

"Stop making sense" – a randomised text design study

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Abstract

The current epistemological scaffolding of psychotherapy and mental health care ruthlessly privileges what is already understood and given shape, to the extent that what is currently meaningless and chaotic is strained out. The present work is an experimental attempt at contesting this way of going about the business of mental (health) care. To achieve this, we attempt to systematically destroy meaning in a text that we ourselves have produced. Through the innovation "randomised text design", we seek to provide space for non-meaning and ignorance within the mental health discourse. What the process of randomised text design allows us to do, is bend away from ideas that hold psychotherapy, and the production of psychotherapy theory, to be finalised, planned and precise processes. Instead, it allows us to play around with ideas about what it can mean to craft our own life lines, where these lines sometimes seek the company of other people, as when I as patient/service user/client/citizen am called "therapist", and when I as "therapist" am called patient/client/service user/citizen.

Abstrakt (Norwegian)

Det nåværende epistemologiske stillaset for psykoterapi og mental helse privilegier hensynsløst det som allerede er forstått og gitt form, i den grad at det som for øyeblikket er meningsløst og kaotisk, er utslettet. Det nåværende arbeid er et eksperimentelt forsøk på å bekjempe denne måten å gå fram på i psykisk helsearbeid. For å oppnå dette forsøker vi å systematisk ødelegge mening i en tekst som vi selv har produsert. Gjennom innovasjonen "randomisert tekstdesign", søker vi å gi rom for ikke-mening og uvitenhet innen den mentale helsediskursen. Det som prosessen med randomisert tekstdesign tillater oss å er bøye oss vekk fra ideer som holder psykoterapi, og produksjon av psykoterapi teori som noe som skal ferdigstilles, planlegges og presiseres i prosesser. I stedet gir det oss mulighet til å leke med ideer om hva det kan bety å lage våre egne livslinjer, hvor disse linjene noen ganger søker andre mennesker, som når jeg som pasient / bruker / klient / borger kalles "terapeut", og når jeg som "terapeut" kalles pasient / klient / tjenestebruker / borger.

¹ The author sequence is randomised.

Introduction

This essay is an argument for pleasure in the confusion of boundaries and for responsibility in their construction.

(Donna Haraway 1991, p.150)

This article represents an attempt at, momentarily, destabilising some of the hidden hermeneutic armouring that underpins the situations that we call “psychotherapy” and other forms of consultation and organisational work. The point of departure of the text is a sense of confusion, of the kind one might experience if caught by a sudden fog when walking in unfamiliar terrain, or the sudden nausea a priest might feel when her religious doubts are vocalised by her inner voices during a sermon. The text is part autoethnography, part literary experiment. Through borrowing the idea of randomisation from quantitative research traditions and applying it in a qualitative context where it does not “naturally” belong, we try to incur the chaos caused by scientifically pushing meaning further than what is possible through everyday conversations.

Psychotherapy and mental health work are both practical and theoretical endeavours founded on understanding, insight and knowledge, generated in language. This positions non-meaning and uncertainty as something to be eliminated or ignored. Yet, non-meaning, that which has not yet been meant, or that which has not yet found a proper place within a discursive field - lulled to sleep, never to wake to make a rumpus - is the main ingredient needed for the machinery of psycho-professionalism to function. Transforming what is unfamiliar and unarticulated in the Other into something that is known and can be expressed by Us, is what it is all about. Equipped with a set of professional terminologies, conserved in auditoriums five, fifteen or fifty years ago, we possess our sentries, scouting the horizon for sufferers fitting the concepts we (but not they) are familiar with. In professional journals and official documents, the interface between service providers and service users is sketched out in fractal-like fashion, over and over, in all directions, constantly. The terminology count is constantly rising, yet all terminologies fit the same format. In our corner of the world, where representative democracy prevails, professionalism mirrors democracy by forming itself around the idea of representation. It is “therapists” and “consultants” helping, assessing, treating “users”, “patients”, “clients”. It is never “you” helping “me”.

Within the logic of representing, the majority always wins. So too in the world of the evidence-based intervention industry. There, the ideal of anonymous elections has been reinterpreted as “randomised control trials”. By accepting the knowledge generated through these procedures, and through communicating via terminologies and behavioural patterns dictated by them, we show our support to an entire ontology, a world order known and cherished. This is an ethos that says that “only if things work do they matter” (Haraway 2016, p. 4). Hence to not take science seriously, is to not take the world - or the people inhabiting it - seriously. Either you’re with us, or you’re with the terrorists.

The present work is an experimental attempt at contesting the epistemological scaffolding of this ontology. Our method of choice will not be sophisticated argument or fiery protest. We will not try to ascribe new meaning to the utterings of any of our fellow earthlings, nor will we provide space for the voices of the marginalised. Instead, we attempt to systematically destroy meaning in a text that we ourselves have produced. By way of the innovation *randomised text design*, we seek to provide space for non-meaning and ignorance within the mental health discourse. To counteract meaning making,

we will refrain from any methodological criticism or ethical reflections. Instead, we will proceed straight to the matter at hand.

The matter at hand

Once upon a time, a psychologist (RS) travelled to a conference, and was discouraged by the discussions he witnessed concerning psychotherapy. Nothing new was said. The sadness he experienced was palpable, and to comfort himself he wrote a summer letter (for this was in summer) to the remaining authors of this article. The correspondence that ensued, appeared to have some meaning – and was, thus, in a sense, just as paradigmatic to the state of things as was the discussions that he had just witnessed. In a spirited moment, and as an act of kindness, he invented a new method - *randomised text design* - to escape this purgatory of perpetual reproduction of the same².

Randomised text design (RTD)

RTD combines lessons from the control trial with elements of qualitative text analysis. In short, and for present purposes, this implies that in line with text analysis, a data material of coherent text is divided into meaningful units. In the present context, what constitutes the data material is the body of texts that the authors created through their summer correspondence³. When the entire data material has been divided into meaningful units, every unit is assigned a number, and all numbers are put in a (brown) hat. Randomisation is achieved by pulling numbers out of the hat, one at a time, in a random order. The resulting number sequence decides the order in which the meaningful units are to be put together again. On only one condition will a drawn number be returned to the hat: if two units stemming from the same author are pulled successively, in which case the last drawn unit is replaced into the hat, and a new unit from a different author is drawn.

Through this randomisation process, a new kind of dialogue arose out of our data material, devoid of responsivity, contingency and any meaningful connectedness. The main part of what follows in this article is what can be called the result of the RTD process, i.e. it is the data material presented in the order that it obtained through the process of randomisation. The starting point of the dialogue is the opening paragraph of the original summer letter from RS. From this point onwards, a randomised dialogue unfolds. The article concludes with a few deflecting remarks that were not part of the original data material. To the degree that anything more than traces of systematic meaning should emerge, this is all on the reader. The authors take no responsibility.

The dialogue⁴

RS: It all started with me attending that conference⁵. In one of the symposiums, there was a discussion between two famous researchers interested in psychotherapy

² Inspired by David Bowie's *Verbasizer*

³ Throughout the summer of 2016, the authors took part in an e-mail correspondence. This correspondence comprises the data material for this study.

⁴ Due to the journal demand for manuscripts not exceeding 7000 words we have removed 1371 words from the original randomly created dialogue. This has, again, been done by randomly choosing which pages to remove in order to reduce the number of words in the manuscript ("randuzation"). Page numbers from our manuscript was put into a (brown) hat and picked out. The pain of including randomisation into scientific activities was obvious to all the authors with following grief over the loss of words.

⁵ On advice from the reviewers, we have omitted the title of the conference in question, and the names of the discussants referred to. Thus, we have tampered with the data material in a way not in harmony with the rigour of our own methodology.

integration. Their discussion was just a new attempt at settling the war between specific ingredients vs. common factors – this time dressed up as “integration.” One claimed that the other’s model really is just about suggestion and persuading/tricking the patient to change, while what he himself is looking for are the actual components that, in integrated form, can bring change about. The other argued that he tried to escape the suggestion trap (if it is a trap at all?). Many of the more nuanced remarks were lost, but this pretty much sums up my understanding of a messy discussion that effected little in me other than a demoralised sense of “here we go again.”

BB: I recently picked up a book that I had for a long time misplaced, called «The development dictionary» (edited by Wolfgang Sachs)⁶, which is a critical theory attempt at picking apart the idea of “development” - primarily in the context of foreign aid. It is an extremely provocative and entertaining read, and I wonder if our idea for a book called “no-one has a mental health” could lend some elements from it.

TDB: Biesta’s “freeing teaching from learning”⁷, which, in our context, translates to “freeing (something or other that we are presently trying to rethink) from outcome.”

PAL: Another thing that comes to mind, is when we first heard John Shotter in Finland⁸. He challenged social constructionism by claiming that relations are not something that exist between us, but rather something that we find ourselves *in*, at all times. “Being in” was the recurring theme for Shotter, then. We are in life, in culture/context, in relationships, in ourselves, etc. For me, this “in” was a small revolution for how I understand what being human means. It says something about what was and what was not, that escaping all the “ins” is impossible. This further added new meaning to Jaakko Seikkula’s notion of being “on the border” or in a “borderland” (Jaakko would maybe say this differently). It might be impossible to escape the box, but it could prove both fun and challenging to be on the border.

OKH: In an article by Søren Øvergård I came across this formulation: ‘Wittgensteinian attempt to “unsay” the “said”, in order to let the “saying” itself be heard...’.⁹ It is not easy to construct a language for what is in motion. What seems to thrive as unfinished, diffuse, about to become complicated and to come into existence. I like the idea of making something that does not distinguish itself from anything. Maybe dogma therapy. But then “therapy” recurs, all words are already (ab)used. I think the book, inspired by the history of family therapy and Tore Dag’s Coldplay song, could be called “The pragmatics of movement - the ups and downs of coexistence.”

RS: Before this symposium, I had been invigorated by a plenary from John McLeod with the title “Making sense of what integrative therapists actually do in their work with clients.”¹⁰ In it, he challenged the psychotherapy concept by saying that a central, theoretical foundation for the traditional understanding of it, is the idea of intervention.

⁶ (Sachs, 2010)

⁷ (Biesta, 2015)

⁸ http://www.dialogic.fi/network/pdf/Invitationrevised_190811.pdf

⁹ (Overgaard, 2007)

¹⁰ http://c.ymcdn.com/sites/www.sepiweb.org/resource/resmgr/sepi2016/sepi2016_final_program.pdf

Psychotherapy is an enterprise consisting in a therapist intervening in relation to a patient. As I understand it, intervention is here seen as a presentation of something that causes change in the patient. Research thus revolves around finding interventions that cause change, either as isolated acts or as sequences of acts. McLeod wishes to discard this conception of psychotherapy, proposing instead an understanding of psychotherapy where the concept “making” plays a central role. This triggered me to revisit an old idea that I’ve always fancied, which I first made acquaintance with in a lecture by Maturana. He was asked if he considered himself a social constructionist, and answered that he did not like to be grouped or categorised. But if he *had* to call himself something, it would have to be a “bring forthist.” As a psychotherapist I do not think that I intervene in the sense that I cause change. Rather, I believe I contribute - through participating in interactions – to something being brought forward, created, or made - as McLeod would say.

TDB: I like the reflection on the dogma idea very much. It is fanatic and silly at the same time. Concerning the need to be weary of the risk of being too radical, thus signing out of the discursive community, my immediate thought was that “you know what? I think I just might want to sign out.” To do something (in writing), make a set of dogmas that are so far out that readers would just shake their heads and refuse to relate to them, and say “you can’t be serious!” Maybe we should accept the risk of signing out completely, holding on to a “professional suicide” which could also prove to be a “social suicide”? The silliness of the whole idea makes it possible to go to extremes in experimentation.

RS: The conference experience clarifies the problem of more of the same, since there will always be situations, events, personal experiences out there in the world that will not fit with already-known ways of thinking. This leads to, and creates, problems and negative results for the people it concerns. The crisis in psychotherapy, as it is currently developing, be it through pursuing the common factors idea or through searching for specific ingredients, is that only those people who fit with some generalised knowledge that already exist, will be helped. In *Morgenbladet* (a Norwegian weekly newspaper) this week, Ole Jacob Madsen¹¹ provides a magnificent description of how the hysteria about normal distribution in public health clinics leads to the pathologisation of children (as a grandfather, I see how attachment theory and other devilish ideas create anxiety among parents and grandparents – does my (grand)child deviate from the norm?). What kinds of interactions and life experiences are offered to infants, when parents and grandparents constantly live in fear of deviation?

TDB: There were some sequences that I really appreciated, and that simultaneously made me think that “damn it, this is just what we should do.” Or maybe we are already doing it. But it must be remembered that this has been an (electronic) dialogue ... But it must ... (~~I am speaking on behalf of all, or anyone~~), no, this ended up just being a mess. But then, it has all been messy – or nearly all. So maybe I should not have delisted that parenthesis? No, I will leave it like that.

RS: Dogma rules for psychotherapy, psychotherapists and psychotherapy research could be:

¹¹ (Madsen, 2016)

1. *The practice and study of psychotherapy must only take place in actual institutions and organisations.*
2. *The first-person perspective must be secured by way of the researcher always being part of the practice to be researched.*
3. *Results and data must be shared with, and examined by, everyone involved.*
4. *The following concepts and formulations must not be used when describing the practice of psychotherapy:
Intervention, factors, ingredients, diagnosis, change mechanisms, relation, alliance, empathy, mentalisation, attachment. To challenge ourselves, we should perhaps add dialog(ical practices), collaboration, recovery (oriented practices), feedback.*
(Any further suggestions?)
5. *If any of the above-mentioned concepts are to be used, it must be shown how they represent something radically new when compared to how they are applied in traditional understandings of psychotherapy.*
6. *The results of what is made must be credited to all participants, in ways that highlight the ones who have asked for psychotherapy.*
7. *We refrain from referring to any variety of psychotherapies by the use of three capitalised letters, such as CBT, MBT; DBT etc.*
7. *Any further suggestions?*

BB: There is an H. D. Thoreau quote that reads:

“If I knew for a certainty that a man was coming to my house with the conscious design of doing me good, I should run for my life ... for fear that I should get some of his good done to me.”¹²

TDB: But then I think that I am more in this “landscape” of mine where I experience that “community,” “we,” “vicinity,” “presence,” are problematic ideas that do not strike a nerve with me when it comes to human existence and my own sense of life.

PAL: A few dogma rules are maybe what is needed to get to the border, not to leave behind what we today know about psychotherapy, but to achieve a certain distance that might reveal something else than what proximity does? Regardless, I think it would be interesting to see where such a movement would bring us, and which thoughts and ideas it would generate. Finally, it was exciting to read about the understandings from the people who had committed acts of terror.

TDB: But that is not what I wish to say. There is a quote I would like to share. I have read it before, and read it again just now, while enjoying a glass of Retsina. God, I never seem to get to the point. Soon I will have to get up and find my gate, before managing to write anything at all. Right now, I am sitting in some sort of snobbish SAS lounge in Gardermoen airport, suddenly more occupied with helping myself to free potato chips and cake. So, I think I will stop writing now... And I am back. There was even free wine and champagne here. I don't understand what kind of place it is that I have stumbled into. It is a shame that this was not on my trip out, to Metochi. That is where I am

¹² (Thoreau, 1977, p. 328)

returning from. Because then, the party could have started here, with free champagne. And what a feast the trip has been. Per Arne can vouch for that, I am sure. But, as I was saying, I read a book – partly about, partly by, Roland Barthes¹³. I have no idea where he belongs in the (philosophical) landscape. But I think he is counted among the post-structuralists. Although I never entirely understood what structuralism and post-structuralism is about. So, when those words pop up, I think that they mean something like modern and post-modern, but in the same instant I get the sense that that is not entirely accurate. But that post-structuralism belongs in post-modernism, of that I am quite certain. Simultaneously, this reflection, or confession, might be misplaced, because maybe Barthes was not a post-structuralist at all. This was all clarified in the book, I think, but I don't think I'll bother to look it up. But that he was a man who made significant contributions to literary theory, of that I am certain. Finally, something. And it appears that he invented his own field or subject, semiology (=the science of signs). And signs, as signs and signs in their materiality! Now we're getting somewhere! Signs are the very bridge between the physical and this which is something transcending what is concretely physical. In the sign we find a leap where the physical in a peculiar way becomes/creates/arouses/refers to/establishes ... something more, something other than what it is in itself. A presentation that is simultaneously a re-presentation. Yes, this leap where the human became a sign-user is what the biblical fall into sin is about. They ate from the Tree of Knowledge, they saw their own nakedness, and were ashamed. Knowledge, language, sign, re-presentation creates a distance vis-à-vis ourselves, and the world. And with this, also a distance to sensation and experience. The humans were expelled from Paradise. Sentenced and displaced: "strangers on earth you shall be." This was a kind of Hell, but it was also the only way to heaven. But this was not what I was going to say ...

BB: It is enjoyable that you have linked your thoughts to Dogma 95,¹⁴ which has been a major inspiration to me as well. It is a way of thinking that I have used rather actively. The vow of chastity from Von Trier & co is one of the sites where the creative potential in negativity/negation is most clearly formulated. As a hobby musician and jazz dilettante, I have for a long time been aware of how creativity grows from limitation (it is much easier to improvise over a cool jazz tune with two chords, than over a be-bop tune with twenty). When my good colleague Espen Odden and I started our walk-in practice, we were strongly influenced by dogma thinking (by removing as much as possible of the habitual curlicues that could make the event of "therapy" branch out beyond the actual meeting, or make it dependent upon "information," "tools," "deliberations," "assessment," "further referrals" or any other practices originating somewhere else than within the actual conversation that the people it concerns is a part of)¹⁵.

PAL: This idea of challenging the concept of psychotherapy in a way that creates a sense of something revolutionary and new is basically fun. What I am trying to do in this e-mail is just to briefly try and share my immediate thoughts after a quick read-through. Whether my thoughts are of any use, I have no idea. I am just expressing them.

¹³ (Gundersen, 1989)

¹⁴ <http://www.dogme95.dk/dogma-95/>

¹⁵ (Bertelsen, Johnsen, Lindemann & Odden, 2015)

TDB: I am really happy about the «He is quirky» article that we wrote, Bård¹⁶ (which is to be published this autumn!). Because there we managed to make explicit some of these “far out” things, in discussing what is happening in meetings that are facilitated through services within mental health care and psychotherapy. An attempt at bringing to light what usually happens in the shadows, the shadows thrown by what is in full light: knowledge, roles, identity etc.

BB: Then, I have much more faith in the dogma project. As I interpret it, it is not about arguing *against* something, but about not allowing oneself the luxury of talking/writing in a language that already has an established relationship to truth. It is about what the poet Robert Frost writes about in the poem “the road not taken”¹⁷:

*Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less travelled by,
And that has made all the difference.*

PAL: The first thing that strikes me is how psychotherapy research comes forth as an exercise in pathologising, where an autopsy is performed on a “corpse” to find a set of causes, understandings and connections that, eventually, will let us know something. In my opinion, this repetitive drill leads to particular descriptions of the organs (“ingredients”), with gradually fewer and fewer (if any) radical news. At the same time, within this approach there is the implicit idea that proximity, in the form of extensive knowledge about the phenomenon, is important – if not necessary. But in my world, distance is at least as important as proximity. What would happen if we consciously move away from the phenomenon, to see the “corpse” in relation to the surroundings where it has been? Will that provide us with another type of insight, understanding, or recognition? And, if it does, our concepts for describing the “corpse” will still be a language that is inherently insufficient. This indicates that we are, perhaps, moving out of a discipline, a move which in itself can be liberating. But it can also be troublesome, if we are to try and describe “the new” which appears as a consequence of distance. As soon as description begins, distance transforms itself into proximity. And maybe that is unavoidable and necessary? As I understand it, you are looking for concepts within what I associate with art (literature, film etc.) - a search (movement) that is interesting because it also says something about the importance of art and language. I think this relates to what Rolf refers to as “escaping the box.”

BB: Another book that I have read this summer, is Simon Critchley’s «Notes on suicide»¹⁸. In a way, that is a book that follows some of the dogma rules that you propose, Rolf, in the way that he wishes to explore suicide without letting himself be captured by the position and status that suicide has acquired in our culture. And he does it from a first-person perspective, by explicitly stating that he himself has ample experience with asking himself the question «to be, or not to be». What made me think of Critchley’s line of thought when I read what you wrote, is the conclusion he arrives at: the problem with suicide is that it is a far too optimistic (!) act. The logic of suicide is that

¹⁶ (Bertelsen & Bøe, 2016)

¹⁷ (Frost, 1993, p1)

¹⁸ (Critchley, 2015)

one, at a given time, can know what one needs to know (about life and death). This presupposes an infinitesimal confidence in one's own judgement. When famous researchers argue about who has the best integrative model for psychotherapy, it presupposes that they are confident that their own respective card houses (which any theory necessarily is), stands on firm ground.

RS: This self-imposed apocalypse can be thought of as a (professional) suicide, but with a possibility for resurrection. To make and bring forth something new that enable the inclusion of deviation in new ways, yet always risking to become a new norm itself. My summer letters must therefore be read as an invitation to collective suicide, to see if there is an afterlife for therapists. The invitation also entails the welcoming of ideas for further dogma-oriented tools and aids for facilitating this collective suicide.

TDB: That is maybe also why I like Biesta's sting towards "uniqueness as difference" (by that pointing out that diversity does not necessarily provide space ... we meet somewhere beyond diversity...). Instead, Biesta talks about "uniqueness as irreplaceability."¹⁹

BB: A quote from the book "Dark Deleuze": 'Concepts are not discovered but the result of a catastrophe, [...] from turning away, tiredness, distress, and distrust. True thought is rare, painful, and usually forced on us by the brutality of an event so terrible that it cannot be resolved without the difficulty of thought. As such, we must quit treating concepts as some "wonderful dowry from some wonderland" to understand the hard, rigorous work that goes into their creation'.²⁰

OKH: Håkan Hellström says it like this²¹:

*Carry on when darkness comes and everything hurts
Carry on like an autumn leaf in the first flood of spring
Like a heart refusing to stop beating
When every prayer has gone by, carry on*

*On your memories' junkyard
When I have fallen heavily
Find me any time
On the same streets as Cederhök*

RS: Prince sings that "There is joy in repetition."²² I follow him with Deleuze in my back pocket.

BB: I wonder if Dogma 95 might be one of the most elitist things to ever hit the world of film. The rules constitute a challenge, a claim that "we bet that you do not have the talent to make a film worth watching, without breaking these rules." Because making a film without the use of any effects or post-production processing hidden from the

¹⁹ See (Biesta, 2014)

²⁰ (Culp, 2016, p.6)

²¹ (Hellström, 2010, track 11)

²² (Prince, 1990, track 8)

viewer, takes extreme understanding of film as medium, an incredible presence and an exquisite talent for storytelling.

RS: I have always been fascinated by deconstruction. Partly as a tool for clarifying dichotomies/dilemmas as fields of tension that has to be lived. Another aspect of deconstruction is that it is comprised by destruction and construction. One way to understand this is that it is neither about destruction nor construction, in the sense that you first take something apart and then put it back together again in new ways. Deconstruction points to something else.

BB: But then I thought, hmm, well, one could think like that, too. It might even be rather common. Maybe cutting loose from such a frame of thinking and speaking would prove difficult, as long as you hold on to the unity of psyche and soma, and the idea that the psyche, just as other parts of the body, can be sick or healthy. And it does not really help to be anti this, either – the anti-psychiatry movement is still a movement with the word “psychiatry” as the main part of its name. To argue against psychiatry, is to acknowledge its claim to legitimacy. I have thought like that when reading about “medication-free treatment alternatives” in the media, lately – it follows the same logic, only in a more cunning way.

RS: My reaction to this discussion, is that it seems to move in circles without getting anywhere. Because both models provide sensible understandings of the empirical findings, the debate seems to be more about faith and ideologies. But perhaps it is more concerned with struggles for interests and power, than with finding a “truth.” The danger is that this obstructs progress, at least when it comes to understanding more about this phenomenon that we call psychotherapy. I dare say that today’s society is very different from when classical psychotherapy (i.e. psychoanalysis) was invented.

BB: Last year, Espen Odden and I wrote an essay for the Journal of the Norwegian Psychological Association, where we dabbled with Zygmund Bauman’s concept liquid modernity²³. The essay was about accessible services, and different ways of thinking about (and practicing) mental health work in schools. Here is a paragraph from that essay: “Bauman calls our age the Liquid Modernity. Social structures are in constant change, power and politics drift apart, bonds of community between people deteriorate and grow increasingly temporary. Our conception of what life is about, moves from being concerned with prolonged movements (development, maturation, career), to viewing life as a series of episodic short-term projects. We turn our gaze towards our contemporaries, through participating in leisure activities, social media, watching reality-TV and talent shows, and away from the generations that came before us, and those that will come after us. In these complex waters, the responsibility for safe manoeuvring is put entirely on the individual, who is considered “free to choose” and responsible for his or her own learning and actions. Where conformity was once held as a virtue, flexibility has taken over.”

²³ (Odden & Bertelsen, 2015)

RS: I found a book by a certain Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, Hanna Arendt's biographer (apparently), titled "Why Arendt matters."²⁴ In it, I found much support for the kind of "boxology" that I use to understand all this new stuff. Her portrayal of totalitarianism, and the Eichmann trial in particular, highlights some important aspects of what it means to be preoccupied with "the new." What was it that Nazism and the Stalinist version of communism, and the totality of horrors in the Second World War (but also in the years that followed, with the dawn of the Cold War and the growing threat of nuclear annihilation), brought into the world? It was something radically new. To understand this new phenomenon, Arendt concludes that the old concepts, which used to provide us with meanings and understandings, will no longer do.

BB: But even if the dogma rules can, in a sense, be understood as realist (i.e. they only allow for technique and narrative manoeuvres that portray reality in a naturalistic fashion), the rules certainly do not represent a move away from fiction. So, what are they about, then?

RS: To me, thinking is heavy manual labour, stemming from more or less palpable bodily sensations that demand to be made into something more than tacit knowledge. They demand words, in a sense, yet finding words for them is never an easy task. Using old, familiar words is the least troublesome, but more often than not those words cannot seem to cover all that needs covering. Somehow, they fail to capture what is sensed or intuited. This forces me to seek out new words, which is a search where I need all the help I can get. Help is what can be found in reading texts, watching films, listening to the radio. But the best help is usually to seek community through actual conversation with others. And that is when I impose myself on the lot of you. I have conversations with you, either you want it or not. Initially, this process is internal to myself, but the true beauty is when I get an answer or a response. This reminds me about a joke I heard, where a person was asked what he or she preferred the most - masturbation or intercourse. After a moment's hesitation, the answer came: "to fuck, 'cause that way we both get to socialise as well." ... Do I sense a drop of real-life wisdom, here?

BB: Particularly exciting with that list, is that it connects with the question of which language one can (and cannot) allow oneself to use about practice, and how research on/in practice can be performed and communicated. But I would wish for it to also provide directions for the purely practical side of conversation, like this:

- *Props, like tests, questionnaires, and prescriptions are not to be used.*
- *Genre-conversations (in the form of anamnestic interviewing, reflecting teams, ceremonial thinking or any version of scripts for conversation found in manuals) must not occur.*
- *Linguistic alienation, or favouring of one particular jargon over another (e.g. privileging a particular professional terminology over everyday language – or vice versa) cannot be accepted.*

Something along those lines. And it is important to keep in mind that the prohibitions are not imposed because the things they forbid are deemed wrong, or dangerous. What is forbidden is forbidden because it works so well and is so expedient that it actually

²⁴ (Young-Bruehl, 2006)

seems to work sometimes. Dogma thought is about forcing something into existence by limiting access to the tools one would normally apply to solve the task at hand. The way I understand your description of your experiences at the European conference, is that you tell of the harrowing boredom associated with listening to clever people talk about what they (and we) already know. While they are doubtlessly exceptionally gifted, they still speak about what they already know.

OKH: Håkan Hellström says it like this:²⁵

*Been kicked around a time or two
As a few of us must be
To get what really matters
And whom you can trust
But when you were with me
The music seemed to never end
Only you make me hang, hang around*

*'Cause I believe
That when we travel through time
That all the best
Is yet to happen*

*I believe
That when we travel through time
That all the best
Is yet to happen
Say it, say it, say it again*

*I believe
That when we travel through time
That all the best
Is yet to happen
Lie to me, lie to me*

BB: If we actually were to go through with the idea of making a Dogma document for (what we often refer to as) psychotherapy, how would we articulate its purpose?

OKH: Håkan Hellström says it like this:²⁶

*I believe
That when we travel through time
That all the best
Is yet to happen
Lie to me, lie to me*

²⁵ (Hellström, 2010, track 11)

²⁶ (Hellström, 2010, track 11)

*And I believe
That when we travel through time
That all the best
Is yet to happen
Lie to me, lie to me
Keep lying, just so, to me*

RS: Gilles Deleuze says somewhere that the radically new is an act of violence. To think something that is actually new is to commit violence towards something that has been thought before, something that until now has sustained the status of viable perspective. To think something new is violence towards what is already established. A less aggressive perspective is to say that to think something new is to think outside the box. But the problem with moving outside the box is, in my own experience, that then you have to already know what the box is, and where its boundaries are. If not, you discover soon enough that all you see is the inside of box. At the same time, I believe that the greatest peril in seeking to be innovative is to discard the box you are in without first getting to know it thoroughly. If your method for describing the box presupposes discarding it, that makes it really difficult to escape the box. So, I think it is pertinent to understand psychotherapy, its various descriptions and practices, as they are currently in use within the systems and workplaces where we live and labour. What concepts are involved, which contexts are highlighted, what are the basic ideas?

Deflection

This is where the conversation ends, and deflection begins. Deflection means “to bend away from.” Is that really what we are trying to do with this article? And, if so, what is it that we are trying to bend away from? The use of randomisation as a means for producing text lets our own words function as reminders of what everyday dialogues about the very issues we are trying to investigate are. In our own research (Bertelsen & Bøe 2016; Bøe et al 2013, 2014, 2015; Helgeland et al 2017; Lidbom et al 2014, 2015, 2016; Sundet 2011; Sundet et al 2016), we have found “therapeutic” conversations to be both everyday and messy. Whether any given interlocutor ever really understands what the previous speaker has said - if our own responses bear any connection with the other’s utterances - or if we are simply responding to our own inner dialogues, is still an open question. Put differently: meaning making is overrated. Maybe there is something else going on, in our exchanges of grunts and gestures, than the making of meanings. And maybe this “something else” concerns itself with non-meaning, with what can only be sensed, is unclear and can only be grasped through accepting that language is not the proper snare for its capturing. The “something else” drives language, and conversation, forwards, exacting on us a perpetual need to ask ourselves how we can move further. Every step throws a shadow of doubt, questioning the factitiousness of the step in the first place – have we walked, or do we stand still (Shotter 2010)? This is the question of immanence. It is the immanence of language, but not only language as a medium for the production of meaning. It is rather the opposite, that through its inherent lack of proficiency in capturing the “something else”, engaging with language installs in us an incessant sense of having to find *other* words to carry on. One could say that language demands of us to stop making sense, and to begin sensing and acting.

To act is to bring something forth. In his book "Making," Tim Ingold (2013) offers a critique of what he calls hylomorphism: "Whenever we read that in the making of artefacts, practitioners impose forms internal to the mind upon a material world 'out there', hylomorphism is at work" (Ingold 2013, p.21). The psychotherapy field, and maybe also organisational work, are fine examples of domains dominated by such a way of thinking: the therapist or consultant has a model in her head, to be realised in the life of another person or persons, which are part of the external world. Thus, the world must be moulded to fit the model. Good therapy and consultation work means realising the model, assuming that when realised, the model will secure that its inherent intentions are realised as well. Within architecture, which is one of Ingold's fields of inquiry, such a process leaves the world with a building that fits a certain standard of aesthetics and/or functionality. The product, it is assumed, is a result of the original idea within the architect's mind. Upon this view, the process of building is, in itself, a trivial phenomenon, chiefly concerned with following the instructions outlined in the design. Anyone who has ever tried to build a tree house as a child (or as a grown-up), will know that it is never quite as simple as that. Ingold shows how the very process of building, of bringing something forth in the act of making it, is just as responsive to the "material," and to the context wherein the work is done, as it is a realisation of the predesigned plan. What occurs to be the result of an intentional process is, for one, never just an upscaled, three-dimensional replica of a drawn-up design plan or a mental image. Coincidence, opposing forces, hidden qualities of the material - and the builder - all leave their marks on the final result, which is never truly finalised, but remains in trace-leaving dialogues with the context it finds itself in. Although clearly traceable, the original design has disappeared through merging with every other force that has influenced the making. A building exists within a landscape, where it is an arena for uses that carve into it the signs of wear, adjustments, and reparations. If not, the building gradually ceases to be a building, transforming into ruinous debris.

As therapists and consultants, our experience tells us that therapy and organisational work is more like this, than what hylomorphism would have us believe. The whole idea of standardised treatments, an idea that continues to pry its neoliberal tentacles into ever more remote and unlikely creases of the psycho-professional fields, is psychotherapy's version of hylomorphism's demands and ideals. To us, the processes of what we call psychotherapy appear significantly more messy, unpredictable and malleable. This is also what the Boston Change Process Study Group (2010) find in their studies of the interplay between infants and parents, which they apply as inspiration for understanding psychotherapeutic processes. Through this, the focus shifts from methodical knowledge and the realisation of abstract models, to implicit relational knowledge in the present moment (Stern, 2004). Abstract ideas, theories and research-based knowledge are part of the processes that are included in what we call psychotherapy and consultation work. But they will always, and inevitably, be transformed when thrown into the stream of forces that make out real-life collaborations between actual human beings. The characteristics, skills and knowledges of the actors ("service users", "clients" and "professionals"), and the anticipatory and sanguine sensations and thoughts arising in every moment of an event of conversation, will, when in concert with traces of prior experiences and in the face of phenomena hindering progress in the ongoing work, always contribute to the bringing forth of whatever will be perceived as a result. Yet a result is never "finished," because life never slows down or takes a break. New events, questions, dilemmas - existential, social and political - will for ever arise, returning us to the perpetual asking and attempted answering of the question "how to move on?" (Shotter 2010).

Perhaps "psychotherapy" and organisational work is something that never should, or can, be finished. The persons seeking help and the therapist or consultant may not have to keep meeting neither regularly nor planned, yet in facing life we all depend on the possibility for inviting others, people with

whom we have spent valued time and who have come to be of significance to us, into our presence. This does not represent a kind of neediness, but rather a responsible dependency where our basic aliveness as earthlings, intertwined in each other's life-lines, is acknowledged. In creating social and conversational meetings, we keep the hope of moving on alive.

What this process of randomised text design (as hoax or in earnest?) has allowed us to do, is to bend away from ideas that hold psychotherapy, psychotherapy theory and other forms of consultation and organisational work to be finalised, planned and precise processes. Instead, it has allowed us to play around with ideas about what it can mean to craft our own life lines (Ingold, 2015), where these lines of life-as-it-is-lived sometimes seek the company of other people, as when I as patient/service user/client/citizen am called "therapist", and when I as "therapist" am called patient/client/service user/citizen.

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