

Brief Encounter with the Taos Institute

October 2020

A Celebration of Mary Gergen

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It is with heavy hearts, deep gratitude, and overflowing love that we share the sad news that Mary Gergen passed away on the morning of September 22, 2020.

We all knew Mary as a lively, courageous, and innovative trail blazer. With Ken, Mary created a global community — a family of caring, committed scholars and practitioners whose central desire is to make the world a better place for all. And, the world is a better place for her presence in it and her connection to us all.

As I sit at my desk, two weeks after Mary's death, I am filled with many memories, many emotions, and many thoughts. My spirit is simultaneously heavy and light: heavy with the sense of loss but light with the gratitude for Mary's presence in my life. While it is difficult to imagine today, tomorrow, and the future without her lively spirit and creative intellect, I know that her presence remains in so many ways.

For those of you who have attended Taos conferences or workshops, you can thank Mary for the elegant touches, the special attention to food, drink, music, and other human pleasures. Mary's connection with all aspects of our lives — the need to play, to relax, to work hard, to engage in serious conversation, and more — opened avenues for connections that were endless. I know that most who have attended a Taos conference always felt warmly welcomed. That warm welcome is in many ways due to Mary's curiosity. She loved meeting others and quizzing them on their lives, their work, their ideas. She never shied away from letting you know what she thought — in this regard, I always thought of Mary as my "big sister" ("Do you really want to wear *that*?"). Mary always thought out loud. She invited us into her conversation, embodying the co-constructive nature of our worlds.



As a central figure in what we might call the constructionist movement, Mary, along with Ken, facilitated and encouraged the expansion of social construction both inside and outside of the academy. Through her scholarly writing, Mary brought constructionist ideas to feminist theory and practice as well as to practical topics such as ageing and retirement. For those interested in her academic profile, I encourage you to explore https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mary_Gergen.

I knew Mary as an avid reader, eager to integrate others' ideas into her own work. Mary was also always playful and creative. Her passion for performative expressions of social construction and relational theory provided an alternative to the heavy tomes and academic jargon that often accompanies scholarly work. But Mary was also adept at speaking the language of the academy. In this way, she was multilingual. She creatively found ways to put constructionist ideas into vignettes that mirrored everyday life. With her multiple voices, she was able to share constructionist ideas and practices with a wide range of people — scholars, practitioners, and everyday people.

Mary was also a matchmaker. She loved connecting people with each other. In many ways, we might describe Mary as the Emily Post of social construction. Her social graces mingled with her intellectual sensibility, a sensibility that prioritized relational engagement and unfolding processes. We can thank Mary for inviting us into humanizing all aspects of our lives. She brought a warmth and practicality to her writing, her performances, and her presence with us all.



I will miss sharing food and conversation, dancing, presenting, deliberating about new initiatives for the Taos Institute, working on publications, her (sometimes unwanted) advice, and most of all, having her as part of my extended and immediate family.

For more about Mary Gergen, visit: www.taosinstitute.net/remembering-mary