



Re-imagining narrative therapy: An ecology of magic and mystery for the maverick in the age of branding

By David Epston

Introduction

Michael completed *Maps of Narrative Practice* in 2007: my co-authors, co-researchers and I had completed *Biting the Hand that Starves You* in 2004. We were determined, as we put it, “to start all over again!” We believed it was just a matter of time and circumstance before we would. We kept telling each another we couldn’t wait. we finally agreed on a date we were both sure would not be deferred as some in the past had to be. we had some cursory conversations that I mentally set down in my mind as a kind of ‘to do list’. Our inaugural meeting didn’t take place because Michael died here in San Diego three weeks before our scheduled rendezvous. I flew instead to Adelaide for his funeral.

There were two matters he lamented which have haunted me ever since:

- Firstly, “Why aren’t the next generation coming up with novel ideas or practices? what are we doing wrong?”
- Secondly, and he told me this with deep consternation, “Why does everyone sound exactly like me? Why don’t they sound like themselves?”

His concerns have stayed with me over the last decade. Today, I seek to disburden myself and request you share them with me.

Michael met with marcela polanco in Adelaide in 2008 to discuss the translation of *Maps of Narrative Practice* in to her Colombian Spanish. Here is Marcela’s account of that meeting:

“When our plates were nearly empty, Michael asked if I had more questions for him. Out of nowhere I managed to say, “Yes, I have one more”. My gaze just rested on my plate, but I wouldn’t have been surprised if I had turned to Michael and found a puzzled look on his face, as if he would have been considering, “A translator who has no questions of the author’s text?” Then I proceeded: “What is it that you hope out of the process of your work being translated into many other languages?” He quickly responded, “Nothing.” Before the next second he said, “Well, yes, actually I have hopes. I hope that the spirit of narrative therapy remains.”

What are these spirits which I have purposefully pluralized? Here’s what immediately springs to mind: enthusiasm, irreverence, improvisation, imagination, righteous indignation at injustice, solidarity with those who suffer, collective creativity and a fascination with the mystery and magic at the heart of everyday life. There are more of course.





Let me tell you three stories to illustrate what I am referring to in the abovementioned:

Story one: The magic of the other

This is a conversation shared by Tom Carlson, myself, Ana Huerta Lopez who was then a student at North Dakota State University and her mother, Maria Guadalupe Huerta. Maria is commenting on a daylong conference on Insider Witnessing Practices:

MARIA: Descubriste la magia de la otra persona – conociste a tu cliente y pudiste expresar la magia que has sentido en su presencia. Pudiste reconocer la magia en tu cliente y te identificaste en la magia que ella a vivido. No asumiste cosas de tu cliente porque tomaste tiempo en estudiar y conocer tu cliente, y que era significativa en su vida. Tu aceptaste la persona que conociste y como era ella. La escuchaste sin rechazó. Pudiste encontrar y reconocer cosas en común entre ella y tu.

Trans.: You (Tom Carlson) discovered the magic of the other person. You came to an intimate knowing of your client and were able to express the magic that you felt in her presence. You were able to recognize (or more precisely translated as “become intimately acquainted with”) the magic in your client and the magic of her life. You didn’t assume things about your client because you took the time to study her and come to intimately know her and what was significant in her life. You were able to accept her and come to know her as if you were her. You listened to her without judgment, rejection or shaming. You were able to find and come to have a shared experience together.

DAVID: To discover the magic of the other person- is there anything more fateful than to do so? And moreover “to express the magic that you felt in her presence” directly to her? Surely, this is the ‘heart and soul’ of what we are calling ‘Insider Witnessing Practices,’ is it not? Maria, no one could possibly have described this more precisely and acutely than you have. To you, we will always be grateful. I cannot thank you enough.

ANA: That’s it! This is the heart and soul of this work – of these practices – this is how it comes to life and carries out such genuine transformations. I don’t think there is anything more momentous and significant than to discover the magic of the other person and in return to express that magic directly to them – how incredibly astonishing! Is there anything more beautiful than this?

Story two: Imagination in discovery

I awoke on July 22, 2015, as usual to the Radio New Zealand news to hear that an 80 year-old man, Ray Flynn, suffering incipient blindness from macular degeneration, which up until then was regarded as incurable, had his sight restored virtually overnight by a revolutionary ‘bionic eye’ implant in Manchester, England. I rushed to my computer to find out if this was Frank Werblin’s ‘bionic eye’. Sure enough it was his patent.





Okay, who is Frank Werblin and what in the world has this got to do with this address?

Frank is married to my cousin Suzanne Pregerson, a narrative therapist in Berkeley. Frank was then Professor of Neuroscience at University of California Berkeley. Some ten years or more ago, Suzanne and I planned to meet Frank at the 'Werblin Lab' and go out for lunch together. When we arrived, no one was there so Suzanne started to show me around. Only a few minutes had elapsed, when Frank and the fellows – post-doctoral and pre-doctoral students – arrived back from a nearby presentation. Suzanne began to introduce me to each of them. I was in the very middle of a handshake when we heard what I considered to be an alarming voice and feet rushing towards us at speed down the corridor. What was being shouted aloud was anything but alarming! It was excitement!

"I've got an idea!"

There was a heightened sense of anticipation and Shelley, whose hand I was then shaking, quickly extricated his from mine and seemed to wish to race off somewhere. Before he did, he asked me, "Do you want to come?"

"Where?"

"To an idea meeting!"

Not having a clue what I was in for, I went along for the ride.

When everyone quickly seated themselves, the person with the idea immediately started speaking excitedly, what could be described as on the good side of mania, while drawing a diagram on a white board. What caught my interest were the exchanges between Frank and the fellows in response to the presented 'idea' and I had the wit to quickly begin to write down as much as I might in a notebook I had with me.

Here is how Frank led the conversation:

"What's the question? Guess at it? What do you think is the most significant question you could be asking about 'the idea'? How can we use it? What is the first thought that comes to mind? Now that's a question! What would you expect to see with this idea that you wouldn't see with another idea? What is the question?"

One of the youngest fellows proposed they duplicate some existing research. Frank admonished him:





"If you did that you would probably get the quickest PhD ever in my lab! But you will never become a famous retinal neuro-scientist."

The fellow then fell silent and the mania was renewed. That idea didn't turn to be a 'good idea' and as such was abandoned.

Frank then told what he referred to as "The history of discovery in our lab... It just happens and we were clever enough to see it". Frank mentioned that what was required as much as anything else was 'courage'. They re-engaged in a wider conversation with Frank proposing:

"Let's set that aside and ask the bigger question— what's missing? What would we really like to learn?" And then he set the terms for such a discussion, "Let's fly away with it. Let your imaginations fly!"

Story three: Between craft and artistry

My third tale exemplifies Michael's irreverence and improvisation. It comes from Michael's (2011) *Narrative Practice: Continuing the Conversations*.

Michael writes about Dianne and her parents Joe and Ellen who have consulted him regarding Dianne's admissions to hospital over the past eighteen months, several precipitated by suicide gestures and others an outcome of concerns for her general safety. She was being treated in hospital for depression. Despite all of the above, Joe and Ellen's concerns about Dianne's predicament have not abated. They describe her to Michael as withdrawn, expressionless, disinterested and "off the air" most of the time. Dianne responds minimally to Michael's inquiries; she is guarded, and her expressions remained wooden throughout the early part of the meeting.

Michael perseveres in his customary droll manner, commenting to readers:

I am not sure where to go next. I try opening my mouth in the hope I will hear myself saying something wise but to no avail. At this point, I find myself wishing that there were a therapist in the room... I finally have an idea and can't figure out why it took so long in the coming. I say to Dianne that it is my guess that something is making it difficult for her to be present at this meeting and to join with us in this discussion about her life. I ask her if this is the case. No response. I say "Well, it is my guess that there is something telling you not to trust me, which I suppose is pretty reasonable, since we have only just met and you don't yet have a good measure of me". Not a flicker from Dianne. "And", I say, "My guess is that it would be difficult for you to imagine that anyone else could understand".

In response to this speculation, it is my sense that Dianne has become yet more stilled. Perhaps she is even holding her breath a little. This encourages me. I say: "I guess that





whatever it is that is telling you not to trust me doesn't even want you to listen to what I am saying, or even to give me the benefit of the doubt in any way at all". A flicker of expression on Dianne's face. "Well, if this is the case, I would like you to know that I am used to these sort of tactics". I now sense a minimal degree of engagement with Dianne. I ask a question of her: "Could it even be that whatever is telling you not to trust me is also calling me names?" Dianne registers surprise. "Do you know that this is something that happens to me a lot, and that I am used to this as well?"

Dianne quickly averts my gaze, which has the effect of encouraging me further. "Yes, this is true," I say. "You wouldn't believe the lengths that are gone to, and the names that are used against me at times in order to prevent people from talking to me about what is happening for them. Anyhow, I want to assure you that I am used to this and wouldn't want you to be embarrassed by this." "Would you believe that I like to collect the names that I am called? I compile lists of them. Some people have stamp collections, and I have these collections of names I have been called. I think of this as my stamp collection because they are names I have been stamped with".

Now Dianne grins. So, I say: "I would like to go and get my most recent list and read them to you. While I am reading this list, would you be prepared to listen to it, because I would like to know if there is anything else that you have heard about me, any other names that are not on this list and that I might add to my collection?" Dianne grins again. "I would appreciate any offering. Believe me, none is too petty".

I begin reading the list. Dianne is telling me that I had most of the ones she is familiar with, and then seems happy to share two names that I can add to my collection. Now these specimens were particularly petty. "Surely", I say, "They could do better than this". Nonetheless, I was gleeful about this opportunity to extend on my collection and suddenly everyone in the room seems relieved (White, 2011, p.27).

I tell this story as an initial attempt to distinguish between craft and artistry, adhering to maps and making maps. As well I wish to introduce Michael's reference to these antithetical terms by way of his analogy of jazz musicianship— learning the scales which according to him precedes learning how to improvise.

Now I turn to the jazz musician, Chick Corea, who speaks eloquently to the conundrum at the heart of his jazz improvisation, which I consider equally applies to us. Chick described it in these terms:

How do you define improvisation? That is hard to put in to words but decisions have to be made- what kind of rules and what kind of freedoms? That's how we come to make decisions as to how much improvisation there will be (Corea, 2016).





For me, what kind of rules and what kind of freedoms will decide whether narrative therapy teaches scales only as a regulatory regime like so many contemporary psychological practices and limits our freedoms and our imaginations. What I am proposing here today is an ecology for the maverick¹ in an age of branding.

Let me take the veterans back to the ‘beginnings’ of narrative therapy as well as introduce newcomers to ‘a history for the future’. I distinguish a history for the future from a history of the past which the philosopher Neil Postman (1994) described as:

Produced when an event is completed, when it is unlikely that a new and more robust phase will occur... In any event, they (historians) find autopsies easier to do than progress reports (p.5).

A history for the future is a prerequisite for narrative therapy’s ‘re-imagination’. As far as I am concerned narrative therapy is alive and well and a very long way from admission to some dusty ‘museum for the history of past psychotherapies.’

The first public appearance of narrative therapy was at the 1985th Australian family therapy conference where Michael and I jointly presented a workshop called ‘Consulting your Consultant’s Consultants’. Now go figure that out! But surely it was an attempt to de-throne some of the mandates of the contemporary psychotherapies, many of which were founded on the transference relationship. We proposed instead that we consider what we do as a ‘gift exchange’ or what Michael referred to later on as ‘a two-way street’. But what I believe characterized us was the type of knowing we appealed to, not ‘authoritative knowing’ but what the Russian philosopher Bakhtin (1996) referred to as “carnavalesque knowing” that subverts and de-crowns our taken for granted assumptions, a “licensed transgression” (Eagleton, 2013) that clears the ground for new ideas. Eagleton proposes a realm for that to take place: the imaginative.

As The Canadian philosopher, John Ralston Saul (2001) writes:

Imagination protects us from the temptation of premature conclusions; the temptation of certainty and the fantasy of fixed truth. What’s more, it seems to draw us forward by using this prolonged uncertainty to alternatively leap ahead and then enfold our other qualities... into a new, inclusive vision of the whole. Then just as we ‘think’ we understand, it leaps ahead again in to more uncertainty. And so imagination appears to be naturally inclusive and inconclusive (p. 116).

At the same time, let us take heed of Saul’s (2001) warning: “As I said, enforced loyalty to declared truth is the way to marginalize the imagination” (p. 121).

¹ Thank you to Pierre Blanc-Sahnoun for suggesting the word maverick to me.





In 1990, Michael and I were invited to Sonoma State University in Santa Rosa, California to do the first week-long narrative training programme on North American soil. Just as we began, we were asked to tell the assembled attendees what was different about narrative therapy from other current therapies. Michael and I looked at each other blankly and somewhat sheepishly asked if we could be alone for twenty or so minutes to consider this. To our astonishment, it took us only ten minutes or more. We came up with a list of nine questions— here are the first three:

1. How does this model/theory/practice 'see' persons?
2. How does it press you to conduct yourself with people who seek your help?
3. How does it press them to conduct themselves with you who offer help? (Freedman & Combs, 1997)

In summary, how are we to come to know the other? And I would suggest: through the magic and mystery at the heart of ordinary life.

Narrative Means to Therapeutic Ends (1990) was closely followed in 1992 by our *Experience, Contradiction, Narrative and Imagination* (1992). Please note the fourth word in the title: imagination. It reappears once more in David Marsten, Laurie Markham and my *Narrative Therapy in Wonderland: Connecting with Children's Imaginative Know-how* (2016). On this occasion, we concocted the neologism 'Children's Imaginative Know-how'.

If there were anything approximating a manifesto for narrative therapy, you could find it briefly stated in the introduction to *Narrative Means*. Here it is for you again:

We have been steadfast in our refusal to name our work in any consistent manner. We do not identify with any particular 'school' of family therapy, and are strongly opposed to the idea of our own contribution being named as a school. We believe that such a naming would only subtract from our freedom to explore various ideas and practices... We regard (this work) to be an 'open book'... However, we are drawing attention to the fact that one of the aspects of this work that is of central importance to us is the spirit of adventure. We aim to preserve this spirit, and know that if we accomplish this, our work will continue to evolve in ways that are enriching to our lives, and to the lives of those persons who seek our help (White & Epston, 1990, p.9).

The re-imagining of narrative therapy that I am proposing here today asks of us, both veterans and newcomers, to reinvigorate what we referred to then as the 'spirit of adventure' and by doing so we call back Michael's irreverent, maverick 'spirit of adventure' forevermore. The original meaning of 'maverick' refers to unbranded cattle that have gone astray. Applied to a person it means "one who thinks in an unorthodox manner".





Back to this manifesto, we then go on to allude to how we have gone about this and how we propose to continue doing so:

And besides our sense is that most of the 'discoveries' that have played a significant part in the development of our practices have been made after the fact... with theoretical considerations assisting us to explore and extend the limits of our practices (White & Epston, 1990, p. 9).

Okay, it was somewhat childishly utopian in refusing to name what soon became known as 'narrative therapy' (try telling a book publisher that you haven't got a title to put on the book's cover!) But nevertheless, we were naively seeking to sustain our 'freedoms'. Freedom from what you might ask? From the 'rules' that Chick Corea referred to and Frank Werblin inspired his fellows to go astray of.

The period of time between 1995 and Michael's death was taken up with writing *Maps of Narrative Practice* (2007). Michael's project was a distillation of some of what he had set out on mid-1981 and systematically evolved ever since. But so extensive was his practice that it could not possibly have been contained in a single text. I would estimate Michael had easily twenty maps up his sleeve. In chapter 7 of his 2011 text, he refers to a 'map' to guide conversations with men who have perpetrated violence. In a 1986 paper co-authored with Fred Seymour, I suppose I could be credited for the first published use of the word 'map' in regard to systematically describing an approach to children/youth who steal.

One of my proudest moments was launching *Maps of Narrative Practice* (2007) at the International Conference of Narrative Therapy and community work in Kristiansand, Norway, June 2007. In my address I said:

He used 'maps' to reveal which way he is going and why he might head in this or that direction. At the same time, he warns that there are so many directions he might have headed in. Or that you might head in. This is no manual...no macdonaldization. This is an artist disclosing in the most congenial manner his mastery and his craft. At the same time he promises that one's craft precedes and makes possible the originality of the reader's eventual artistry.

Let's go back to what I wrote in my introduction to his 2011 book, *Narrative Practice: Continuing the Conversations* where I spoke to Michael:

Michael, you never cared to look over your genius but I would like to consider your genius in improvisation. In your scintillating and respectful conversation with Salvador Minuchin at the Evolution of Psychotherapy Conference in 2005, Sal kindly insisted that there was so much more to your practice than the ideas you pinned it on. You accepted this in principle by introducing the metaphor of jazz improvisation but locating that in





the craft of musicianship. You insisted that that comes first. Could we take this metaphor seriously? And if so, aren't we going to have to consider pedagogies relevant to improvisation, once a person has mastery of their craft?"

Maps of Narrative Practice has no reference to improvisation, but I wholeheartedly agree with what you said: "Everyone has to first learn how to play and only then can they improvise" (White, 2011, p. xxxiii-xxxiv).

After Michael's death, I placed in my mind a kind of moratorium on *Maps* and any projects Michael and I had considered out of reverence to him. For me, like many, it was as if *Maps* were now inviolate and should stand as a memorial to him. I now have come to realize that I wasn't thinking clearly when I confused his last published words as his final words. Not a word should be changed, nor should I even annotate my copy of the book. It should remain as it was without discussion, debate or generativity. And that it should stand on its own, without reference to any of the myriad of his earlier publications. I know for a fact Michael had no intention of the finalizing of narrative therapy. He did not intend *Maps* as the final word but as a designated halfway point along the way so that he could 'start all over again.'

My homage and moratorium were quite contrary to what I knew of Michael's intentions for this book. In fact, it finally dawned on me this was as far as you could possibly get from what I knew of Michael's intentions. Michael had had to circumscribe his thinking for some time to collate *Maps* and distill them down to manageable, teachable, and doable forms for practitioners. He was determined to write an accessible book, as his prose style had been criticized as opaque and hard going. *Maps of Narrative Practice* (2007) was a masterpiece of such an ambition. The text was packed to the gunnels. The point I am trying to make here is that there was just so much more to Michael than its 304 pages allowed. To my way of thinking (and I never discussed this with him) that the 'Maps' are not, by a very long stretch, the territory of narrative therapy practice.

Michael had a talent for the systematization of his practice. It does indeed require meticulous care. If the 'Maps' are not the territory, what relationship do they have to such a territory? My suggestion would be this—that the 'Maps' take you to un-mapped territories and enable you to find your way there expeditiously. However, should you travel beyond where the extant 'Maps' go, you have some responsibility when you return to report back on where you went and what you found, so others can travel in the same direction.

And sooner or later, a mapper will map such a territory, allowing so many more to travel there and enlarge the terra cognita or known lands of narrative therapy practice. I would suspect such 'maps' may be far more modest and travel far less distances than his *Maps* of 2007."

I wrote that in 2010 for the introduction of his 2011 posthumous book.





Michael, I am now speaking to you almost eight years from the date in San Diego. We couldn't have predicted how the neo-liberal regimes of thought have infected all the therapies and the worlds we live in, and already artificial intelligence is working on robotizing therapy. My friend, David Codyre here in Auckland tells me that the Mental Health Services are investing in this and that potentially the Watson IBM computer could, believe it or not, be 'taught' to have narrative conversations with people!

Let me tell you about a federally funded service for youth to which I consult in West Sydney. You will recall it as the most marginalized area in Sydney. Staff are provided with four manuals, and I am sure you could guess which they are: anxiety, depression, psychosis, and trauma. No manuals as you can see for poverty, racism, asylum seekers and refugees who have fled war zones, unemployment, or for the indigenous Aboriginal people. I am very sorry to tell you that 'maps' in some instances have been eclipsed by the trend to manualization of our avocations. And believe it or not, there was even a narrative therapy app in the United States for \$5 or so. It seems to have failed to go viral I am glad to say. The watchword in every manualization of a practice is 'fidelity'. Do you get it? If the practice doesn't work, you have failed to be faithful to the manual. The genius and inventor of virtual reality, Jaron Lanier (2007), in the different context of musical composition, refers to this as being "locked in", which denies the imagination and forbids creativity. The 'freedoms' required for our imaginations to re-imagine narrative therapy have now become very precious. And we may have to secure them appealing to a greater fidelity to the 'spirits' I referred to in order to respond to your concerns that narrative therapy had become uncreative and why everyone sounded just like you and not themselves.

I am sure you would ask me the same question you always did, "What ideas are you thinking about?" Well, I am wondering if we haven't overlooked or perhaps taken for granted what may very well have been at the very 'heart' of narrative therapy practice. And I regret such matters couldn't and didn't find their way in to your *Maps*. How could they? If anyone could 'map' improvisation and the imaginative, they would have done so, patented it and turned it into a very lucrative franchise by now.

Michael, let me remind you of marcela polanco's comments on translating us both (2011):

I found a poetic resonance. It is not a language that tells about lived experience; rather it is a language that once again brings the lived experience to life. It is like a living vocabulary. Life is happening in the vocabularies, not besides them or prior to them. When I was translating a story, I was living it. The idea of time that says that this story happened before and is now being told was irrelevant.

In *Creativity in Times of Constraint: A Practitioner's Companion in Mental Health and Social Care* (2017), published with concerns that are very similar, Jim Wilson, the Scottish family therapist, writes:





Imagination invigorates serious conversation. To invite the play of ideas, with metaphor and story, fanciful associations and humour, loosens the ties of overly formulaic practice. To let go of standardized practices and protocols can be risky and one needs to feel secure enough as a practitioner to being to improvise as if on the spur of the moment (p.101).

In the introduction, Imelda McCarthy speaks of the “background noise” constraining the creativity of our colleagues working in the United Kingdom and Ireland: “It can be greater bureaucratisation, privatisation, models, manuals and measurements, surveillance and regulation, social disconnection and dehumanisation” (Wilson, 2017, p.xxiii)

Michael, let me remind you what I wrote in the Introduction of *Narrative Practice* (2011):

These papers direct our attention to your politics and ethics but you rarely commented on what I am calling the poetics of either your practice or your thinking in general. Perhaps for you, it was so taken for granted that it was just beside the point or tacit and beyond your own telling. Anyone who watched a videotape, read a text of yours or heard you speak couldn't help but marvel at the eloquence of your thought...

No one could plagiarize you, Michael, because your fingerprints were over everything you said or wrote. Surely you must have added several hundred questions to the library of therapy enquiry? And how many of your neologisms will turn up some day in the Oxford English Dictionary? It wasin the enchanting externalizing conversations with young people that I first marveled at your genius with your vocabularies. It was rare for you to say much that you had not previously invented.

Michael, don't you think we have to turn to poetics for this? After all, your words were at times mesmerizing and it was no surprise to me you drew upon Bachelard (the French philosopher of the Imagination) and the aesthetic metaphor of 'transport' as images for your narrative practice.

Recently, Michael, I have become aware of something else that has rarely, if ever, been mentioned in reference to narrative therapy— ‘aesthetics’ or the study of beauty. I was recently having dinner with my colleague Joan Campbell, family therapist and jazz musician, who attended my very first training in Auckland in 1984 and met you several times at your workshops here in New Zealand. We were reminiscing and without any prompting, she mentioned that she was drawn to narrative therapy because of its ‘beauty’. How uncanny as so many of our co-researchers/colleagues have also described Insider Witnessing Practices as ‘beautiful’, a terminology and a realm I hadn’t really previously considered before. Had you?





I asked Joan what she meant by this:

My initial thoughts are about things like an 'emotional response' and being moved/transported out of the ordinary, glimpsing something beyond, over the rainbow so to speak. I need to think more. Something about not being ever able to go back to what was before even though that 'before' is still there.

Michael, I have had further cause for the urgency of re-imagining narrative therapy at its very heart. Perhaps better put: one of the four chambers of the narrative therapy heart. And that is the consideration of poetics and aesthetics. Didn't we by 1985 insist upon this at least by implication? Surely as I have proposed elsewhere an externalizing conversation qualifies in socio-linguist MAK Halliday's terminology, as an 'anti-language', a conscious alternative to a majority language providing the means to contest and resist it. Have you ever met an English-speaker who 'naturally' speaks in an externalizing conversation? If I were ever to meet such a person, I would really cherish finding out how they came to do so. I do not consider a question you asked of us in your 1989 Process of Questioning Paper with its sub-title: "A therapy of literary merit?" (*Question mark!*) has been adequately broached. Perhaps in the re-imagination that I am proposing we might return to that question and zealously take it up on your behalf.

Michael, this reminds me too of the Wittgenstein (1921) quote we passed between us: "*The limits of my language are the limits of my mind. All I know is what I have words for.*"

I recently found my notes from "Against Method: Outline of an Anarchistic Theory of Knowledge" (1978), by the Austrian philosopher of science, Paul Feyerabend, who spoke about how one's capacity for innovation varies with the language one chooses. He insisted that invention cannot find voice in the normalized vocabulary of old ideas. Let me quote him:

We are of course obliged to appeal to the existing forms of speech that do not take counter-inductive speculation in to account and which must be distorted, misused or beaten in to new patterns in order to fit unforeseen situations. Without a constant misuse of language there cannot be any discovery (p.25).

Narrative therapy could be said to have "distorted, misused or beaten" the English language in to new patterns not so much to fit unforeseen situations but rather to provoke them. Might narrative therapy consider itself linguistic anarchy? What inspiration and comfort his ideas gave us in the 1980s. I still relish them. Is this why you were so concerned that people were copying and pasting your words rather than improvising their own?

Doesn't the Irish poet, Seamus Heaney, sum up what we got up to when he suggests what a poem does, "To place a counterreality in the scales— a reality which may be only imagined but nevertheless has weight because it is imagined within the gravitational pull of the actual and can therefore hold its own" (2002, p. 34).





In early April, 2008, I flew from Miami to Bogota, arriving exhausted just before sunrise. I was greeted by my ill-at-ease hosts who handed me several emails detailing Michael's circumstances and his grim prognosis. I was advised there was no sense in trying to see him again. That day I considered what I should do by asking myself what I imagined Michael might have wished me to do. His advice was to teach as 'hard' and as 'well' as I could. It gave me some solace to wonder if I was as earnest as I sought to be that I just might keep him alive. I engaged the 200 or so attendees with my fierceness of intent. That night John Winslade kindly phoned me to tell me Michael had died. What was I to do with the next day? I consulted myself. I would have Michael teach alongside me and I invoked him to join me with the same fierceness of intent. I more or less ventriloquized him.

Here is marcela's memory of translating us both:

While doing the translation I remember wanting to devour your words with great intrigue to learn as much as I could from Michael one last time...I felt he was there, through you...he hadn't left yet but this would be the last time we would hear him before his voice would leave us for good...

That night I felt a cramp in my right shoulder, so painful that the only way I could ease it was to sit in the bath and continually refresh the hot water. The pain persisted over the weekend until it became almost unendurable and finally I informed my sponsors of my plight. I had one more day teaching at a psychiatric hospital and they immediately booked me an appointment with a physiotherapist over lunch. I invited marcela to join me to translate. We had checked carefully that Sandra, the physiotherapist, knew nothing of my circumstances which made what followed exceptionally uncanny.

Sandra bustled in, dressed in professional attire, carrying a canvas bag of ultrasound gizmos and unpacked them as I lay, at her request, on the treatment table. As she turned and met my gaze, her eyes blazed wide open as if she had seen a ghost. That worried me. Was my condition far worse than I had thought? She emphatically declared: "Your brother died two days ago!" Shocked, I foolishly said the first thing that came to my mind: "What if it was my sister?" She seemed to scoff at my naivety: "Then it would have been your left shoulder!"

marcela was trying to alert me to the fact that she was very uneasy as she considered she was speaking to a professor and should show me due respect. So I had to preface each and every inquiry of mine by this prologue: "According to your knowledges, which I know nothing about, could you advise me about this or that.." In our second meeting she became more expansive and her advice, which I had earnestly sought, was:

It seems that you and your brother have done and gone through a lot together. And that both of you had a very special relationship of togetherness and you looked up to him. And now because of the death of your old brother, perhaps you are putting all the





weight on your shoulders of the responsibilities of taking on his place, feeling committed to continue what your brother left unfinished.

And then she authoritatively urged me to brush off such responsibilities and with it the pain would also be brushed off by demonstrating this in mime. I also asked Sandra as to what advice she would give me as to how I should conduct myself in Mexico. Her advice, again unequivocal, was to swim in the sea at my earliest opportunity.

The next day, I flew to Xalapa, in Mexico, several hours drive inland from Vera Cruz to visit Marta Campillo and meet Peggy Sax there who had previously intended to join us and decided, as a consequence of Michael's death, to keep to this. Marta picked me up at the airport with Peggy who had preceded me and announced that we were going to spend a day at her friends in a fishing village on the Gulf of Mexico, and swim in the sea.

What a relief!

While there, Marta invited us both to join her on an Aztec archaeological site nearby. Two basalt pillars about 1000 feet high strangely loomed straight up from the otherwise flat coastal plain. We were being told of the Aztec ritual whereby there was a fierce competition to be eligible to be sacrificed to ensure the fertility of next year's crops, when I looked over at the other peak nearby. I had a vision of Michael completing a very difficult ascent on his bicycle. At the top he stopped and waved to me; I waved back. That was the last time I saw him.

Michael, you aspired to live by the Foucaultian notion of "movement of thought." Rabinow and Rose (2003) described this methodology of Foucault as "an anti-methodology":

Thus the practice of criticism which we learn from Foucault would not be a methodology. It would be a movement of thought that invents, makes use of, and modifies conceptual tools as they are set in relation with specific practices and problems that they themselves form in new ways. When they have done this work, without regret, they can be recycled or even discarded (p. 27).

This is in sharp contrast to other notions of methodology, so familiar to therapies getting a bit long in the tooth which develop 'canons' and might be called 'canonical'. By that I mean to practice is primarily to be ruled and regulated by "a principle or criterion" (Collins Concise Dictionary, 1991). What might have been thought of it at one time as considerations transform in to 'rules and regulations'.

This is what the philosopher of science Thomas Kuhn (1967) in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* referred to as to how 'revolutionary sciences' over time become 'normal sciences', which are left to 'mop up' before being replaced by another 'revolutionary science. If I were to predict when that would take place in any contemporary therapy, I would say around twenty-





five years from the date of its discovery. It is a rather predictable path to its obsolescence. If 1985 was the year of the origination of narrative therapy, then its 'use by' date was looming around 2010. Michael and I had wisely proposed to preempt that, to 'start all over again' in 2008.

Going back to Chick Corea's definition of improvisation and the balance between the rules and the freedoms and how over time there is a shift in favour of the rules: Shouldn't we resist such regulatory regimes, from both without and within?

I believe that Michael would enjoin us to learn how to 'map' so we ourselves could 'map the unmapped' and continually extend the known territory of narrative therapy practice, but to do so with the requisite meticulous diligence and rigor that informed his own practice. A quotation Michael consistently referred to over the years was one he borrowed from Lionel Trilling. It had to do with his conviction that "copying originates." I have no doubt that Michael's copying was a kind of origination as that was his purpose in scrutinizing his practice. He always was looking to inaugurate the new.

For that reason, I would want to add what Michael took for granted—copying originates only if that is your express intention. That is, to look for those random and chance events that are brought about by novel circumstances, to cherish them and elaborate upon them next chance you get. Perhaps to tentatively describe it to yourself so next time around, you could try this 'route' out again, knowing that many reiterations are required to draw up a 'map' for others to follow. How many map-makers does narrative therapy require if 'Maps' are not to become regarded as sacrosanct relics rather than the 'scales' preliminary to 'improvisation'?

It is not surprising that Michael used 'map' as an analogy to describe his reflective practice. A map, in the simplest sense of the word, is the means by which one finds a way from one place to another. And over time, the elegance and economy of how such conversations went from here to there became mystifying, so much so that many watching were bewildered and, I suspect, began to wonder if they had seen magic or a trick of magic. Michael resented such imputations about his practice, knowing as I did just how much he had practised, practised, and practised, but always by way of reflection on his practice. Michael was entirely unsatisfied with his practice as 'tacit knowledge.' He always tried to find words to describe it, at first to himself, and then, when he was more assured, to others.

Michael's reflective practice refused to leave his knowing in the action; he insisted upon a map to guide his future practice, no matter how hard it was, how long it took, or how many ended up trashed and replaced by more suitable revisions. But again and again, he subjected his practice to the same style of mapping as before. I witnessed continuous revisions as one map succeeded another, each one more elegant and economical. By economical, I mean taking less time and effort to go from one place to the other so that at times it appeared as if he and his conversational partners had leapt as if by magic. You had every right to marvel and ask yourself





how did they get from where the conversation you were observing began to where it ended up? To answer that question, you would have needed to travel the same distance by the same series of maps that had preceded the current one.

There was another advantage to his mapping that could not have happened if he had not mapped. He would be as interested in finding those junctures between where the conversation/inquiry had set out and where it went astray, got bogged down or dead-ended. Here again, he would meticulously and zealously apply himself to see if he could imagine a way to make this transition less troublesome, and persevere until he had something original on hand. To do so, he might rehearse any number of possibilities to try out a different enquiry or sequence of enquiries the next time a conversation seemed to be following this map and heading toward this selfsame dead end. I believe that such problematic points inspired him to invent the new as a kind of bridge over the juncture where you strongly suspected you would have lost your way and been required to backtrack.

Let me speak in more detail to Michael's poetics and aesthetics:

Poetics comes from the ancient Greek verb 'potiein', which means to make or create". Bill Randall considers that the 'word' poetics is "uniquely suited to describe human development because it implies activity, and emphasizes the creative agency in what we do as we interpret our lives. Definable simply as 'the creation of meaning' (Freeman, 2001, p. 297), poetics encompasses as well the continual re-creation of meaning. Accordingly, like a literary story which we read and re-read, a life story is meaning-filled....(p. 148).. "poetics implies not just creativity but purpose, and it is this continuous purposeful creativity.....(p. 149) that Randall speaks of as 'ordinary wisdom (Randall, 2007, p.XX).

Miller Mair (2012) wrote of a "poetry of personal inquiry" that entails enchantment, "the marriage of feeling and imagination:

By poetry I do not mean short lines on a page that may or may not rhyme. I am referring to an approach to living that involves imaginative fluency rather than conventional objectivity... In referring to enchantment, I do not mean being put under a spell by a witch or wizard. I mean recognizing that consciousness and life can be raised to a different level: filled with new meaning; full of delight, beauty, and poetry. Our lives, in this sense, are enchanted when we are touched by beauty or by the inflow of new meaning so that we are able to see and feel more than the obvious and the objectively given, to what may be beyond and through what is immediately present (p.185).

Mair speaks similarly of 'ordinary magic'.





And above all else, Bakhtin (1983) refers to the “originality of ourselves” and calls engaging with an other as a species of love, “to linger over the particularity of the other.”(p. 64). This involves taking a loving interest in the other. I will quote from Caryl Emerson's (1983) clarification of what “love” means to Bakhtin because I believe Michael could easily have written this as well:

What marks a 'true love experience' is nothing possessive or erotic— and certainly nothing neurotic or compulsive. Rather, love is an urgent curiosity, almost more cognitive than emotional. It is an intensification and concentration of attention that enriches the beloved over time (p. 113).

The best way I can think of restoring Michaels’ ‘ordinary magic’ is to remind ourselves of his poetics and aesthetics as the means by which we come to 'know' those who consult us.

It was exactly at the sound of the word ‘pedagogy’ in my next paragraph that Ann, after 4 hours of copyediting this address so far, slapped down the remaining pages.

“Dude, enough already! Give them a break!” Startled, indignant and then relieved, I agreed to desist and write it out in a longer publication.

At least let me close this with a moral tale:

Story four: A moral tale

Our dear friend, Walter Bera, has just arrived from Minneapolis. His first night, Ann took him out to our backyard to gaze at the Southern Cross, a constellation of stars only visible in the Southern Hemisphere. Immediately, Walter whipped out his smartphone and enthusiastically showed Ann a map of the constellations. “Forget the gizmo, Walter! Look up at the stars!” Walter tried to interest her in the miraculous properties of this app. Ann insisted. Finally Walter looked up just as a shooting star streaked across the sky. They looked at each other and burst out laughing.

Thank you.

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