

Becoming a posthuman systemic nomad.

Part I: Truth and trust

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Abstract

We live in a complex, globalised world. Everything is connected and still many of us feel detached, disconnected from other entities on earth. We might sleepwalk into a global ecological crisis and therefore we need to develop new ways of living together differently. Can we imagine an ecological response on globalisation and complexity? What difference can systemic practitioners make, a difference that makes a difference, that matters (Bateson, 1979)? Transformation in a complex system is the emergent result of interactions between its components and its environment. We can't predict and control inter-action between all multi-actors in a complex system. We can anticipate, improvise and learn how to learn. In this article I present a theoretical framework, inspired by Neo-Materialism, that integrates cybernetics and social-constructionism in contemporary systemic thinking. The question I ask is how to navigate complexity and offer accountability about the process of systemic learning, without getting drawn into the paradoxical spiral of control. I suggest ways in which therapists may become systemic nomads and describe how to produce 'validity from within', remaining open to the unpredictable process of becoming in multi-actor networks of human and non-human generators.

Introduction

The text "Becoming a Posthuman Systemic Nomad" is derived from two chapters of my doctoral thesis "Practice Based Evidence Based Practice, Navigating Complexity in Feedback-Informed Systemic Therapy" (van Hennik, 2018). In these chapters I have outlined the social, political and philosophical context that informs my practice and research as a systemic family therapist. I suggest ways in which therapists may become systemic nomads and describe how to produce "validity from within" (Maturana, 1998), remaining open to the unpredictable process of becoming in multi-

actor networks of human and non-human generators. Systemic nomads learn how to learn to anticipate in complex systems, through adaptation, improvisation, the deconstruction and reconstruction of frames of reference, through practice based, collaborative and systemic research (Van Hennik, & Hillewaere, 2017).

We live in a complex, globalized world and many of us experience feelings of deep uncertainty, and a crisis of trustworthiness. I witness a “conservative revolution” with the focus on separateness, sameness and control: through practices of exclusion, protection, creating borders and building walls. I wonder how a “systemic evolution” would look like, with a focus on connection, difference and flow: through practices of “intra-action”, inclusion, trust and relational responsibility. “Intra-action” is a term used to replace inter-actions (Barad, 2007), which necessitates how bodies of human and non-human actors participate in actions with each other. Can we imagine an ecological response on globalisation and complexity? What difference can systemic practitioners make, a difference that makes a difference, that matters (Bateson, 1979), responding, responsibly to the world, with a focus on relational ethics rather than on control?

I remember a fascinating conversation between systemic theorists Humberto Maturana and Heinz von Foerster (1998) centred on the difference in meaning between the words “science” and “systemic”. The word “science” derives by way of the French *science* (“knowledge”) from the Latin *scire*, which originally meant to separate one thing from another, to distinguish. The same root is found in words like “schism”, “schizophrenic”, and “shit”. To know means to distinguish, take things apart and see them as separate. In contrast, “systemic” is related to the Greek *συσμ*, meaning “[putting] together”, as in a word such as symphony. Science means “taking things apart” and systemic means “seeing the connections”.

In this article I intend to describe and develop systemic, ecological responses towards complexity in a globalised world. I believe systemic, ecological responses are necessary, forming eco-resilient “multi-actor learning communities”, co-creating ways of living together otherwise, relational responsible to all (human and non-human) actors within our vulnerable interconnected world. The main question in this article is how to responsibly respond in complex adaptive systems, without getting drawn in a paradoxical spiral of control.

The article is divided in two parts. Part 1 is called “**Truth and trust**”. Part 2 is called “**Systemic Nomads**”. The first part “**Truth and trust**” is about building trust rather than truth. Trust is only possible in a state between knowing and not knowing. “Trust means establishing a positive relationship with another person in spite of not knowing” (Han, 2014:105). Both postmodernism and neoliberalism lead to uncertainty, culminating in the present crisis of trustworthiness. My work as a systemic family therapist in mental healthcare is significantly impacted by both postmodernism and neoliberalism. Within the field of systemic therapy, therapists, influenced by postmodern ideas, have developed collaborative, narrative, solution-oriented, and dialogical approaches. Within this context, I learned to adopt an attitude of “not-knowing” and to remain open to the unpredictable process of becoming in those approaches. The influence of neoliberalism has resulted in large-scale, standardised procedures in the field of mental healthcare. I witness the meritocratic paradox of control in my everyday work in this sector: I am part of an escalating pattern, an increase of complexity, distrust, stress, and bureaucracy.

In this first part of the article I introduce Maturana’s (1998) concept of “validity from within”. Systemic practitioners and participants in the network produce “validity from within”, creating coherent explanations that are compatible with culture and community, sometimes comfortable, other times uncomfortable, in such a manner as to open up new ways of living together differently?

The second part “**Systemic Nomads**” is about how to navigate complexity in multi-actor networks. We might sleepwalk into a global ecological crisis and therefore we need to develop new ways of living together differently. Everything is connected, within intra-actions, in our complex, globalised world. Still many of us experience detachment, disconnection. Neighbours can't tell each other's name. Consumers don't know where their supermarket food really comes from, or where electronic waste ends up. They feel disconnected from the people that make their clothes, from the animals we share our living space with, from the earth that provides home to all actors present.

I suggest ways in which systemic practitioners may become systemic nomads, reintegrating cybernetics and social construction, taking a new-materialist perspective on life. A systemic nomad considers a system as a multi-actor-network, in which we are relationally responsible to all (human and non-human) actors, in the networks that we produce and that we are produced by.

Part I: Trust and Truth

This is the first part of the text “Becoming a posthuman systemic nomad”.

Uncertainty in a VUCA world



Is Truth Dead? Time Magazine April 3rd 2017 ([link](#))

Crisis in trustworthiness

The question on the cover of this issue of TIME, “Is Truth Dead?” highlights the crisis of trustworthiness in the modern world. Both postmodernist and neoliberal discourses have led to uncertainty, feelings of existential anxiety, and social insecurity. Postmodern deconstruction challenges every dominant orientation. Neoliberalism is caught up in a meritocratic paradox of control. Each increase of control increases complexity, and each increase in complexity strengthens the need to gain more control.

Postmodernism

Let’s travel back a hundred years in time. In 1917, the artist Marcel Duchamp (1887–1968) submitted a urinal entitled “The Fountain” as his entry for the Society of Independent Arts exhibition in New York. The artistic committee insisted that “The Fountain” was not art and rejected it out of hand. This exclusion caused an uproar among the emerging group of artists who became known as Dadaists, who challenged the dominant ideas about what constituted art and whose prerogative it was to make that decision.

Some twenty years after Duchamp, in 1938, the French philosopher Raymond Aron (1905–1983) wrote in his doctoral dissertation “The Philosophy of History” about the limits of objectivity. Aron claimed that “objectivity”, “progress” and “reason” were nothing more than theoretical possibilities in time. The committee tasked with judging his dissertation was openly hostile to Aron. The notion of challenging objectivity was highly controversial. The committee argued that this approach could lead to subjectivism, relativism, nihilism, and the end of positivist, universal science. One of its members wondered if Aron was possessed by the devil and expressed the fervent hope that no other student would follow him. Aron later recalled this statement. He [Aron] was not possessed by the devil but rather “experiencing in advance the world that my judges did not see coming” (Aron, 1990:76).

The contributions that Duchamp and Aron made to change in their respective fields opened up space for a new postmodern era. Postmodernists claim to have abandoned the basic premise of the Enlightenment. That premise, “the ideal of the progress of mankind through a self-regulatory and teleological ordained use of scientific rationality aimed at the “perfectibility” of Man” (Braidotti, 2011:28) rests on the assumption that there is only one single, fundamental and static principle of organisation that explains our world, and that this principle can be discovered by pure reason and objective observation. Postmodernists dispute “objective observable and reasonable truths”; instead, they proceed on the assumption that a mediated “hyperreality” is a social construct. They embrace paradox, juxtapose unrelated parts in newly-formed assemblages, and open up space for multiplicities of differences in life.

They [post modernists] became more attuned to the irregular than to the rule, to the discontinuous rather than the linear, the hybrid instead of the pure, the singular rather than the universal, the marginal over the mainstream, the shadings and the mixtures instead of the clear and distinct, and a lot more willing to concede that things can, and do, go wrong all the time.

Caputo, 2013, p.179

Postmodern thinkers, architects, artists, therapists and activists challenge common and dominant orientations. Nietzsche (1891) captures this in his famous quote: “One must still have chaos in oneself to be able to give birth to a dancing star”. Many postmodernist thinkers played a political role in social resistance movements. Foucault, Derrida and Deleuze (the French critical school) became involved in, and drew inspiration from, the wave of protests that took place in Paris in May 1968. Foucault, the driving force behind the “Groupe d’Information sur les Prisons” protested against prison policies. Deleuze and Guattari were involved in the anti-psychiatry movement. Contemporary postmodern thinkers like Braidotti, Barad, and Bennett develop feminist and queer theories and performative politics. Postmodernists reject “totalising” knowledge and dominant representations, and strive to empower marginalised multiplicities in a pluralistic and multi-cultural world.

Despite political activism postmodernist have frequently been accused of nihilism. Postmodernism is often understood as a kind of “anything-goes” relativism (the deconstruction of deconstruction leads to relativism) and has attracted strong criticism. Some authors (Pluckrose, 2017, Pomerantsev, 2016) hold postmodernists responsible for the rise of populism, neo-nationalism, the belief in “alternative facts” (such as the notion that climate change is a Chinese hoax) and a growing tendency to distrust authority, expertise, science, and government, in a disastrous response to the transformative complexities of our globalised world.

This complex, globalised world is sometimes described using the acronym VUCA, which stands for Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity in the post-Cold War era (Mack et al. 2016). Several transitions have led to this VUCA world: (1) the transition from a structured to a more fluid phase of modernity: social structures dissolve faster than they can coalesce. (2) Political power has moved to a global level. (3) The decline of social solidarity and cuts to social security. (4) Our society is changing so rapidly that it becomes impossible for us to predict and plan our future. (5) The promotion of self-care, based on the belief that individuals are free and able to make their own choices, and that they are responsible for selecting from among the many available opportunities and solving their own problems (Bauman, 2012).

In his critique of postmodernism, the sociologist Anthony Giddens (1991) argues that what he calls “late modernity” is a post-traditional society, in which doubt and self-reflexivity have become institutionalised. All knowledge takes the form of a hypothesis. Any claim is always potentially open to revision. The self and the body have become projects. An “obsessive” process of self-reflection, self-construction, and self-expression has become the norm. The process of constructing an identity requires in each person a continuous response to changing social conditions. A constant urge for transformation is accompanied by a lack of clear orientation. This process results in feelings of existential anxiety and social insecurity.

The individual feels bereft and alone in a world in which she or he lacks the psychological supports and the sense of security provided by more traditional settings. Therapy offers someone to turn to, a secular version of the confessional

Giddens, 1991, p.33-34

Although postmodernism was described as marking the end of all master narratives (Lyotard, 1979), capitalism has in effect become the new master narrative, holding out the promise that the market economy will lead us to the highest possible form of human evolution. The assertion “It is easier to

imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism” (attributed to Jameson, 2003) captures what Mark Fisher means by “capitalist realism”.

Capitalist realism: the widespread sense that not only is capitalism the only viable political and economic system, but also that it is now impossible even to imagine a coherent alternative to it

Fisher, 2009

Meritocracy, a paradox of control

Capitalist realism is generally described as a meritocratic ideology. In a meritocracy, ability plus work equals success. The underlying assumption is that all change is manageable. We can maximise competence and production by controlling the process. Meritocrats demand predictable outcomes in linear processes. They intensify control to correct mistakes and improve the process of production. But it is not in fact possible to manage control in complex systems. Our actions take place in a complex world, where simple answers do not fit.

In complex, non-linear systems, small changes may have dramatic effects and generate a great deal of complex behaviour, because they may be amplified repeatedly by self-reinforcing feedback (Capra & Luisi, 2014). This means that control and structure are counterproductive and produce paradoxical effects. The more we try to control a symptom, the more the symptom will end up controlling us. Capitalist neoliberalism is caught up in a meritocratic paradox of control. Every increase of control leads to an increase in complexity. And every increase in complexity intensifies the need to gain control.

It is a consequence of the meritocratic ideology that we regard problems as a lack of control over our lives, and brand a lack of control as failure. The promise of the meritocracy – “any individual can make it if they try” – disregards positive and negative contextual factors. Some people work hard and never achieve success. Many people are unable to live up to society’s expectations. They internalise unachieved goals as a personal deficit. In a culture of “Yes we can” (Han, 2014), “No we can’t” is felt as a personal failure. We get stuck in vicious circles of internalising failures and trying to achieve control. This has produced “an epidemic of depression” (Dehue, 2008) and a reproduction of power relations (Braidotti, 2013).

Under the cover of individualism, fuelled by a quantitative range of consumer choices, the (contemporary capitalist) system effectively promotes uniformity and conformism to the dominant ideology

Braidotti, 2013:61

Capitalism, the great nomad

There is a paradoxical quality to the relationship between postmodernism and capitalism. On the one hand they are completely at odds with one another, and on the other they can chime surprisingly well together. Postmodernists and neo-liberal capitalists share an affirmation of fluency, nomadic flows (Deleuze & Guattari, 1972). “Capitalism is the great nomad”, Braidotti (2013) argues, but a perverse one. Its slogan could be: “I can’t get no satisfaction”. Capitalism over-codes desire (Deleuze & Guattari, 1972).

“Advanced capitalism” is a “difference engine” in that it promotes the marketing of pluralistic differences and the commodification of the existence, the culture, the discourses of “others” only for the purpose of consumerism

Braidotti, 2011

In capitalist culture there is no separation between the promotion of profit-oriented differences and the ethical-political empowerment of alternative differences. An organic shop in the city where I live closed its doors shortly after a big supermarket company opened an organic department next door. This supermarket sells both industrialised, processed food, and organic food. It orders its stock on the basis of profit; ethical considerations play no role. “We sell what you buy”. Elvis Presley’s manager earned a tidy sum in the 1950s by selling both “I love Elvis” and “I hate Elvis” buttons. When Nirvana messed with MTV at an awards ceremony, the producers evidently discovered that nothing got better ratings on MTV than protests against MTV (Fisher, 2009). In ways like this, capitalism colonises alternative subcultures.

Alternative and independent don’t designate something outside mainstream culture; rather they are styles, in fact the dominant styles, within the mainstream

Fisher, 2009

Capitalist culture promotes a free circulation of data, labour, employees, and profit-making commodities, without any ethical considerations. This is dangerous when it comes to merchandising living matter, seeds, plants, knowledge, and genetic codes. The free circulation or flow of profit-making commodities takes place in a trans-global, 24/7 economy, a world that is constantly changing. To connect with these processes calls for flexibility, a measure of control, and trust in the processes themselves.

Transparency, control and trust

To build a business culture – through standardisation, measuring outcomes, and benchmarking) – everyone and everything has to become transparent (Han, 2014). The underlying promise is that transparency will make it possible to control production processes, to improve the quality of care, and to help consumers make informed decisions. But transparency also has a dark side, writes Byung-chul Han. It may involve giving up cultural values such as privacy, dependency, doubt, not knowing, and trust in favour of transparency and control. Han asserts: “The transparency society is the hell of sameness” (Han, 2014:52), a totalitarian system of openness. Han compares this culture of transparency to pornography. In pornography, everything is visible and superficial. In our love lives, however, we also have to deal with secrets, shame, and trust. In Han’s view, “Trust is only possible in a state between knowing and not knowing. Trust means establishing a positive relationship with another person in spite of ‘not knowing’” (Han, 2014, p.105).

Dealing with complexity in a postmodern, constantly changing, pluralistic world demands “negative capability” (Keats) – the capacity to endure uncertainty and instability, to live with the unforeseeable and unpredictable (Caputo, 2013, p.92). It implies “trust in spite of not knowing” (Han, 2014). How do we produce trust, trustworthiness in a postmodern world?

Trustworthiness

The main question addressed in this article is how to reliably navigate complexity. How can we respond in complex adaptive systems, without trying to control the process or adopting an “anything-goes”, relativist position, without getting stuck in the paradox of control or getting swept up in a current that leads nowhere? Navigating is a constant remapping, a finding of new coordinates (Braidotti, 2011). How can we navigate, remap, find new coordinates, and produce accountable trustworthiness in that process?

Becoming truthful

If you ask a postmodernist “What is truth?” you are likely to be met by a narrowing of the eyes and the cautious response: “It depends” (Caputo, 2013:6). Is truth dead in the postmodern era or do postmodernists think differently about truth, or truthfulness? What is truth in a pluralistic world, without fixed ideas?

Over the centuries, classical philosophers from Plato to Descartes, Kant and Hegel have argued that reason creates the means to achieve enlightenment, while emotion is the road to human suffering (Lehrer, 2009). Each of these thinkers promotes a system of “pure reason” and separates the observer from the observed – conceived as an external reality that can only be comprehended with the aid of pure reason. To Plato, most people are prisoners in a cave who give names to shadows on the wall and take them for real. What they see are illusions, mere representations of the static and logically ordered cosmos behind them. Descartes, the founder of seventeenth-century European rationalism, argued that we can find truth using only reason. Truth, in his thinking, is subordinate to reason. Kant, the philosopher of the Enlightenment, describes pure reason thus: “The art of thinking is the cool critical, dispassionate discrimination of categories, of knowing how to draw borders” (Caputo, 2013:37). Hegel promotes a dialectical understanding of the world as a true whole, synthesising opposites that bring forth a historical development of progress. Plato, Descartes, Kant, and Hegel all share a desire “to bring all phenomena under one common rule of law, create an agreement between mind and reality, discover a rational order, and unify the heavenly and earthly” (Caputo, 2013:114).

What is truth from a postmodern perspective? Nietzsche criticises the idea of “pure reason”. To him, the Enlightenment is the “Endarkenment”, and Socratic reason is “a monster . . . that suffered from an excessive and uncontrolled growth of one part at the expense of the whole” (Caputo, 2013:28, 29). Nietzsche introduces a relativist, anti-rationalist and affirmative counter-Enlightenment. Nietzsche’s *tolle Mensch* (roughly, someone whose head is spinning, usually translated as “madman”) has lost his rational orientation. “One must still have chaos in oneself to be able to give birth to a dancing star”. To Nietzsche, it is life rather than truth that comes first. He does speak, however, of truthfulness: he puts truth to work in the service of life (Caputo, 2013). The question is not whether something is true or false (making judgments), but whether it serves life or death. Truthfulness is vital, a life power, it is not about who we really are, but about who we become. Truth is the process of trying to become true (Caputo, 2013, p.53).

Lines of flight

In an essay called “Nomad Thought”, Gilles Deleuze (1995) builds on Nietzsche’s concept of becoming true, replacing opposites with differences, and emphasising becoming rather than being (Deuchars,

2011). Deleuze conceptualises the process of becoming as creating “lines of flight”. The line of flight is a route, a trace in a multiplicity of philosophical ideas that shapes intellectual lives through time (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Creating a line of flight does not mean to take flight but to re-create or act against dominant systems of thought and social conditions (Deuchars, 2011, p.5). Lines of flight “never consist in running away from the world, but rather in causing runoffs” (Deleuze, Guattari, 1987, p.204). Becoming truthful in creating lines of flight is about differing from “the self” as much and as often as possible.

Truth is temporal (it comes into being and passes away again): it inhabits the realm of the mutable, rather than the eternal. Truth cannot be reduced to a single organisational principle that explains the world. There are a thousand planes or plateaus (1987), serving as compositional frames or assemblages. Together we create frames that allow us to think and act differently in the world. Becoming truthful means creating lines of flight, making “adequate” compositional frames that allow for a multiplicity of little truths.

What is “adequate” [about them] is a purely pragmatic matter, not a normative measure or an ideological injunction. It is whatever works to create sustainable lines and productive planes of transversal interconnection among entities and subjects that are related by empathy and affinity, not by some generic moral model or idealised paradigm.

Braidotti, 2011, p.33

Parrhesia

Michel Foucault (1970) describes the “subject” as the result of “processes of subjectification”. The concept of subjectification raises the question of whether the subject can be free and relate to – or escape from – the “orders of discourse” that shape its reality? In a later work Foucault (1983) explores the concept of “parrhesia” as a “practice of freedom”. Parrhesia is an ancient Greek concept. Etymologically, it means “to say everything”. “In parrhesia, the speaker is supposed to give a complete and exact account of what he has in mind so that the audience is able to comprehend exactly what the speaker thinks” (Foucault, 1983). Essentially, then, the speaker tells a truth that is different from what the majority thinks, which is dangerous to him and thus involves a risk.

In parrhesia, the speaker uses his freedom and chooses frankness instead of persuasion, truth instead of falsehood or silence, the risk of death instead of life and security, criticism instead of flattery, and moral duty instead of self-interest and moral apathy

Foucault, lectures, 1983

One example of a *parrhesiastes* in ancient Greek literature is Socrates; another is Diogenes. Socrates confronted Athenians in the street and drew their attention to the truth in provocative ways. He also challenged power relations. He was convicted of corrupting the youth and was sentenced to death by drinking a poisonous draft of hemlock. Those who tell the truth rather than reposing in the security of a life where the truth goes unspoken risk death (Foucault, 1983).

Diogenes of Sinope challenged power relations in a famous encounter with Alexander the Great. Alexander visited Diogenes, who lived entirely without possessions in a barrel. When Alexander asked Diogenes what he wanted in life, Diogenes replied: “Move to the side: you’re blocking my sunlight”.

Alexander was impressed and said: If I were not Alexander, I would like to be Diogenes. Diogenes replied: "If I were not Diogenes, I would like to be Diogenes too". Alexander, who had conquered the world, was impressed by Diogenes, who needed nothing from life. Diogenes compared Alexander's power to what he himself considered the vastly superior power of what he refers to as the "king among the bees". As a *parrhesiastes*, Diogenes nonetheless managed to survive, possibly because he was an outsider, an illegal immigrant, who accepted his marginal status as a nomad, who was only loosely coupled to society. Foucault gives the following summary of Diogenes' taunt to Alexander:

"The King of bees doesn't need weapons to stay in power. If you bear arms, you are afraid. No one who is afraid can be a king". Diogenes angered Alexander but stayed alive. He said: "Well, you can kill me; but if you do so, nobody else will tell you the truth"

Foucault, lectures, 1983

Truth as an event

In Foucault's 1983 lectures on parrhesia, he states that his aim is to focus not on the problem of truth, but rather on truth-telling as an activity. From a postmodern perspective, truth is not about what happens, but about something going on *within* what happens. Truth is an "event": something that is trying to happen in something. Truth is a process; it is always in the making, a "forward repetition", something coming that bears repetition. Martin Heidegger draws a distinction between repeating the actual and repeating the possible. Repetition of the actual is a repetition of the same. Repetition of the possible, on the other hand, is a way of recontextualising, and of allowing an unexpected truth to arise (Caputo, 2013). Truth is the process of (1) trying to become truthful, (2) creating adequate compositional frames that will allow for multiple small truths (3) being willing to take a risk.

We stand in the truth to the extent that we stand exposed to the event, open to what we cannot see coming, putting ourselves in question and making ready for something for which we cannot be ready.

Caputo, 2013, p.83

Trust instead of Truth

[The social constructionist] is little likely to ask about the truth, validity or objectivity of a given account, what predictions follow from a theory, how well a statement reflects the true intentions or emotions of a speaker, or how an utterance is made possible by cognitive processing. Rather, for the [social constructionist], samples of language are integers within patterns of relationship. They are not maps or mirrors of other domains – referential worlds or interior impulses – but outgrowths of specific modes of life, rituals of exchange, relations of control and domination, and so on. The chief question to be asked of generalised truth claims are thus, how do they function, in which rituals are they essential, what activities are facilitated and what impeded, who is harmed and who gains by such claims?

Gergen, 1994, p.53

Navigating complexity and producing reliable accountability demand rigour, openness and “trust in spite of not knowing” (Han, 2007). When can we speak of trust? Trust requires one to: (1) be vulnerable, to some extent (2) to think well of the other person (in certain domains) (3) to be optimistic that the person is, or at least will be, competent in certain respects (McLeod, 2006). Ideally, trust is reciprocal. For there to be mutual trust in a relationship, the actors in that relationship must be trustworthy. Some authors (Harding, 2011) assert that trust is the result of a rational judgment: trust must be proven or earned before given. Maturana (2008) refers to what he calls “the biology of trust”: “Biologically, trust is the spontaneous manner of being of any living system when in comfortable congruence with the medium” (Maturana & Verden-Zoller, 2008:214).

A butterfly that comes out of the cocoon arises with a structure that entails the operational trust that there is a world ready to satisfy all that it requires to live. Similarly, a baby is born in the operational trust that there is a world ready to satisfy in love and care... And indeed, if the baby is received in the manner that fulfils that trust, both the baby and the mother (and other members of the family) are in natural wellbeing.

Maturana & Verden-Zoller, 2008, p.214

Mistrust, according to Maturana, is an emotion that entails tension and systemic ignorance or blindness. Mistrust distorts the systemic awareness of possible relations between the organism and its circumstances. The loss of trust in the spontaneous coherence between systems in the medium leads to human suffering. Maturana distinguishes between control and influence. He seeks to define the feelings that arise when things do not go as we expect. When we feel a lack of trust, we seek to control: we try to stop or manipulate any event that is at odds with our criteria or expectations. Control, in turn, generates blindness. When we feel trust, we can be curious, open up to seeing and hearing something new, and influence one another.

Do we need an external theory or juridical theoretical model to establish trust? Margaret Walker (2007) argues that social scientists should shift their focus away from thinking in terms of global unities (juridical-theoretical models) towards local, collective, and collaborative practices of establishing trustworthiness in communities. Walker introduces an expressive collaborative concept of “moral understandings”. Morality does not exist independently from how people live and form their opinions. Ordinary people weave a moral understanding together, in their language and culture, in the communities they belong to, with people they trust and for whom they feel affection (Walker, 2007).

The theoretical-juridical model pictures morality as an individual action-guiding system within or for a person. The expressive–collaborative conception pictures morality as a socially embodied medium of understanding and adjustment in which people account to each other for the identities, relationships, and values that define their responsibilities

Walker, 2007, p.67-68

Language games

How do we respond to complexity and offer reliable accountability in relation to the process, with a focus on relational responsibility rather than control? From a systemic or postmodern perspective, the criteria used to assess its validity are not independent of the researcher, the observer, or the measuring procedure. Validity and verification occur within particular communities and their “language games”. We can understand $2 + 2 = 4$ only within certain rules of a language game (Wittgenstein, 1953). As long as we play according to the rules of the game, we will end up with valid answers. There is no overriding set of rules for all games. It is not possible to understand something in one language game by referring to a different one. “Reduction is cheating, mixing up the rules of one game with the rules of another” (Caputo, 2013: 199). “There is no referent other than the happening of the process of human living” (Maturana & Verden-Zoller, 2008:xix). There is no independent variable when we explain the world we experience, when we ask ourselves if the sky is really blue. We are explaining our experiences with our experiences. There is no criterion of validity outside of the experience itself. Maturana (1998) suggests that we could speak of validity in itself, “a validity from within”.

Validity from within

This process-oriented vision of the subject is capable of a universalistic reach, though it rejects moral and cognitive universalism. It expresses a grounded, partial form of accountability, based on a strong sense of collectivity and belonging by singular subjects.

Braidotti, 2013, p.191

Even if there is no truth, man can be truthful, and even if there is no reliable certainty, man can be reliable.

Hannah Arendt, 1958, p.254

Systemic epistemology is different from modern – positivist – scientific epistemology. The systemic theorist Maturana (2008) defines three stages in systemic research. (1) We experience “something” that we distinguish; (2) We perceive that “something” in a connecting pattern; and (3) We embed these various patterns in a matrix. Since we are both observers and participants in the matrix, we cannot step outside it, see it as it is. “We explain our experiences with our experiences” (Maturana & Verden-Zoller, 2008). We cannot objectively compare our measurements to any external independent parameters, since no such external parameters exist. Every parameter is part of what may be called a language game, and can only be understood within the rules of that particular language game. What we can do in systemic research, however, is to create “validity from within”, to create coherent explanations of different experiences that make a difference that matters – explanations that “fit” within the communities involved.

The concept of “validity from within” is at odds with the dominant discourses of science, in which “truth is a matter of the accuracy of representation of an independently existing reality and not of subjectivist interpretation” (Braidotti, 2013, p.175); in which validity is based on value-free rationality in research; and in which objectivity is the condition of research and distance the condition of objectivity. An example of “validity from within” is illustrated in an interview with Karen Barad.

Another example that may be helpful here is an example that Haraway (2008) talks about. It is an example that is raised by Barbara Smuts, who is an American bioanthropologist who went to Tanzania to investigate baboons in the wild for her doctoral research. She is told as a scientific investigator of non-human primates to keep her distance, so that her presence would not influence the behavior of the research subjects that she was studying. Distance is the condition of objectivity. Smuts talks about the fact that this advice was a complete disaster for her research, that she found herself unable to do any observations since the baboons were constantly attentive to what she was doing. She finally realized that this was because Smuts was behaving so strangely to them, they just could not get over her. She was being a bad social subject in their circles. The only way to carry on and to do research objectively was to be responsible; that is, that objectivity, a theme that feminist science studies has been emphasizing all along, is the fact that objectivity is a matter of responsibility and not a matter of distancing at all. What ultimately did work was that she learned to be completely responsive to the non-human primates, and in that way she became a good baboon citizen. They could understand, at least intelligibly to the non-human primates, and as a result they left her alone and went about their business, making it possible for her to conduct her research.

Dolphijn, van der Tuin, 2012

Establishing “validity from within” means finding a way of explaining the experience (something we distinguish, perceive as part of a pattern within a matrix) in a reliable, accurate way. In arriving at this explanation, we use the coherence of our experiences to explain our experiences: “if this and this happens, then the result is such and such” (Maturana & Verden-Zoller, 2008, p.4). An explanation, according to Maturana is:

(1) We use our experiential coherences.

(2) We propose a generative mechanism. This generative mechanism (if this, then that) is the formal explanation.

“A generative mechanism consists of a process that if it were to take place, the result would be experience to be explained”

Maturana & Verden-Zoller, 2008, p.15

(3) This formal explanation should be accepted as such by an observer. This condition is the informal part of the explanation:

“It must also satisfy some condition that the observer adds from his or her own choice, or preference as he or she listens”

Maturana & Verden-Zoller, 2008, p.15

In Maturana’s criterion for a scientific explanation, there is no independent reality. Prediction and control do not play any role. An explanation is scientific, according to Maturana, contingent on both formal conditions (experiences are coherent and generative) and informal conditions

(the experiences are accepted as coherent and generative by an observer). The informal part of the explanation is subjective. Acceptance depends on the observer's preferences, discussions between observers, their various understandings in the language games that exist within the specific social communities. It follows that validity, as acceptance, results from discussion. But how do observers distinguish perception from illusion? When is an explanation seen as valid or invalid? Observers experience their experience in relation to other experiences. When observers devalue one experience in relation to another they experience illusion. When observers value one experience through another experience, they consider it to be valid, or even more valid. Validity is a result of valuation, and valuation takes place occurs in culturally-informed exchanges. Cultures are closed networks of exchanges, a result of the systemic conservation of manners of living, manners of seeing, reacting, reflecting, and valuing (Maturana & Verden-Zoller, 2008).

Conclusion and reflection

The discussion in this first part has thus far emphasised issues of truth and trust. From a postmodern perspective, truth is an event, in the process of becoming. It is about creating planes of composition that open up space for a surprise and different multiplicities. Truth is about taking risks, challenging dominant representations and common grounds in ways that are accepted in the communities concerned. Truth is a local practice, according to Gergen (1985). Maturana (1998) speaks about "validity from within". Systemic practitioners are able to produce "validity from within", if we see (1) truth in the event, in the becoming; (2) if we are open to something that is unexpected, (3) which challenges dominant representations and prevailing assumptions, and if (4) this is acceptable within the local communities concerned (5) and explained in an accessible and coherent way.

As a systemic family therapist I am often surprised when family members give me their answers to the question: "What was it that triggered change during your time collaborating in family therapy?" Last year a fourteen-year-old boy called me. He and his parents had participated in family therapy with me about seven years earlier. He wanted to tell me how he was doing after all those years. I remembered our meetings very well. We had externalised fear as "the scary man" and I had interviewed his toy dinosaur, who told me about all the progress that had been made. I was working with the parents because of a violent family history and a lack of emotional support in their relationship. The therapy worked very well and the boy overcame his fears that year. I was curious to hear his story. I asked the tall young adolescent; who was now seven years older, about what he believed had triggered the change. He answered immediately and started talking about an orange ball. I was astonished and had no idea what he was talking about. The boy said that he had initially been terrified of taking part in therapy. Then, in the final ten minutes of that first family therapy session, we decided to play a game of football. It was because of this football game that he started to enjoy our collaboration. Through this joy we were able to connect and because of that connection we were able to collaborate and chase away the "scary man".

In complex adaptive systems "small unpredictable differences" can make the differences, that matter' (Bateson, 1972). Small "playful" differences can become the tipping point in the process of transformation. In this first part of my text I wanted reflect on the question how to produce accountable trustworthiness in a process of systemic learning in complex systems. Systemic learning, a transformation of living together, starts when the actual consequences of an action strategy do not correspond to the expected consequences (Visser, 2007). At these unique moments of discrepancy, we learn – provided we are able to creatively respond and reorganise ourselves in a "fitting" manner

to what spontaneously occurs. Systemic therapists can produce “validity from within”, remaining open to the unpredictable process of becoming. In the second part of the text I suggest ways in which therapists may become systemic nomads, systemically learning in the multi-actor-networks (of human and non-human actors) they participate in.

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