A Reconsideration of the Reflecting Process:

Turning the Reflecting Team into the Reflecting Processes

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I. Introduction

A new pattern in therapy emerged in March 1985 from the practices of Norwegian family therapist Tom Andersen. Known as the reflecting team (hereafter, RT) approach, it was first made known to the world at large in 1987 through the journal *Family Process*[1] and was later followed by Andersen's important work of 1991.[6] It has since attracted the interest of clinicians and researchers worldwide and contributed to the development of a variety of practices. Andersen's 1991 work was subsequently revised to include the results of further studies and its Japanese translation was published in 2001.[5] RT had been introduced to Japan several years before that through a succession of translated volumes[13] and article collections[10] that positioned it as one of three currents in narrative therapy, but matters remained at this entry level until comparatively recently. It is still safe to say though that compared to the upsurge of debate over the "deconstruction of the dominant story" approach (also known as narrative therapy in the narrow sense) advocated by Michael White and over the "Not-Knowing" (or collaborative) approach espoused by Harold Goolishian, only limited attention has been focused on RT in Japan.

Yasunaga Komori made a very interesting comment in a roundtable discussion that appeared in a special edition of the journal *Japanese Journal of Family Therapy* in 2009. He presented a framework for dividing therapy up into the "heart" (idea), the "head" (theory), and the "limbs" (technique), drawing on White's approach for the "heart" and Goolishian's for the "head."[15] Although it frowns on doing such, Andersen's RT approach can also be regarded as having truly got its start from presenting a technique in rather concrete terms in its call for "switching the lighting and the sound." While it is clear that various theoretical strands run through the history of family therapy and the systems theory-based knowledge that underpin Andersen's practices, it is still a fact that RT first appeared in this rather concrete form of "switching the lighting and the sound." For this very reason, it could also be presumed that the concept of RT was freely incorporated into all of his practices without the theoretical debate that had already made RT itself a focus, having been fully developed (lacking in reflection, as it were).

However, shifting our attention overseas to the time right after RT made its debut, J. Davis and William D. Lax tell us that, along with increased interest in the approach, there were also fears about it being trivialized as a simple technique or form.[8] Andersen himself was already talking in 1989 about the desirability of keeping the use of the term "reflecting team" to a minimum, his reason being that an RT was nothing more than one of any number of ways for structuring "reflecting positions."[2] He later casually used the term "reflecting process" (hereafter, RP) in the epilogue to his 1991 study.[6] In an article from 1992,[3] RP is something clearly presented as an ordinary "shifting between outer talk and inner talk that weaves together various active participants" that includes RT as one of its forms.[3]

Based on Andersen's distinction between RT and RP, it can be surmised that Davis' concern about the technique and form of RT being trivialized would likely arise when sufficient investigations into RP, that is, its essence, were not being conducted and it was being integrated into slipshod practice in an RT-like form. In recent years, with the utility of RT starting to be recognized in numerous fields in Japan, the significance of once again engaging in a theoretical scrutiny of the characteristics of RP is becoming apparent.

Below, I discuss the method and plan of observation to be used in the inquiry undertaken in this article. I begin first with what is assumed from a word like "observation." Here, it refers to the concept of observation as used in the social systems theory of Niklas Luhmann.[11] Part of this theoretical framework that includes the concept in question sets the basic groundwork for the arguments in the present article. As is well known, observation according to Luhmann takes as its starting point the quite formal definition of "an operation using a distinction for indicating one side of the distinction and not the other," that in turn originates with George Spencer-Brown.[17] It is an extremely versatile concept. In fact, when observing something, one has to point that something out, and what's more in order to point that something out, one must distinguish it from other things. This concept at first glance seems simple, yet it is also quite complex. This is because when we try to talk about our observations of something, we end up producing a sort of self-application—essentially an observation of the state of observation.

As the foregoing should already make clear, one of the most important distinctions about observation made in this article will be the distinction between RT and RP, and this distinction sets the underlying tone, as it were, for the account made here. Needless to say, Andersen's descriptions will be emphasized as the raw materials for making concrete observations. Because his descriptions have the quality of diamonds in the rough laden with intuitions and suggestions, if we are to boldly bring out the theoretical pictures of RP to be found in them, we will require observations that use numerous unique sources of light (ones that reflect the light from themselves and other sources of illumination while retaining their own inherent brilliance). Accordingly, in the inquiry that follows we focus in turn on the three dimensions of RP—the substance of the process itself, its modalities, and its workings—by shining theoretical lights of suitable and different qualities on it, aiming to reveal its characteristics as clearly as possible.

II. The Substance of the Reflecting Process
To observe, to be observed, and to observe the observation

That the substance of RP lies in the characteristic of observation accompanied by a rotation of viewpoints can be confirmed in the words of Andersen:[3] "The reflecting process itself could be described as formalising the shifts that the various participants make between talking and listening" (p. 88). However, even assuming a quite everyday dialogue, it would in fact be quite normal for the "talking" and "listening" to repeatedly change positions between the participants. Regardless, where is the significance of formulating that as RP to be found?

Certainly, if we bear in mind the historical context of family therapy in which the practice of

"switching the lighting and the sound" was situated in March 1985, then we can imagine just how big the impact likely was of the shift of specialists from the privileged position of "observers" (listeners) to that of "being observed" (talking), and further how this in itself had a performative effect (I will speak of this in further detail below). However, the implications of "observation accompanied by a rotation of viewpoints" that is the substance of RP do not stop at being a landmark moment ideologically speaking, one that simply saw the equalization of the "client-specialist" relationship in the context of family therapy. We can find at least two points of major theoretical significance therein. First, it added the standard of "observing the observation" (secondary observation) to the distinction between "to observe/to be observed." Second, the distinction between the standards of communications systems and consciousness systems was shown by situating "to talk/to listen" as "outer talk/inner talk."

Let us turn first to "observing the observation" (secondary observation). In his 1991 work, Andersen[6] presents a table that compares the features that distinguish secondary observation from primary observation on numerous points. The secondary observation approach, needless to say, is presented based on the work of the systems theorist and well-known proponent of second-order cybernetics Heinz von Foerster.[20] A change of perspective from the "observed system" to the "observing system" (of observation) is produced through this approach. Here, I shall introduce a metaphor from Luhmann as a means to highlight the substance of RP. Luhmann[11] argues that the metaphor of the mirror has a significance that is proportionate to second-order cybernetics. The important thing about this metaphor is not just that the appearance of something is reflected in the mirror, but also that one cannot see it without the mirror—in other words, the observer is himself reflected. Allow me to amplify on this metaphor. I have already mentioned how observation is an operation that entails using distinctions to indicate something. Such distinctions are also restrictions on observation. Through such distinctions, it is possible to see only those things that can be seen and it is not possible to see those things that cannot be seen. Accordingly, the person making an observation cannot simultaneously observe the distinction itself due to his own blind spots—that is to say, due to the distinction itself that he is using. We can observe whether an observation cannot observe something only through a shift in the observational scheme or by borrowing the help of time. This is the observing of observation—or secondary observation. However, given that secondary observation is also observation, it winds up being filled with intrinsic blind spots, of such observation (accordingly, secondary observation does not provide knowledge that has greater insight than some other thing, and moreover does not offer better grounding or certainty). However, the observer in secondary observation can himself use some sort of distinction as an observer and notice through his observation of other observations the fact that he has blind spots. Thus the account of the world for a secondary observer is a contingent rather than an inevitable thing (there are also other possibilities). The change of perspective that turns the account of the world into a contingent thing in practical terms also makes it possible to interpret the "meta-cognition"[18] that in recent years has been presented as a process that is shared by a diverse range of psychotherapies as something to cultivate. RT as RP can be seen as a concrete tool with which we can actually hasten such changes of perspective in fixed time and space (although this change is certainly not a one-way shift from first to second order, but

rather one that entails going back and forth between them).

Next, I will elucidate the standards for communication and psychic systems based on the distinction between outer and inner talk. This will enable us to discuss the subject of the observation concept that I have used in this article thus far. In normal terminology, the subject of observation in most cases is regarded as either a "human being" or "human consciousness"; this is in absolute contrast to how it is used in Luhmann's social systems theory.[11] Communication systems also carry out observation that can be understood as being based on the extremely formal definition of "using distinctions to indicate." As I have discussed in detail elsewhere,[22] psychic and communication systems make the possibilities of consciousness and communication for all things feasible because they depend on one another to a great degree while also maintaining operational closure as systems that are completely autonomous from one another. Andersen's distinction between outer and inner talk is premised on the foregoing mutual autonomy of the standards of these two systems. Through the physical division of two teams, for example, it guarantees that while an outer talk is taking place with one team, the other team has the "freedom not to listen" (i.e., is freed from responding as a participant in outer talk). It can be said that through this it promotes inner talk in the latter party. This very process that enables such psychic and communications systems to observe one another (to observe the observation) is nothing less than the substance of RP in the form of the shifts of talking and listening.

In short, in RT as RP, when a person, for example, looks in a mirror and discovers his own image as something that can be discussed as the topic of outer talk in the team, it means that the psychic system observes (sometimes accompanied by inner talk) the image of itself as "something observed as something that is observing" reflected in that mirror (it is truly like the magic mirrors that M. C. Escher made in his paintings). The outer talk in both teams promotes secondary observations in the communications within the teams. This is because the mirror as a metaphor situated at the boundaries of various systems (the boundary between individual psychic systems and their environments, the boundary between psychic and communications systems, and the boundary between a specific communications system and its environment) makes possible the projections in the observations as an autonomous function of this system. Of course, promoting the mutual projection of such multilayered observations can entail the use of a variety of techniques and forms other than RT. On the other hand though, even having traced out the superficial form of RT, we cannot expect to discover RP in there if everything there is limited to carrying out primary observations,　or if the practice that is carried out aims at the specialist directly connecting observation in the psychic system with observation in the communications system.

III. The Modalities of the Reflecting Process
The vertical, the horizontal, and the oblique

Andersen clearly set forth the characteristics of the modality of the RP: "The feeling of relief in March 1985 was most probably related to leaving the hierarchical relationships of therapy and entering the heterarchical ones" (p. 18). The fact that the practice of "switching the lighting and the sound,"

which mark the origins of RT, would force specialists who in their relationship with client families had occupied the privileged position of unilaterally "doing the observing" to step into the position of "being observed" is nothing less than a heterarchical relationship (it is not for sure that Andersen used, in a much stricter sense as expected, this term which Warren S. McCulloch had introduced a half-century before[12]). Continuing the aforementioned text, Andersen then discusses the possibility of being able to restate the term "heterarchical relationship" in more general terms such as "democratic relationship," "equal relationship," and "relations of equally important contributors." Many other theorists[13] when speaking of RT also stress the point that the construct equalizes the power relationships that exist between client and specialist. This fact can perhaps be understood as RT introducing the latter horizontal relationship seen in the distinction between vertical and horizontal relationships into the relationship between client and specialist.

However, the original heterarchical relationships are not the same thing as simple horizontal relationships that can be described as static structures, and they definitely are not automatically achieved by using the RT form. Tracing back the experience of a three-member RT comprised of the family and the therapist in training, Young et al.[24] discuss how a situation can arise in which the supervisor, not without reason, maintains his influence on when and how to use reflection. They also discuss how a situation can arise in which a family member may feel quite bewildered by their experience in an RT, even if the therapist intends to give the choice about making use of RT to the family. A person with authority may undercut a constative standard, as it were, with a performative standard, such as by forcing a specific method on the family by saying the method is needed in order to create an equal relationship among members. Such a situation might be detected when it occurs regularly, but care should also be taken about the misuse of a formal RT, as it could fall into a rut regardless of whether the practitioner is aware of it or not.

Let us bring in here our second source of light for scrutinizing the theoretical significance of the heterarchical relationships that are characteristic of the modalities of RP. This is the concept of transversality (obliqueness) contraposed to verticality and horizontality that Félix Guattari[9] presented in the course of his discussion of "psychotherapy using institutions" at the famous La Borde clinic. According to Guattari, verticality refers to things that are found in pyramid-shaped organizational charts. Horizontality refers to something that is realized in situations where people and things take on a form for making the best compromises possible within the situation in which they have been placed. Naturally, the nuance of the concept of "horizontality" presented here is quite different from the "democratic relationships" and "equal relationships" seen in Andersen. However, knowing that Guattari presents transversality as a concept that should be contraposed with what he calls verticality and horizontality means it cannot be mistaken for the heterarchical concept that was presented initially as a methodology for addressing the dynamic reciprocal actions between divided levels for horizontal relationships as a static structure. Transversality (La transversalité) "est une dimension qui prétend surmonter les deux impasses, celle d'une pure verticalité et celle d'une simple horizontalité ; elle tend à se réaliser lorsqu'une communication maximum s'effectue entre les différents niveaux et surtout dans les différents

sens." （p. 80.） [9]

In short, the modality of that which occurred in March 1985 in RT as RP is an operation that concretly gives rise to separate currents and separate communications that traverse even the verticality of the traditional client-specialist relationship, but still does not resolve even in the horizontality that is its simple negation (because if it sought to do so, then taking away the mirror and everyone just talking together in a circle would be enough). If we were to try to point out this operation, we would have to use a distinction that pairs "vertical relationships"/"horizontal relationships" with "heterarchical relationships." However, heterarchical relationships do not fit within a specific form or system. Rather, their traces are found only in all the trivial events that try to open as many existing forms and systems as possible. The characteristics of the modality of RP are to be found there.

IV. The Workings of the Reflecting Process
Kataru, *hanasu*, and *yuru(f)u*

I mentioned at the outset that when the RT concept was first introduced to Japan, it was situated as one of three currents within narrative therapy. However, picking out the words in Andersen's accounts that can be called the core of narrative therapy—that is, the "narrative" or "story" (*monogatari* or *katari* in Japanese)—is in fact unexpectedly difficult. What we find instead are the words "conversation" and "talk." While the differences between these words may seem trivial at first glance, the characteristics of the workings of RP are embodied within them.

Here, I will introduce as my third source of light the arguments of Megumi Sakabe[16], who has been working to decipher the richness of Japanese, and particularly classical Japanese. This will help to bring a theoretical scrutiny to bear on the characteristics of the workings of RP based on the differences between "narrative" and "conversation," or more plainly between "narrating" (*katari*) and "talking" (*hanashi*). Sakabe, in characterizing the verbal act that is "to tell" (*kataru*), contrasts it with the closely associated expression, "to talk" (*hanasu*). He writes, "The verbal act of 'talking,' if anything, is involved with primordial segmenting and establishing differences in the forms of 'dividing' [also *hanasu*] or 'setting out an origin' [*ha nasu*]. On the other hand, the act of 'narrating' [*kataru*], as something that entails 'taking shape' [*kata ru*] or 'patterning' [*katadoru*], is positioned at a higher level than the former as a word for bringing together briefly segmented and differentiated things and directing them toward a form [*kata*] (imago)" (pp. 16-17)[16]. A similar observation may be seen in the arguments of the narrative philosopher Keiichi Noe [14]. In Noe, the origins of *hanasu* (talk) are in *hanatsu* (release) while those of *kataru* (narrate) are in *katadoru* (to pattern). This is treated as one kind of corroboration. He also draws a contrast between *hanasu* being a situation-dependent episodic verbal act and *kataru* as a far-and-away situation-independent structured verbal act.

Based on a perspective of *katari* and *hanashi* that is filled with the distinction between narrating (*katari*) and talking (*hanashi*) that can be transparently seen through classical Japanese, it once again becomes clear that the characteristics of the workings of RP place a greater emphasis on "talking" than on "narrating." That is to say, the basic workings to be discovered there are those of an operation

that produces primordial differences and radiate meanings. Naturally, the RT form itself does not instantly guarantee being directed toward the creation of differences and the radiation of meanings. We can see this also in White,[21] who introduced the RT form into his own practice, in how he regards "narrating anew" by an outsider/witness in a defined celebration as contributing to the "binding together" in keeping with the central theme that the stories of those people's lives share (in short, they use RT for narrating [*kata-ri, katadori*]).

One can see the strong influence of Gregory Bateson, one the origins of family therapy in the theoretical backdrop where RT as RP places great importance on *hanashi* to encourage the creation of differences. However, Andersen, who likely was also a superb clinician, grounds himself on Bateson's declaration that information was a "difference that generates difference"[7] in going farther to point out the importance of "differentiating differences"[1]. He shows here three types of differences: differences that are too small and cannot be noticed, moderate differences that are big enough to be noticed, and differences that are so big that they destroy a system. Only the moderate differences can produce differences over the course of time—that is to say, they are the only ones among the three that can produce change. Andersen[3] also notes that persons who create meaning can do so attendant upon moderate deviations (divergences) from one another while accepting ideas from one another.

One of the characteristics in the workings of RP is nothing less than the creation of these "moderate differences" in verbal acts. If we were to draw upon classical Japanese for the word best suited to this operation, I believe the word we want is *yuru(f)u* (the "f" that would have been voiced in ancient times would no longer be voiced in modern Japanese). *Yuru(f)u* is a word connected to the act of "easing" a condition of being bound or strained. That is, it means "to loosen" or "to slacken," as well as "to forgive" (*yurusu*), as in to ease feelings. Even in the radiation of simple meanings through the creation of differences, RT as RP does not integrate opposite meanings with them. Rather, it goes back and forth between the distinction between *kataru* and *hanasu* on the one hand and *yuru(f)u* on the other (while swaying back and forth in an agreeable way) as it produces operations that can create possible changes.

V. Concluding Remarks

Here I have discussed RT as RP, or the treatment of RT as RP, from the three perspectives of its substance, modalities, and workings. By using three light sources with strong original characteristics—the metaphors about secondary observation from Luhmann, the concept of transversality introduced from Guattari's practices, and Sakabe's linguistics using classical Japanese—I was able to pick out the characteristics of "observing"/"being observed"//"observing the observation" in the substance, "vertical relationships"/"horizontal relationships"//"heterarchical relationships" in its modalities, and "*kataru*"/"*hanasu*"//"*yuru(f)u*" in its workings. Needless to say, with RP making the principle "both that and this," this account of such distinctions will not uncover the supreme value among those categories and is not intended to build a wall to enclose such value. Rather, the intention is to provide a standard for building various bridges for going back and forth among the categories.

Also, further possibilities for RP not dependent on RT are also suggested by the inquiry presented here. Due to space limitations I cannot discuss these in detail here, but one example is engagement with a kind of action research like that seen in the latter distinction between RP in its narrow and broad senses as seen in Yahara[23].

The information presented in the present article might also be useful for avoiding any sort of impasses in the practice of RT. Of greater importance, however, is noting the fact that impasses in RTs themselves afford the chance for RP to occur. This is truly similar to how Andersen's RT as RP gave rise to the stalemate seen in traditional family therapy.

Finally, thinking about the limits of the present work, I hope in the future to expand on the further possibilities for RP. In order for the present article to meet the standards of communication systems, the standards of the psychic systems to the utmost, and in short with systems of meaning, I had to forego examining the domain of the body, which produced an important part of Andersen's account. I look forward to working on it.

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