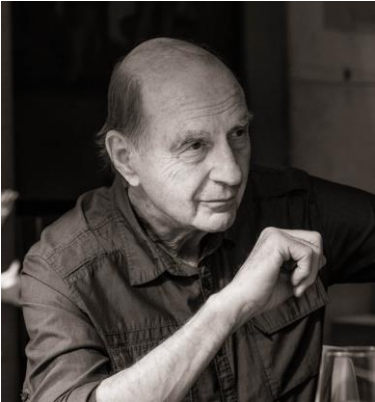


Brief Encounter with the Taos Institute

January 2021

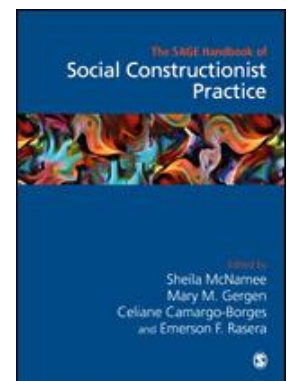
Social Construction on the Cusp



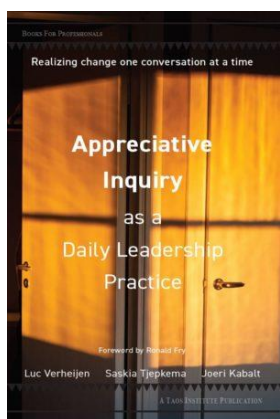
By Kenneth J. Gergen, *Taos Institute President and co-founder*

It has been an arduous year for the world, and once again hope rises for the dawning. So much has been said, both in anguish and optimism. While on the cusp of the New Year, I would like to share some thoughts on what we have been through, and how it bears on the past and future of the Taos Institute. Social constructionist ideas place major importance on the collaborative creation of what is real and good. This past year, we have come to share a reality in which a deadly virus is sweeping the world. But where have we placed our values? Where have we located “the good?” Here it seems that the central value has been placed on self-protection – *my* health, *my* family, *my* community, or *my* country. But in this stampede for self-protection, who is co-creating the value of the global good? If we all strive to take care of our own health, does this mean that global health will take care of itself? When care for me and mine is prized, we invite the familiar conflicts: who is responsible, who controls, deserves, is blameworthy, and so on. The good for all drops from sight. The situation is much the same in terms of our collective incapacity to protect the environment or live peacefully with each other. Without this valuing of the whole, the Covid crisis is simply a harbinger of a much darker future.

Here I do take heart in the spirit and activities of the Taos Institute. At the core there is the acknowledgement and appreciation of the multiple realities and values across the world; and there is a major investment in creating and sharing practices that move us toward a greater good. A milestone in these efforts was achieved this past year in the publication of the [*Sage Handbook of Social Constructionist Practices*](#). Thanks to the mammoth efforts of the editors, Sheila McNamee, Mary Gergen, Celiane Camargo Borges, and Emerson Rasera, the *Handbook* offered 60 chapters, filled with innovative practices in therapy, healthcare, education, organizational development, and community building. Significantly, the 84 authors of these chapters represented 14 countries.



Last year the Taos Institute, partnering with and produced by [Positivity Strategist](#), offered a series of eleven [Podcasts with the Authors](#). This year, we continue with six [Dialogues with the Authors](#) that will introduce the various sections of the new [Handbook](#).



Pleasure can also be taken in the publication of a new Taos Institute book, [Appreciative Inquiry as a Daily Leadership Practice: Realizing Change One Conversation at a Time](#). Here we must thank the authors Luc Verheijen, Saskia Tjepkema, and Joeri Kabalt for showing us how Appreciative Inquiry can be absorbed into daily organizational life. Also symbolizing the way we all continue learning from each other are three new graduates from the [Diploma program](#), from three different countries. The program is especially designed to provide guidance to those wishing to embark on a specialized and unique learning journey or project

(www.taosinstitute.net/diploma-program). And we are especially proud of the four new graduates of the PhD program: Tzofnat Peleg-Baker, Richard Manley-Tannis, Lucie Hornova, and Maria Ospina Alvarado.

While these were inspiring markers of the year past, the beat goes on. For example, the Institute features a number of discussion networks open to all. The [Dialogue with the Author](#) webinar series is a lively, free, online offering to hear about new and timely books. This past year the [Relational Research Network](#) worked on a video series highlighting theory and practice in relationally centered research. In February they will begin a launch of some 26 of these videos. Further, the new Relational Education Network will be joining others to offer an online, international conference in July, on Relational Education.



Excitement abounds...

These are energizing efforts of great promise. The looming challenge remains, however, of the global good. One glimpses potential in these activities, but that potential can only be realized through our collective participation.

Change can begin with the next conversation.