarchically arranged, with Mind (Bateson, 1985) being the impetus for all that followed. Mind often took on a supernatural connotation, being conceived of as for example, deity. The early evolutionists, beginning with Darwin, then reversed the order of living organisms by placing the smallest of living organisms at the beginning of process (Dennett, 1996). The question of *mind* was sidelined as evolutionary theories of the time focussed on survival by natural selection – the survival of discreet organisms (or species of organisms) through responding to environmental demands. Thus, the unit of evolution according to this framework is the organism itself. An important question in such a framework of explanation is “what is it made of?”

Without getting entangled in the dialectical arguments of evolutionary theories themselves, it is suggested that for the purposes of this thesis it is important to recognise the usefulness of the earlier order, the pre-Darwinian order, whereby *mind* is seen to direct evolutionary processes (Bateson, 1985). Mind becomes the unit of ecology that drives evolution in social systems. Mind in this sense, is not dissected or reduced in any biological sense, but advances a more complex, in-context approach to ecology and evolution.

Mind in Ecology

The diagnostic approach to the stories matches these earlier descriptions of evolution as mentioned above. It suggests that there would be something *inside* Lesaka, Cabangile, Thabo, Alice, Founder and the young healer that would determine their individual survival of external demands by adapting that which lies inside them. The focus is on inherent characteristics or individual patterns of mind of the individuals. Psychologically speaking this would be intra-psychic processes. It is not suggested here that there is no value in intra-psychic processes or inherent characteristics of individuals as humans, as these also play a role in broader ecologies. However, the intrapsychic approach tends to leave questions unanswered, such as how does the individual continue in the context? What lies beyond the immediate survival after the event? These individual patterns of mind have evolved themselves within a context to fit with that context and in which they will generally continue to live. As Bateson (1985, p. 451) suggests the unit of survival is the “flexible organism-in-its-environment”.

Thabo and Alice felt their very survival threatened by the mismatch of their each personally evolved consciousness with the information they were receiving from a new socio-cultural environment. The effect was, as reported by Seedat (1997) and presented earlier in this text, an unbearable sense of alienation. The diagnostic approaches did not address the sense of alienation for Thabo and Alice, as it also would not have done so for the young healer, and so help from this source alone could only be very limited.

Relevance of Patterns of Organization for Psychological Practice

An ecological approach to evolution, such as Bateson's, suggests that a more useful question than “what is it made of?” (as in the earlier theories of evolution) is “what is its *pattern*?” (1985, p. 449). Pattern distinguishes the mind in ecology. According to the Batesonian approach evolution driven by

mind in ecology is characterised by cybernetic system processes. Mind (capital M) consists of subsystems of minds to which individual minds belong. The units of mind are ideas which emerge from information of differences. In this framework, it would be inconceivable to attempt to offer psychological help outside of the interaction between individual mind and contextual mind. Bateson (1985) warns specifically against this: “I suggest that it is ... monstrous - and dangerous - to attempt to separate the external mind from the internal. Or to separate mind from body” (p. 464).

Thus it follows that successful treatment of psychosomatic illnesses as experienced by Thabo must address both the personal patterns of mind and the contextual patterns of mind as well as their interaction. It is then in the relationship between the different levels of mind wherein lies what we call psychological problems or wellness.

Founder attended to this relationship not only with regard to his clients at the community centre, but also in terms of his own situation in his personal ecology and the forging of a relationship between his personal ecological system and that of his clients. In speaking of his practice in Mamelodi he used the words “other ways of working” and clients bringing “news of difference”. His referring to his work in Mamelodi as being “out there” indicates recognition for the difference in ecologies and thus his struggle to “appreciate the ecology”. *Crisis* is a word which he used frequently in his conversation during the interview. *Crisis* is defined in the Concise Oxford Dictionary as “turning-point” and “moment of danger or suspense”. His frequent use of this word in talking about his practice “out there” emphasises his acknowledgement that his practice had to change in the ecology of the township in order to be effective. He suggests that it becomes the responsibility of the reflective practitioner to channel this “news of difference” through the universities but despairs at their “stuckness” in their own self-reified ecologies of ideas.

Patterns of Organization in Other Artefacts

Capra (2003) suggests that the central focus of a systemic analysis is the notion of organisation, or “pattern of organisation” (p. 79) of the structures which comprise the system. In social systems, structures are nonmaterial and material. The social system, or network, is sustained by processes of communication. These generate shared meaning and rules of behaviour (culture) and knowledge. The structures of a social organisation are materially embodied (documented) in the artefacts of the culture, - artworks, written texts, music, psychotherapy, healing processes and so on. These are the embodiments of the shared meanings generated by the culture’s networks of communication.

Cognition and Communication in Ecology

Taking all the above into consideration, in debating “Mind”, Bateson (1985) concludes (p. 461) that the immanence of Mind in the ecology subsumes the individual mind, which is a subsystem of the Mind. Generally, intrapsychic psychologies consider mind as very much consisting of the individual mind and all its processes including conscious, unconscious, and influencing autonomic systems of the body. In contrast, the ecological approach discussed here expands this notion of mind to include the entire ecosystem in evolutionary processes. These contrasting views have implications for theories of cognition and communication.

Capra (2003) criticises views of cognition which define the unit of analysis (of cognition) as being the body and mind of the individual. He reminds us that these bodies and minds do not exist in isolation, but are in continual interaction with other bodies and minds within communities of organisms: “These interactive processes are crucial to understanding the level of cognitive abstraction that is characteristic of reflective consciousness” (p. 45).

According to Maturana (1988; Maturana & Varela, 1987), communication is a result of co-ordinations of behaviour between organisms, rather than the transmission of information, a view shared by other authors in the field (Capra, 2003; Dell, 1987), the result of which is mostly unpredictable (Kenny, 1989; Mariotti, n.d.). Language and conversation belong to a social domain, bringing forth ideas in an ecology of mind.

Knowing in an Ecological Sense

Referring back to Keeney's reminder of the etymological meaning of the word diagnosis being "to know", Maturana's definition of knowing as a consensual event implies that there are those who have arrived at a consensual body of knowledge around the categorisation of diseases and pathology. This is generally the world of those who prescribe to a medical model in which diagnosis is useful and in which a restricted interpretation of certain human problems is facilitative. However, the ecology of knowledge taken in a broader sense allows for other interpretations that may be useful for other types of interventions in human problems.

If one starts at human reason from which cognitive knowledge emanates in ecology, then

human reason does not transcend the body...but is shaped crucially by our physical nature and our bodily experience. Capra (2003, p. 53)

Discussing the phenomenon of cognition, Capra (2003) explains the cognitive scientific notion that living organisms categorise (know the world) depending on how they are embodied (Maturana & Varela, 1980; Mariotti, n.d.; von Glasersfeld, 1988). It is the self-conscious experience of the human body that directs the knowing of the world outside the human body – the environment or context, through physiological make up of the body. Many of the categorisation processes occur at an unconscious level and are acquired in

early experiences (Capra, 2003; von Glasersfeld, 1988). These categorisation processes lead to the formation of abstract thought as a result of a process Capra refers to as “metaphorical projection” (p. 55). Capra gives the example of the metaphorical abstract idea of a “warm friendship” originating in the early bodily association of the physical warmth of being held closely.

Our thought and language contain hundreds of primary metaphors, most of which we use without ever being aware of them...they originate in basic bodily experiences.... In our abstract thought processes, we combine primary metaphors into more complex ones, which enables us to use rich imagery and subtle conceptual structures when we reflect on our experience. For example, to think of life as a journey allows us to use our rich knowledge of journeys while reflecting on how to lead a purposeful life. (Capra, 2003, p. 55)

If Maturana’s idea of communication as a socio-cultural phenomenon is accepted, then cognition must also be socio-culturally determined through knowledge being communicated in socio-cultural networks. The notion of metaphorical projections has significance for communication between the psychologist and her client. The language used by the client to describe the problems presented will allow the psychologist entry into the ecology wherein lies the solution.

The Process of Interpretation

At this point it may be useful to reflect on the interpretation/translation processes between the psychologist, Lesaka, Rasta and Catherine in The Story. Again, drawing on Maturana’s sense of communication as occurring in a consensual domain of meaning, conversations between persons

of different cultures suggest a greater complexity than those that occur between persons of similar cultural backgrounds. The implication is that persons in communication from similar cultural backgrounds would relate more easily to language being used that reflects metaphorical projections emerging from a consensual domain. When working across different cultural backgrounds, it becomes necessary to listen more carefully to more complex possibilities, taking cues from outside the immediate conversation – as meanings are read ecologically.

Capra (2003) presents a definition of interpretation as “conceiving in the light of individual belief, judgment, or circumstance” (p. 73). Thus the process of interpretation or translation would seem to be a highly complex one involving far more than merely substituting one language for another. In the interpretation process, the idea of consciousness as a “knowing together” enters not only between the client and the psychologist, but also between client and interpreter, and between interpreter and psychologist. It is suggested that just as in a therapeutic process one psychotherapist cannot substitute for another, in a cross language conversation, one interpreter cannot substitute for another, without changing the context of the conversation. Changing the context of the conversation changes the conversation.

The psychologist in *The Story* became aware of the differences in the conversations she was having with her client depending on who was acting as interpreter. As communication flows reciprocally, meaning interpretation happens on both sides of the process. Meaning making also goes beyond reception and interpretation, - it includes making decisions on how to respond. The process begins with the individuals involved taking note of the messages or deciding what are messages at all. As Capra (2003) states in discussion on the communication process:

What people notice depends on who they are as individuals, and on the cultural characteristics of their communities of practice. A message will get through to

them not only because of its volume or frequency, but because it is meaningful to them. (p. 97)

Part of the interpretation process would include the meaning making dynamics within the triangle of client-interpreter-psychologist. A different dynamic occurred when the interpreter was Catherine or Marley as they each picked up on and responded to different messages in different ways, impacting on Lesaka and the psychologist's responses and communications. In addition each member of the interpreting team would have brought individual influences such that the "knowing together" took a different direction with different players. In addition to her cognitive differences, her different ecology of ideas, Catherine brought her female-ness, her motherliness and her blackness, for example. Marley brought other influences such as stemmed from his youth, his maleness, his trendiness as well as his blackness.

The above discussion suggests that interpretation cannot be a neutral process and perhaps should be used in the practice of psychology as a tool with potential for intervention. It also has implications for interpretation processes that occur within the same language but across the socio-cultural ecologies of individuals. In such instances the client-psychologist team could interpret the messages for each other as part of the therapeutic or research intervention. Such a process contributes to the "knowing together" of the effective conversation bringing added dimensions of complexity and enrichment to a professional dialogue.

Mutual interpretation of socio-cultural ecologies is an aspect of what happened between the young healer and the Prophet. To a greater or lesser extent this occurred in each of the Other Stories with little of it happening in The Story- leaving the client feeling isolated and the psychologist ineffective.

Perhaps it could be said that recurring significant messages within a culture contribute to the creation of local knowledge. It is these recurring significant messages that create a web of traditional beliefs, myths and

cognitions within which individuals come to know themselves and their world. This idea refers back to Barnhardt's quote (2002) in chapter two of this text, wherein he states that local knowledge is characterised by its context-bound nature, its utilitarian value, and the fact that it is arrived at through direct participation in real-world activities, ultimately forming a distinct world view.

As has been previously suggested in this thesis, local knowledge may not reflect the way *reality* is for specific cultures, but rather that specific cultures "know together" in certain ways as a matter of survival.

Thus, as Capra (2003) has suggested, there is a "fundamental unity to life" (p. 70), it is not that westerners do not experience the need for communalism or that Africans do not have the urge to compete individually, but that the "knowing together" prescribes otherwise priorities for the survival of the individuals within the culture. It could be said that the extent to which the individuals of the culture incorporate the ecology of ideas of their socio-culture norms into their personal ecologies of minds that they are able or not to accommodate *other* ideas.

Cabangile struggled with this, as did Founder, but both were able to some extent live with the resulting ambivalence. The young healer floundered until she made the shift with the assistance of the prophet who provided the "knowing togetherness" she required to ameliorate her sense of alienation.

Alice seemed unable to assimilate the new information from her new socio-cultural context with her personal ecology of ideas acquired from her cultural ecology of mind. The rejection she experienced from the medical world of her own consciousness became a psychotic-like experience. A sense of consensual cognition with the psychologist allowed her to explore her ecology of ideas more openly and together Alice and the psychologist found a way forward. A similar process occurred with Thabo.

Change in Social Domains

There is a fundamental unity to life...different living systems exhibit similar patterns of organisation...they are always variations on the same basic themes.

(Capra, 2003, p. 70)

The above idea applied to social networks involves complexity. Social networks are first and foremost networks of communication involving symbolic language, cultural constraints, relationships of power and so on, as have been discussed in sections above.

Ecological theories presented here (Capra, 2003; Kenny, 1989; Maturana, 1988) suggest that the way to effect change in social systems is through perturbations or disturbances rather than through mechanistic control. This idea of perturbation follows from the discussions of cognition, communication and meaning making, above. Thus, perturbations in an ecology give rise to punctuations which define psychological problems, but the dissolution lies in further perturbations (for change) which may be more ecologically congruent. Because of the unpredictable nature of much of communication and meaning making and therefore behaviour (Gergen, 1997), especially across different ecological contexts, it is not always easy to direct or predict change in living systems. Capra (2003) stresses that it is the meaningfulness of the perturbations for change that are important in effecting change.

This idea emphasises the importance for the psychologist to enter into meaning-full conversations with clients or research participants so that meaningful perturbations may be delivered into the communication system.

An important aspect of psychology training programmes is some form of self-development or personal growth in the trainees. Reflecting on Seedat's (1997) description (presented in chapter four) of his own professional training

experience, it is likely that training conversations did not speak to his personal socio-cultural context. Meaningful perturbations, intended to disturb his personal ecology into personal change, did not reach him. He was left feeling alienated. The training conversations existed in a closed cultural network of meaning, other than his own.

The Ecology of Healing

Why and how healing takes place in relationship between a psychotherapist (or healer, shaman, prophet) and the client is possibly more clearly explained by Maturana's theory of autopoiesis (1988) and the structural coupling of systems, than it is by Bateson's notions of ecology of mind or Capra's theories of connections between living systems. The above discussions have shown that relationship is crucial to the process of healing and the following section will attempt to suggest some explanations from Maturana's theory of ecology.

A reflection on Maturana's explanation of love and falling in love from his theory of Living Systems, inspires the proposal that this can be used to discuss processes of healing. According to Maturana (1988), each living system, in this case individuals such as Alice or Thabo, has a unique and closed structure that characterises it from any other individual. These living systems exist, or drift (Maturana, 1988), in a medium with which they need be congruent in order to survive. Living systems, existing or drifting in ecological proximity to any other individual, form part of the medium for that individual. As has already been stated there must be congruency between living systems and their medium, or context. When there is not congruency then there follows an adaptation process until mutual survival is possible. In this way persons influence each other to change. When two individuals fall in love they change in a way that they are able to share a domain of existence for the time that they are in love. They exist in a state of mutual acceptance (Maturana, 1988). Kenny explains Maturana's conception of love as being "a path of (structural)

drift together. Within this co-ontogenic drift new phenomena will arise immediately” (Kenny, 1989, part 1, para. 2; Maturana, 1988).

It is possible to draw parallels between the social condition called love and the social, coordinated domain of activities entailing mutual acceptance (Maturana, 1988), called healing. The therapist is required to have skills that allow her to facilitate the relationship, through conversation, within the bounds of its purpose. However, for the duration of the therapeutic relationship the therapist and client continue in a co-ontogenic drift in which new phenomena are encouraged to arise although the predictability of exactly when, how and what, may be low (Kenny, 1989).

Attributing causal factors to psychopathology is, according to Kenny, reductionistic and the categorising of psychopathology owes more to the “consensual confines of ...[the] observer community” than the behaviour of the observed (final section, para. 8). According to Maturana, healing happens spontaneously within the client when the conditions of the relationship environment are conducive to change. This implies a mutual acceptance and, in lay terms, a connectedness within a shared understanding.

Conclusion

The Stories and in places other texts presented in this thesis have been explored from an ecological perspective. The focus has been on therapeutic and research possibilities in psychology. The explorations seem to have yielded more fit-ting possibilities offering congruent solutions to human problems in socio-cultural contexts. The following chapter will provide some concluding comments to the study.