

*Brief Encounters from the Taos Institute*

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Play and New Openings

During the final days of summer I had the chance to observe a group of children playing on the beach. With excited enthusiasm they were making up a game for themselves. As they played on, the rules for the game were continuously in motion. One could detect hints of soccer and tag, and then a bit of baseball, and on it went. Each creative concoction suggested new worlds of fun. As they shrieked and jumped, laughed and dove, I was reminded of the idea that the most exciting and creative movement in any given field takes place at the margins. At the edge one is not playing by fixed rules, but borrowing, melding, and re-shaping. In a word, one is playing.

I then began to reminisce about the enormous excitement accompanying the emergence of social constructionist ideas some decades earlier. Here was a heady mix of history, sociology, literary theory, feminism, political theory, and more. We were all kids on the beach of history, and no one could imagine the outcome. In many ways, these results have been extraordinary. The Taos Institute is only one small outcome. But then, at the edge of consciousness, the nagging question: are we turning the “game in the making” to a game with fixed rules? Are we generating a new box, without the means to recognize that it is a box?

My answer is a guarded “no.” I say this in large part because social constructionist ideas do not carry a banner proclaiming their own truth. It is just such banners that invite the erecting of boundaries. Either you believe, or you fall outside. Nor, from a constructionist standpoint, does one look to the work of others with an eye to a transcendent truth. Most important is what follows in practice. “If we take this idea on, what happens next?” we ask. Within the Taos Institute this attitude has led to a rich array of dialogues on sustainability, Buddhism, spirituality, network theory, action research, the arts, and much more.

This February 2011 we are even creating a conference – a seminar at sea — in order to explore the potentials of improvisation and innovation. From a constructionist view, the borders of understanding can be much like those pounded into the sand by those children...infinitely porous. And so, I find myself always looking forward to the next conversation with my colleagues. There may be a new leap, laughter, and an unexplored universe.