

Momentos bomba: the explosive effects of metaphor in the therapeutic re-storying of human lives

Jeannette Samper A¹. and José Antonio Garcíandía²

1Sistemas Humanos, Bogotá, 2Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, Bogotá

ABSTRACT

In this article the authors' purpose is to illustrate how the client - therapist interaction creates an ethnic culture (Etnia Terapéutica) with unique language and procedures. In this therapeutic exchange powerful moments of change occur (Momentos Bomba) when words and images shared by members of the system are used by the therapist in the construction of a metaphor that instantly triggers new ways of looking at past experiences. The explosive effects of these metaphors stimulate a re-looking and a re-thinking of problem situations such that change takes place.

En éste artículo pretendemos mostrar cómo en el intercambio terapéutico se genera una etnia cultural (Etnia Terapéutica) particular de los encuentros. En ella es posible que sucedan momentos (Momentos Bomba) en los cuales a partir de elementos del cliente y del terapeuta se construyen metáforas lo suficientemente significativas para modificar hacia el cambio, la visión de las situaciones disfuncionales. De modo tal que a partir de ello, el cliente pueda resignificar el pasado como fuente de lo que será una nueva forma de pensar y actuar en relación a las disfuncionalidades.

INTRODUCTION

As therapists working in Bogotá, Colombia in a context of war and violence, we face a difficult task in building therapeutic relationships and conversations that can create new meanings powerful enough to counteract stories of impotence shared by our clients. In the last decade, SISTEMAS HUMANOS, a center for Systemic Teaching and Training has invited important professionals to share their ideas and practices. In his second visit to Colombia in 1994, Heinz Von Forester spoke about the Blind Spots, Socratic Ignorance and their connection with Cybernetics "...the science of defensible metaphors". In his own words, Blind Spots occur when "One does not see that one does not see" and Socratic Ignorance is related to a position where "I know that I don't know; but many don't even know that." (Von Forester, 1994) This "not knowing" and "not seeing" position developed our curiosity and our intent of asking questions that allowed us to see and know what was unseen and unknown both to the consultants and ourselves.

The metaphor of the MOMENTO BOMBA developed in our therapeutic practice when we discovered the power of metaphor in removing "blind spots" that were maintaining our clients' suffering. One of our consultants referred to the effects of the metaphors as "illuminations of meaning, explosions where tension is released and new understandings come forth.... The excitement of unexpected yet desired possibilities" (2000, Client's personal communication). In this creative, collaborative and therapeutic conversation we constructed a new metaphor that described this meaningful moment, the instant of passing from darkness to light, from

feeling stuck to experiencing movement, as similar to a “big bang”. The experiencing we were bringing forth was one we thought could be similar to the “Big Bang” metaphor that is used by Astronomers to describe the explosion that initiated the expansive growth process of the universe. Our consultant helped us to understand the transformative effects of our metaphors as a similar explosion of possibilities of action and meaning. Frank J. Barrett and David L. Cooperrider describe metaphors as “an invitation to see the world anew. ... a way of seeing something as if it were something else. Because metaphor can instantaneously fuse two separate realms of experience, it is transformative. Good metaphors provoke new thought, excite us with novel perspectives, vibrate with multivocal meanings, and enable people to see the world with fresh perceptions not possible in any other way.” (1990, p.222) Their description of the power of metaphor resembles closely what we came to refer to as “Momentos Bomba”.

It may be important to mention that in the Spanish language and culture the word BOMBA has several meanings. One of them of course is when the word is used as a noun that names a destructive object. A second usage is also a noun and refers to the decorative and playful object; the balloon. Another meaning and experience is created when the word BOMBA is used as an adjective to describe moments of excitement and lots of fun. Our metaphor of “Momentos Bomba” is related to this last meaning; the type of joy that comes with a meaningful experience. Our “Momento Bomba” is a Big Bang experience where the symptom is rapidly deconstructed and new possibilities come forth offering new light, new pathways and new feelings.

We have also experienced that this metaphor has allowed us to create, through language, a new experience that contrasts with the surrounding context of war and violence where feelings of doom were developed.

The Explosive Effects of Metaphor and the Re-storying of Chronicity in Therapy

We would like to share several client-therapist interactions that highlight the transformative power of metaphor in re-focusing the clients understanding of their problems and enabling them to move beyond the problem story and re-author their identities and their lives. (Epston, 1992). Client names and certain elements of their situation have been changed in order to assure confidentiality.

Too Much Love ?

In the first case Teresa, a 47 year old recently divorced mother of Italian descent comes to therapy with her 13 year old son, in despair because “Marco and I cannot live together happily... he tries to control my life and I can’t successfully control his... he gets everything he wants and still we don’t have a moment of peace ... he is demanding, irresponsible ... he is failing at school although he is gifted , and doesn’t have any friends ... so he wants me to be with him in his free time.” Marco says “ mother screams and criticizes me, she is never home when I need her, she says I am demanding and angry... of course I’m angry, she comes into my room whenever she wants ... I don’t have any privacy... if she’s not with me during the weekends I have nothing to

do... I don't have friends. "Teresa wants " to learn how to live in love and peace". Marco does not want to come to "another" therapy.

The first two sessions are taken up by accusations that mother and son have to tell about each other. Mother emphasizes the immense value placed by her ethnic and religious group in producing male offspring; making it very important for her that this son "turn out right". Marco is Teresa's only son from her second marriage and " my chance to be the good mother that I wasn't with my daughter... she came from a different seed Marco's father is a good seed, . . . but he was very possessive and dependant... I discovered he was using drugs, so we eventually ended in divorce. I think Marco has not forgiven me for this."

Mother and son arrive late and in the middle of a quarrel to our third session. Mother is yelling about having to fight to get Marco out of bed as they rush in with coffee and donuts in their hands. As we are about to begin, Teresa turns to thirteen year old Marco and firmly orders him to go to the bathroom,

Mother (Mo): "Marco, please go to the bathroom!"

Marco (S): Visibly upset, Marco angrily asks " Why? ... I don't need to go!" Mo: " YES YOU DO... AND YOU MUST.. NOW!! Go to the bathroom before we begin Observing this difficult mother son interaction, and remembering previous complaints regarding mutual invasions of privacy, the therapist asks the following question. Therapist (TH) -" Teresa, how do you know that Marco needs to "poop" ? Mo:-"I just know I know what he needs"

TH.- "Oh! (Así que ustedes cagan por el mismo culo?) So, you poop and share an anus? The two of you are connected in such a manner that you know when he needs to "poop"? Like Siamese twins? you are joined together."

Marco breaks out in nervous laughter and rapidly scans the room in anxious suspense; obeys his mother and then comes and sits close to the therapist. He is now interested in the session. The therapist turns to Marco and asks:

TH: - "Marco, how does your mother know that you need to "poop"?"

S:- "I don't know... "

Mo.: (surprised) "Doctor what are you trying to tell me?"

TH. - " It seems to me that only if the two of you are joined together, like siamese twins, is it possible for you to know for sure when Marco he needs to poop".

Marco moves his chair closer to the therapist as if to confirm a newly experienced alliance while Teresa asks for permission to light a cigarette and the conversation continues.

At the next session Teresa says she has been giving a lot of thought to the "pooping metaphor".

Mo: - " I have had that image in my mind all week, and many ideas come to mind. I have always loved Marco very much and have wanted to be close to him and protect him, especially after the divorce. Marco's father is a good seed. I knew that when we got married, but I didn't know of his drug problem. I also found out that his father is manic depressive and I want to protect Marco. I didn't think that love could be experienced as an invasion and... I wanted to be a better mother than I was with my daughter... I was distant with her and wanted to love and be

close to Marco ... I don't know how to create independence and not threaten our love for each other. Since our last session, every time I start to control Marco I remember the image of CG "pooping through a shared anus" and stop.

Marco also shares comments of efforts he has made "to do things on my own". The metaphor of the shared anus has triggered personal and private reflections regarding their closeness and need of privacy.

As the symptoms are placed in a different context they are *reframed* and acquire new meanings (Watzlawick, 1992). Teresa describes "giving orders and trying to control Marco as a way of showing her maternal love, assuring that Marco (the good seed) will grow well." For the first time she questions herself and the therapists "if it is possible to love so much that it is not good." Teresa mentions previous therapies that had not helped her understand the relation between love and intimacy and talks of controlling her words and actions by thinking of the "pooping" metaphor. Both feel the tension between them has "magically" diminished.

Therapy becomes the place where it is possible to talk and play about "pooping on my own" (at a symbolic level) without engaging in battle (at the behavioral level) and new possibilities of meaning and action are created. The therapeutic culture or "ethnic system" is born. Mother and son talk about taking charge of their private matters and play with different degrees of

togetherness and separateness. A new set of words emerges that describe their interactions; they now speak of meddling, sharing, inviting, "pooping in private" and doing things on their own. The metaphoric images become lenses (Hoffman, 1990) that help mother and son reflect on ways for transforming the invasion of each other's privacy.

Comprehending with Deafness

Reinaldo is a 30 year old single male that shares a story he is convinced cannot be changed. Reinaldo is a middle child, born with a partial deafness that was not identified until he was an adult. His family knew he was different and they had little hope of his ever becoming an independent, self-supporting adult. He describes a life of isolation as well as being teased and ridiculed by peers... and by his older brother whom he describes as "the first born, the preferred son, probably because he was the first... and he was allowed to bully me. He was given a better education, he went to law school... since I was born *second* I know I will never be able to *be first*... at anything." As the therapist and client explore the meanings of "being first" he describes two counts that are against him; "I was born second so I can never be the first, and I can't work because of my hearing loss." Reinaldo answers questions that lead to describing specific childhood episodes.

THERAPIST (TH) - The therapist searching for openings, asks "How did you manage at school if you couldn't hear?"

REINALDO (R) - "I always sat in the front so I could look very closely at the teachers lips and I kept my eyes glued to the blackboard, but sometimes the teacher would ask questions that I misinterpreted and answered... and everyone would laugh. Since I could *hear some* I thought the lack of clarity was the same for everyone and that I was different... I was stupid."

TH - Focusing on the lack of clarity and hoping to uncover hidden meanings. “Can you describe what your hearing was like?”

R - “Yes, I could hear muffled sounds... they weren’t always clear, but they were there.”

TH - The therapist remembers Heinz’s Blind Spot metaphor (1994) and offers her experience with “muffled sounds” in order to become sensitive to his experience of “muffled sounds” and asks: “I wonder,... the only experience I have had with “muffled sounds” is when I have been scuba diving... have you ever had the experience of talking underwater? For me it was like

hearing sounds but not clear enough that I could understand them. It was like hearing in a BUBBLE!” (Burbuja)

R - Reinaldo’s frown turns into a smile as he shares his own thoughts in an effort to connect with his therapist not knowing where they will end, “I imagine you could hear sounds, but you say they weren’t clear. That would happen to me at school, I could hear something sometimes but not clearly. The word BLTRBUJA brings to mind the image of a fighter plane. I think of the pilots being in a BLJRBUJA... you know how their cabin is a glass or plastic that covers themselves?”.

Two images of muffled sounds come together and we construct a phrase “estar enburbujead” (being inside a bubble) that describes many of Reinaldo’s experiences of isolation and we can now talk about past events in a new way. Our private phrase triggers conversations in search of moments when he was able to burst the bubble and interact comfortably. The metaphor produces a MOMENTO BOMBA when “unique experiences” are brought to life in language, and plans for “emerging from the bubble” now that he has a hearing aid and can transform the isolation and loneliness he has experienced thus far. Every new thought and behavior become efforts of bursting the bubble. Surprisingly each week Reinaldo brings to therapy “bubble bursting” experiences as he begins to explore the city on his own, and courageously tells the family he wants to work in the family store, even though they are afraid he will not be able to understand all of the customer’s words. At that critical point a new metaphor emerges in our conversation and the therapist invites Reinaldo to “ponga su sordera sobre la mesa” (place your deafness on the counter) by pointing to his newly acquired hearing aid and telling customers “I want to be helpful ... if I ask you to repeat your request and to speak loudly it is because I can’t hear well, it’s not because I don’t care”. By “placing his deafness on the counter” Reinaldo finds a way to move beyond his incapacitating feelings, thoughts and behaviors, he is no longer centered on not being able to hear, he is focused on showing his interest in becoming a good salesperson.

“Momentos Bomba”: Metaphors ... And Their Explosive Effects

The ‘MOMENTO BOMBA’ experience we have describes, is powerful because of the explosion of possibilities that come forth and illuminate the clients mind. The “MOMENTO BOMBA” is created in language when an image that is offered condenses and expands images, displacing meanings and reordering memories in novel and unique ways. Our clients report how the metaphor’s image displaces the Blind Spot and makes it impossible for them to continue to see things the old way.

In the session with Teresa and Marco, the “Momento Bomba” occurred when the mother’s words triggered the therapist’s silent search for an explanation of the mother-son interaction that was being played out before his eyes. When Teresa *orders* Marco to go to the bathroom she probably wants to enforce her authority and demonstrate a good mother’s understanding of her child’s needs. As they perform their behaviors for their therapists the sequence triggers the inner fantasies of the therapist who first, wonders how the mother can be so sensitive to her son’s bodily needs and secondly, wonders how the son has communicated his need. In both cases the therapist’s thoughts try to connect the actions to explanations offered and he comes up with the idea that a mother and son who are in such close mutual dependence, symbolically dissolve the physiological limits that exist between them. This image has the *potential* of becoming a shared map that joins all four members of the therapeutic system in a process to facilitate change.

The metaphoric image acquires strength in the dialogical exchange between therapist and client as an intense consensual coordination of coordinated actions that creates possibilities for new meaning and action. The Momento Bomba happens when the image of mother and son (Teresa and Marco) connected by their anus emerges as a *valid* way of her knowing he needs to go to the bathroom. The discomfort of the image produces enlightenment.

Our questions delve into unexplored areas by using key words and actions expressed by our clients. When Teresa orders her son to go to the bathroom and the therapist asks “How do you know Marco needs to poop?” we are curious to know HOW mother knows that her son needs to poop and what hidden meanings can be found. Metaphoric questions put into words the drama that is carried out and are aimed at finding a possible connection between observations, thoughts, feelings and words. Questions help mother and son move beyond their Blind Spot to find something that can illuminate their joint awareness.

As we reflected about the effects of the metaphor, José Antonio describes his inner conversation as he observed Marco’s disobedience and his mother’s interference. He recalled mother’s previous description of their entangled relationship as they were showing us how they related to each other outside of therapy. The therapist’s interest heightens and he makes use of it to enter the drama and explore it with them. The words used by the therapist are strong, but so is the mother-son entanglement, and the metaphoric image triggers reflections in all of the members of the therapeutic system. Teresa can use the metaphor to observe herself and has a reference point to reflect upon the profound connection that exists between them. Marco from his adolescent viewpoint experiences an outside man that silences mom and opens up space for new conversations; they are no longer two people trying to make sense of their lives, the therapist is accepted as a significant other.

The Therapeutic System As An Ethnic System

Historically speaking, Colombian culture evolved through a blending of ethnic groups and races that learned to live together by minimizing their dramatic differences. Since the 15th century Spaniards and other foreigners invaded the land where indigenous people were silenced into obedience and African Negroes were also torn away from their continent and their people and

forced into slavery. These voices are still vocally or silently present in everyday conversations of a multiethnic population. Our therapy takes place in a context where the cultural beliefs and daily experiences are counterproductive to therapeutic goals. As we establish our initial agreements and work towards building a therapeutic subculture where stories can be told, believed and changed it is also important that we are sensitive to the client's regional, racial, ethnic differences in language, beliefs and customs.

Therapists in their training have been exposed to ideas and techniques that are foreign to our client's understanding. For example, in our professional culture, a mutually respected agreement is essential to the therapeutic relationship and outcome; while in the surrounding culture, verbal agreements are binding only until the need arrives to break them. We have become culturally sensitive in our effort to build a bridge between our therapeutic culture and our clients' culture.

The use of language is pivotal to the meanings people give to their lives and their relationships. (Anderson, and Goolishian, 1990) For Humberto Maturana, language is ... a manner of coexistence, a manner of living together in recursive co-ordinations of consensual actions such that the structure of the participants changes in a manner contingent upon their participation in it' (1988). Because words are polysemic, it is necessary to comprehend their local meaning. Dictionary MEANINGS are used by all the communities that speak a language and can be passed on without change from one generation to another. Words also MAKE SENSE ONLY in a "here and now" relational context. Therapeutic conversations must keep both word uses in mind. For example, in Spanish the word "perro" (dog) is defined in the dictionary as a noun and describes the four legged canine. In a local, personal sense it is used as an adjective to describe a person's tendency towards sexual promiscuity. The latter meaning most probably was first heard in small family settings and used until it acquired meaning in a broader ethnic and cultural setting, as occurred in Colombia. Words MAKE SENSE in a transversal, local setting while MEANINGS have longitudinal, historical dimension and both must be considered in therapy.

As therapy begins, therapist and client exchange words in hopes of moving from *understanding the story told to comprehending* the underlying meanings shared. In Spanish the word for UNDERSTAND is ENTENDER and means to "move towards" while the word COMPRENDER is a compound word where the prefix "com" means "with" and the suffix "prender" means "to grasp". To COMPRENDER (grasp meaning) is a relational process that goes beyond ENTENDER (understanding) because it describes the manner in which one grasps with another and constructs a shared meaning. With this in mind our questions inquire about the personal SENSE (sentido) of the word used. We look for differences in language that

MAKE SENSE in our relationship (dan sentido a nuestra relación). We pull words apart to comprehend the underlying NUANCES that allow us to develop greater coherence in our interaction. Comprehension for us is a step in the co-construction of a new therapeutic reality, created through the recursive sharing of universal meanings, individual senses and personal nuances of language.

Step by step new understandings are created and become a part of the therapeutic language and culture that gives sense to the chaos that surrounds. We like to think of the therapeutic system as a system with its own language, culture and ethnicity.

Metaphoric images facilitate agreements around the events clients cannot explain or resolve. Teresa and Marco *knew* they had serious difficulties but they were unable to move beyond them. The visual images created with words removed the Blind Spot and came closer to describing their sensations and feelings such that what was incomprehensible became meaningful. In Teresa's case, the metaphor of being "joined and pooping through a shared anus" created an image that allowed her to understand that what she defined as profound love for her son was immensely damaging to both of them. Up until that point, as Teresa clarifies in the follow up conversation one year later, she loved her son and wanted to continue loving him, and although painfully aware of their problems was afraid of giving him space because she experienced separateness as a threat to their loving each other.

The metaphor created a space where therapist and client could make distinctions between understanding and comprehending problem stories. Each of us, therapists, Teresa and Marco may have had different understandings of pooping through a shared anus but we all developed a shared comprehension of their need to separate.

A reflexive dialogue with Teresa one year later that Validates our understanding

We have recently begun evaluating our work by inviting clients to come to a session (free of charge) where they can talk about the effects that therapy has had on their lives. Client's feedback helps us grow and become culturally effective. With this purpose in mind we contacted Teresa one year later, knowing that Marco was no longer living in Colombia. This is an extract of our conversation:

THERAPISTS: We would like to know, one year after, what you believe was helpful in the therapy.... how did the metaphors influence you and your son ... ?

Mother (M): I think therapy was a total success ... if we look at how things evolved Marco is very happy and is studying at a very good private school where he is doing well. I think Marco became independent ... no, I mean we were able to cut the umbilical cord to allow him to become more independent and move on. Our conversations are frequent, open and honest. I want to give you an example. Yesterday I spoke with Marco on the telephone and he told me, "Mom why is it that you always ask about my algebra, my Science and other classes? Why don't you ask me how I am, how I am feeling. If I'm happy..." "I know... he would never have been able to speak to me this way before and that he thinks I understand his worth is not only in his academic success... he wants us to have a different type of relationship.

TH: "Aha....."

M: "I think the metaphor about how we were both pooping through the same anus (cagando por El mismo culo) helped me first to understand something that would have taken years to accomplish ... It was a strong and difficult moment... it jolted me... but the picture of Marco

using my anus to empty his bowels helped me to understand that I needed to let go. I began to look at many ways in which I was always controlling and then feeling angry because he wanted me to do everything for him.”

TH: “ You mentioned the metaphor about the umbilical cord? How was it helpful?”

M: “That one wasn’t as strong (for me) as the other one. I don’t think I was yet willing to understand or let go. I am a controlling person. But I remember Marco especially enjoyed talking about when we would be ready to cut it... And he thoroughly enjoyed taking the imaginary scissors and cutting it. Remember? I think it helped him feel stronger. The metaphor of our both defecating through the same anus was sooo strong that it made me think of my codependency and how my need to control was damaging us both.”

TH: “ What do you mean by co-dependency?”

M:” Well, you know I have been in psychoanalysis for years. Marco’s father is an addict, we were both in therapy for a long time before I divorced him. In that therapy they spoke of codependent behaviors ... that scared me and helped me make the decision to divorce. With the pooping metaphor I realized that in my need to protect Marco I was feeling responsible for everything he did... controlling his eating habits, his time to go to bed and waking him in the morning. I felt responsible for protecting his high I.Q. and also for his failing at school. I felt responsible to protect the good seed from becoming an addict, or a manic depressive like his father.... it scared me... I realized that my pathology was harming him... and that’s not what I wanted. I wanted to love him. Jose Antonio, can I ask, how did you come up with that metaphor?”

TH (JA): “ When I heard you order Marco to go to the bathroom I was puzzled with your mandate. I thought that at 13 a boy doesn’t need his mother’s help if he needs to go to the bathroom. You were so insistent about his physiological needs that immediately the image came to mind that his colon maybe was not connected to his anus and that neither of you could defecate in peace ... like Siamese twins, your digestive tracts were not independent... it was ghastly... It was damaging to both of you and I felt I had to share it (the image).”

M: “I felt angry and confused, but my love for Marco made me think that I was hurting him... and I believe that “ large ills require large remedies” (a grandes males grandes remedies) so I knew I had to continue. I think Marco left here feeling surprised with such a strong message and my reaction. But you remember he laughed and I think he thought this therapy was going to be different from previous ones. For several days we both moved between being close and distancing, the image of the shared anus made closeness uncomfortable... so we moved back and forth, we were ambivalent, but it was helpful. I think the “pooping metaphor” was more effective with me than the “umbilical cord” because I believe a mother’s love for her son is natural and can never be cut or broken... it scared me to think that my need to control and protect was hurting my son when what I wanted and... the reason for coming to therapy is because I love him and wanted to live in peace.”

TH: “ What about the other metaphor?”

M: “The other metaphor about my wearing the balls (in this family) ... (laugh)... I’m still

working on that one with my analyst ... I was the son in the family, the son my parents wanted and never had.”

We now think of metaphors as emerging *between client and therapist as they bring forth shared thoughts*, and the images created in language offer symbols that create instant possibilities for reflecting and acting (**momento bomba**). The umbilical cord, a shared digestive tract and wearing the balls in the family become concrete, referential symbols that allow the client to look at his/her problem from a new perspective, with a new emotion, while maintaining an inner dialogue that can be taken beyond the confines of the therapeutic setting.

Metaphors: Shared Fantasy and Crazyness with Explosive Effects

At its best therapeutic changes take place through the creative exchange of ideas *between* client and therapist, where both know that metaphoric images are only reflections of something else. Both parties experience the construction of a shared reality as they become allies in a fantastic, crazy adventure that is mutually stimulated and contains secret, private ways of naming and describing things.

In therapy, questions like “How is the umbilical cord today?” were answered by mother and son in the following ways: “It (the umbilical cord) is still strong although I think it has started to dry up, or it is getting thinner and thinner, soon we won’t need it any longer.”

The parties involved *know* the umbilical cord does not really exist; it exists solely in the private fantasy world that the client and therapist share at that moment in time (Boscolo. & Bertrando, 1996). In Maturana’s own words, the metaphor becomes “*objectivity* within parentheses”, which means that the Observer recognizes his/her participation in the creation of meaning and that both cognitive and biological phenomena are changed by the explanations created by the Observer (Maturana, 1997). Maturana makes an important distinction when speaking about reality and objectivity, a distinction that is important in understanding our metaphor of the Momento Bomba. When he places the observed or lived experience within parentheses as we have done above, he is speaking of “Objetividad Constitutiva”. By placing the experience inside parentheses he is highlighting that the meaning given and obtained is due to the boundaries and meanings provided by the Observer’s structure. The consultant’s experience of the metaphor is subjective and is therefore placed within parentheses (objectivity) and is one way of differentiating it from what Maturana refers to as “Objetividad Trascendental” which refers to the type of OBJECTIVITY that exists independent of what a person is or does. The subjective experience of the possible meanings contained in the metaphor is adopted by client and therapists as a three level agreement: **first**, at an explicit level they can all make continual references to the metaphor; second, at an implicit level their combined efforts are geared to “make sense of” and “co-construct new meanings” and third, at a secret level the metaphor brings together their innermost intuitions, sensations and emotions. The *disappearing cord* becomes a symbol of the differentiation process in the family relationship and the progress made in the therapeutic relationship.

New emotions and meanings appear allowing new identities and behaviors to be tried. Like Alice in Wonderland, metaphors create a language of wonder and fantasy where therapist and clients can risk taking new paths and open new doors. (Carroll, 1941)

The metaphor is an invitation to play; made by the child within the therapist to the child within the client(s). We all know when children play everything becomes possible; a stick can become a horse, a dog and an airplane. OBJECTIVE REALITY becomes (a reality within parentheses or a subjective experience) when it is transformed by desire. The tyranny upheld by the symptom can be transformed into something new, like magic. How? As Heinz Von Foerster would say, (1998, Bogotá) "Magic cannot be explained; it just happens!"

Mythical Elements Add Meaning to the Metaphoric Bomb

Constructing metaphors in therapy is a journey back to the origin of the construction of the collective fantasy of mankind and the social construction of realities in the truest sense. Metaphors facilitate the development of new narratives regarding the symptom by using stories that contain a different moral, action oriented and explicative discourse. Metaphors introduce change into chaos. Hesiod, father of Greek didactic poetry, 8 B.C. in his work THEOGONY writes "First there was chaos and then came the expansion of the earth..." (Primero existió el caos y luego vino el ancho de la tierra). (Hesiodo, pg. 1) In the therapeutic encounter, we believe both client and therapist experience chaos before order and understanding can develop. Metaphors reorganize chaos in a mysterious and magical manner thereby adding a new coherence to the stories lived and the stories told (Pearce, 1994).

In the beginning we are unaware of all the forces that influence our existence: ethnicity, race, gender culture, religion. Each of these become lenses that introduce order in the existing chaos. The therapeutic system is a new ethnic group where people come together in search of new possibilities. The creation of a new time and space, different from the personal ones becomes imperative and gives life to the therapeutic time and space (Boscolo & Bertrando, 1996). In that sacred time and space client and therapist' histories merge in order to eliminate contradictions and give way to the evolution of co-constructed realities through fantasy. It is exciting that metaphors become shared maps offering direction as members of the therapeutic system explore the territory of symptoms and episodes. In every ethnic group, members colonize their own space through action. "Maps make use of images that allow us to single out and focus on some aspects of reality that would otherwise be lost in the details of the background. A good map allows us to appreciate some characteristics of reality while we ignore others.... exploring that reality would not be possible without a map." (Briggs, & Peat, 1994, pg. 32). Inner maps facilitate our approximation to complex realities. Paradoxically they become THE WAY to enter unknown territories, by providing clues that help us to move throughout. The apparent simplicity contained in the images of both map and metaphor become catalysts, condensing the surrounding territory. Metaphors and maps can be used, set aside and returned to each time one wants to explore the territory; and then a new one created if the old becomes obsolete. Like children's language and poetry, metaphors are full of surprises and secrets, communicating

complex ideas in a very simple manner. “Simplicity hides complexity and complexity contains simplicity” (Briggs et al, 1994, p. 43).

If one of the strengths in Colombian culture was the “mestizaje” or blending of races, one of the weaknesses developed is the silencing of differences. This country was built on the capacity of blending not highlighting differences. We live in a culture where the hidden meanings (cultural, ethnic, racial and religious) maintain an equilibrium. We are sensitive to the power of metaphor and the use of indirect awareness in refocusing the search for meanings in a new territory that facilitates the reorganizing of “the stories lived and the stories told.” (Pearce, 1994, pp. 63-65). Our goal is to develop a way of joining our clients where words, people and images move back and forth allowing diversity and differences to emerge. Metaphor is, at its simplest, a way of proceeding from the known to the unknown. It is a way of cognition in which the identifying qualities of one thing are transferred in an instantaneous, almost unconscious flash of insight to some other thing that is by remoteness or complexity unknown to us. The test of any metaphor is found, not in any rule of grammatical form, but in the quality of semantic transformation that is brought forth.

We have found the use of metaphoric questions and images especially helpful in therapy because indirect speech and playing with words and meanings is culturally correct. In conversation, client and therapist create what we describe as a new ethnic culture; a therapeutic system that builds a sacred, intimate territory where the darkness and chaos experienced by the client can be transformed into something exclusive to this ethnic group.

Conclusions

Metaphors created in therapy create explosive effects; they remove Blind Spots through the initial explosion of meanings and initiate a wave of changes that infiltrates other areas of the consultants lives. Additionally, metaphors like “time-release capsules” have the property for releasing new meanings, new connections over an extended period of time. The Momento Bomba is created through the combined “not knowing” experienced by both consultant and therapist as it creates an image that unites them in a joint process where *understanding* is transformed into *comprehending* (grasping together). The act of creating the metaphor is a unique moment which we believe has an ethnic significance that leads us to describe our therapeutic encounter as a process of forming a new *étnia* (ethnic), the “Etnia Terapéutica”.

Requests for reprints should be addressed to: Jeannette Samper A., at Calle 90 # 12 - 44, ofc. 406, Bogotá, Colombia or jsamper@sistemashumanos.com

References

Barrett, Frank J. and. Cooperrider. David L (1990). “Generative Metaphor Intervention: A

New Approach for Working with Systems Divided by Conflict and Caught in Defensive Perception”. *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, vol. 26, No. 2, pages 219-239.

- Briggs, John & F., Peat, David (1989) *Espejo y Reflejo: Del Caos al Orden*. Editorial Gedisa, Barcelona.
- Boscolo, Luigi & Bertrando, Paulo. (1996) *Los Tiempos del Tiempo*. Editorial Paidós. Barcelona.
- Carroll, Lewis. (1941). *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. Heritage Press. New York.
- Erickson, Milton. (1980) *The Nature of Hypnosis and Suggestion*. (vol. I) Irvington Publishers, Inc. New York.
- Gordon, David. (1978), *Therapeutic Metaphors*. META Publications. Los Altos, California.
- Guevara, Lino. (1995). Violencia Familiar y Mundos Posibles. *Sistemas Familiares*. Año 12, No. 2: 49-57.
- Hesiod. *TEOGONIA*. Editorial Planeta (1988). Barcelona.
- Hoffman, Lynn. (1990) Constructing Realities: An Art of Lenses. *Family Process*. Vol. 29, No. 1, pages 1- 12.
- Lankton, Stephen R. & Lankton, Carol H. (1983). *The Answer Within: A Clinical Framework for Ericksonian Hypnotherapy*. Brunner Mazel, Inc. New York.
- Maturana, Humberto (1991) *El Sentido de Lo Humano*. Editorial Hachette. Santiago de Chile.
- Maturana, Humberto. (1997) *La Objetividad: Un Argumento para Obligar*. Editorial Dolmen. Santiago de Chile.
- Pearce, W. Bameett. (1994) *Interpersonal Communication: Making Social Worlds*. Harper Collins College Publishers, New York.
- Penn, Peggy. (1985) Feed Forward: Future Questions, Future Maps. *Family Process* 24:3 pp 299-310.
- Rosen, Sydney. (1982). *My Voice Will Go With You*. W.W. Norton & Company. New York.
- Von Foerster, Heinz. (1994) Seminario: *LA METAFORA DEL PUNTO CIEGO*. Bogotá.
- Von Foerster, Heinz. (1998). *Personal Communication*. Bogotá, Colombia.
- Watzlawick, Paul, Weakland, John H., & Fisch, Richard. (1992). *Cambio*. Editorial Herder. Barcelona.