

An Interview with Tom Andersen

Ana Draper¹ and Chris Hannah²

¹*Macmillan Consultant Systemic Psychotherapist, West Herts PCT*

²*Freelance Consultant Systemic Psychotherapist, Bedfordshire.*

Introduction

By invitation we the authors of this article had the pleasure of interviewing Tom Andersen whilst at the 123 Summer School organised by KCC in 2002.

Having prepared and sent the transcript to Tom he gave his consent for publishing.

Thus we then entered a long period of not knowing how to go on with this work. What became clearly evident was the impact this interview had on our personal and professional lives. The richness of processing our brief but intimate time with Tom became more poignant with his sudden and unexpected death.

If I (CH) were to take two themes arising and flowing through this process it would be death talk (Fredman) and the therapeutic relationship. The interview immediately followed a workshop that I had led and Tom had attended and fully participated in. In the workshop I invited practitioners to reflect on the life events that had shaped and influenced their practice as systemic therapists. This was an opportunity for me to begin to share how my experience of being very close to death in 1986/7 has influenced my life and professional practice. In telling the story of how my life was given a new start as a consequence of receiving a heart transplant I could see that Tom was visibly moved and seeing how he was moved, I invited him to interview myself and Ana Draper (my co-presenter and good friend) on how our lives and professional practice had been shaped by these kinds of experience.

Sometime after this Tom e-mailed me to say how our conversation had helped him when he had a “close encounter” following a thrombotic clot. Which brings me to the second theme of reflecting on the therapeutic relationship. In my view a much overlooked area of importance in the teaching and development of systemic practice. In reflecting on the impact of Tom’s work on my practice, in addition to (as Tom would say in countering the yes/but discourses) it would be the development of ways of reflecting that seek to articulate the intention to live an ethical practice with openness and transparency. What really shines through is Tom’s ability to co-create relationships where mind and body are fully present. Through this reflection I can now see how in many therapeutic encounters little change is evident in terms of the content of what is spoken about (often held in place by politics and cultural forces) whilst considerable change is occurring at the level of relationship. The quality of open handed generosity flowed through this interview as it equally shone in the way Tom positioned himself as a therapists and excellent teacher.

The language of the hand was often present in the way Tom talked about his work – resulting in my developing conversations with young offenders such as how did that open hand become a fist; how did that hand move from resting by your side to flying through the air and impacting on another's body. In this way Tom has opened space for body/mind conversations.

Creating cultural memory

So in this article, we became interested in the possible effects of the conversation we had with Tom on our views of our future. The literature within the social sciences about cultural memory pointed to a connection between the stories we are told and tell and the lives we go on to live (see King [1997], Kuhn [2000] and Terdiman [1994]). We would argue that the experiences we have, and the stories we tell ourselves about them, have an effect on the ways we work with families. King (1997) uses this idea when he recounts how a Jewish man who witnessed his wife being taken away to the gas chamber was haunted by the experience. The man said: 'I didn't know that then' – he didn't know she was being taken to the gas chamber. This was his way of expressing the coming-together of separate events, beliefs, emotions and relationships that defined an understanding about what took place.

And yet it can be argued that memory is not something we can rely on, in that it is changeable according to new understandings, as King's example shows. An event can be understood differently in the light of knowledge obtained about it subsequently. Nonetheless, Swanson (2002) argues that

Memory does not exist as a separate realm from authorised domains of knowledge, but is itself constituted through historically specific cultural knowledge.

We have therefore not identified or reported the actual transcript of the conversation that took place, but present the knowledge we have obtained in the light of the conversation.

The idea of using essays, films or autobiographical writings for analysis is not new. Such works as Heron (1985), Turim (1989), Antze and Lambek (1995), King (1997), Holland (1991) and Radstone (2000) show that research has been done with such data. There is also a history of using psychoanalytic theory in analyses of the meanings within specific films and writings. For example, Lamplanche and Pontalis (1988) developed psychoanalytic film theory that places an emphasis on the process of identification proposed in films.

Radstone (2000) states that memory is often unbidden and can be created in uncanny forms. We would argue that a transcript of a conversation that took place is a form of memory and therefore constitutes data that can inform our understanding about the conversation that took place. In analysing aspects of the transcript, we looked at our own autobiographies and our memory (Swanson, 2000). Memory and our autobiographies are interlinked as they are the specifics of memory that go on to form a fantasy, which is informed by our perception of the social and cultural discourses. Each of the reflections, therefore, are influenced by our autobiographies as people who had the privilege to meet and spend time with Tom and are a rich source of information about the effects of conversation and the potential future for systemic

psychotherapeutic theory.

The focus of our reflections will be the memories we have. Chris has reflected on an aspect of the conversation and connected it to an ongoing process of becoming as systemic psychotherapists, which is crafted together by not only the conversation, but the meeting with each other that took place. We are enclosing the whole conversation in the form of the transcript, as we are aware that others may connect to aspects that we have missed and therefore the reflexive process continues beyond the conversation in shaping us, by connecting and joining each person that reads this article at the place they find themselves in. We would also like to acknowledge that in just having the written words, we are missing the bodily expressions, the eye contact, the facial expression and the awareness that Tom gave attention to in the communication. So we give you the whole in a narrative sphere and yet in the whole, there is blindness to the unsaid in the moment.

The transcript – opening the way

The participants in this conversation are identified by their first initial as follows:

T Tom Andersen

C Chris Hannah

S Stewart McCafferty

E Elisabeth Heismann

A Ana Draper

M Maria Trafford

TT Tom Trafford

C How long can we talk with you, about half an hour?

T. As long as you need, until we fall asleep

C Very generous

The therapist in politics – noticing injustices

The participants in this conversation are identified by their first initial as follows:

C Shall we think of this as an evolving conversation? Like the workshop we just finished we had an idea how to start but ended up in a very different place from where we expected to go. This conversation could be the same, looking for the gifts of what we might create in conversations such as this. I was thinking how you have brought so many gifts to our ways of working over time I was wondering how you reflect on that yourself in terms of what pleases you most about how see your ideas have developed?

T Ah, I'm not sure I see that, it was very long before I understood these things could be useful for others, it took very long, I certainly thought it was useful for myself and now I understand that it so much useful for other people and I can say I am glad, very close to the word thankful, for me this work is very political, very political - I hate injustice so this one small contribution to make things less unjust

C Is that a connection you have always made?

E How does that fit putting things into a balance? Fit with the voices.

T Yea that is one way to see it, well I cannot stand these big differences in those possibilities I travel pretty much and it's harder to see the big differences which is driven from an ideology of a – language of competing and winning –taking from others – I think it comes from there –

The systemic evolution and academia

C I was wondering how your ways of doing therapy give a non competitive way of working, seeing you work now what would we notice?

T It was a period when I was very engaged in so called systemic thinking, I thought it was fantastic in the middle of the seventies and I knew that to have a chance to work with something different it was very important to get out of the routines of thinking, so I got this position at the University which I thought gave a possibility for more freedom of thinking. So I set off ten years to come there I had to do all these stupid things to be accepted at first and then I started to do things I had the idea that we should take the whole mental hospital to the home (laugh) stupid idea! I thought that the group of seven – I was fighting for the group's position, the psychiatrist in town they wanted to be on top of this project, so I went to the government in Oslo to have their support to say he should have this project for himself, the psychiatrists were so angry so when the project was over everybody was very happy and particularly primary care which we work much with to avoid admission to the hospital, these primary care people are very happy so we ask the authority let us continue a bit and the authority spoke to the psychiatrists and asked is that a useful idea and they say no and then I understood that one cannot change the system from outside.

E To add to that there is this anti-psychiatry movement that R D Lang and they were very strong in the 70's and I was wondering if you would see your self as part of that movement then?

T Not so much inspired by Lang but by the Italians the movement in Italy very influenced. I get to now them, and when I was defeated, I was defeated, I thought never more try to change – you must never ask to present or ask to have something published, wait until you are invited, this is very important I have stuck to that so I never write without being asked or talk without being asked

Simplicity in the complexity

C Does that connect for you in terms of your own philosophy?

T I learnt that lesson I changed by philosophy

C How has changing it enriched your life?

T Everything is much more simple

C It's became simpler to wait for the invitation

T Yes there have been very many strong attacks to kill me professionally so it has been very important to survive, tough attacks, but I am not a person who is angry for long, I'm not bitter,

S What's helped you survive those attacks

T There have been some persons very close to me professionally so I used to call three of them

in the hard years from 87 – 93, so I call them and I said I cannot move I give it up and they said keep going two more weeks (laughter) and I knew they were going to say that that's why I called them (laughter) that was very helpful and it has been, when I was defeated if that one way does go, there must be another way that is a strong belief in my life so we started to make seminars in the north of Norway out in the small communities and brought in important persons or a person who had contributed significantly. So the first two were Lyn Hoffman and Peggy Penn and then came the Italians "the Milan Boys" and then Harry Goolishian and many other people, it was very important to pass by Oslo and go straight out into the world.

A place where new ideas are born

S But Oslo created a sustaining base for ideas

T Yes an annual meeting it became a meeting place which grow by itself people came every year some came one year some every second year

E You emphasised this morning that you are a marginal person that you want to stay on the margins rather than be part of the mainstream systemic world, but you naming these people like a group so I can't see how you stay at the margins, how do you do that?

T Well I personally stay on the margins but don't ask others to do it, I cannot do that, NO. Harry Goolishian he was very much on the margins.

C I was thinking about the idea of being on the margins not being in the centre but there is a join.

T Well I always like to be invisible and inaudible that is my preference it helps me to be on the margins.

Presence in the moment

C John Shotter yesterday was talking about presence, is that your presence

T Yea I prefer to be invisible and inaudible

E How does that fit with coming to a conference and speaking

T Ah I say this is not so important or something like that

E To yourself and then you can go back to being on the margins, when you come out for a little while

T Well I know that people heard my name but I feel the same as when I was a young man absolutely the same

S the same Tom

T A bit more stupid

C That makes me curious about how that fits for you in your family context?

T Ah that turns it a bit personal if you are going to write to a big audience I'm not sure, I want to answer more generally what is the most important to focus on it this moment and I do it, if that should be one of my children I will do that, I would say to KCC I'm sorry I cannot come something happened

S I was just thinking back to when you say about feeling defeated and the struggle that you're in and how your relationship with your friends kept you going through that you had an idea about

how they would support you and how you needed to be supported. I was just thinking how do you bring that into your practice it sounds like a very fundamental experience to have. I was thinking for families that feel cut off a lot or..I was wondering how your experiences informed how you work with families who may be in a similar place?

Making connections

T Yes I think so but what has learned me the most has been to meet with families and work with family that is what learn me the most.. to see what makes it worse for them and avoid doing that and try to do more of what seems to work well that has to do with finding the good connections, I think that when people come with the trouble I think that the connections that they are part of does not help them fully so let us see if those connections they have can be different or they can make more connections to link back to important persons in life which might have been dead for a while and pull that person back , if your grandmother was here what would she say, what would she say back, what would you then say? All these kind of things. Broaden out connections

S I was also thinking about if you have a trust in peoples abilities to survive almost intolerable things as well, and feel they can't go on , I don't know if you have a kind of idea that there is a way which is different from the place that they are in.

T So far my experience is that people can get somebody with them to go with. Those are my experience one must have somebody, and that experience is so strong that we are network persons

C so in those moments of despair you're connecting people to a network

T In first moment try to find connections, look for more if that is necessary

E do you sometimes look for less connections? Think that some people have too many.

Reducing the volume of noise

T I say to this you thinking of all the young people with cell phones and I say to them please can you reduce your voice a bit and they do! Yea we have too much technical connections I'm very concerned about that. All these messages I'm very concerned

C Are you talking about txt messaging?

E I'm thinking that there are so many voices that are competing somewhere and not able to select or connect with the relevant ones

T for instance if they quarrelling or fighting all the time

E Yes or they have so many competing voice within themselves or within their

T an American cocktail party

E constant cocktail party yes

S A cocktail party in the head

T I have never been asked to do something with a cocktail party

C being invisible and inaudible in a cocktail party

The public versus the private

T I determine to only work in public settings, I will not work in the private sphere, If I'm asked I say no my time is given to the public and it has very much to do with the tenancy of privatisation which your Thatcher started with Reagan so quick and it is very dangerous privatisation, there is an American professor in economy his name is Benjamin Barber he wrote a book in 95 which was called Jihad verses McWorld . and it came out after Sept 11th with a new forward and he is say that the fear in the times now is that democracy is defeated by anarchy and anarchy has two feats one is militant fundamentalism and the other is market fundamentalism and part of that is privatisation. So I took a stand there. Every child shall have a chance of education good health services

S I was thinking how does that position you as worker in the public health services because when in this country and France and many other places public services are so much under attack one way or another on the one hand the government of this country says we are pouring lots of money into the health service and on the other hand as you say there are different ways of privatising service different ways of rationing services and I was thinking does the therapist in the public service become more of a political animal in the sense of defending the service as well as defending their way of doing their practice and I was thinking that in connection with you saying I like to be invisible and inaudible how do you do invisible and inaudible when your services are under attack?

T Well I think every health service should be changed dramatically in order to make them more cheap and we could if I speak of the mental field. There is big difficulty with the whole idea of diagnostic procedures: they define a problem in the professional's terms and the family should work with the problem as defined by the procedures and that is not their definition of the situation and one should leave away all diagnostic procedures, get rid of them, and just stick to what people want to do. That will decrease the expense 90%

E Do you want to revisit the position that you had in 73 when you felt you were defeated? With today's knowledge how would you then approach the public health service differently?

T I had to be friends with them. I don't know if I could have been engulfed this is a very difficult question what we tried to do is to a pretty strong community up in the north between the four countries and we now coming up with the quantitative of use numbers, which I think we have to do for a while, (pause) I'm sorry I speak too much.

E It's very interesting

T It has been a very very interesting connection with the patients' organisation in Sweden and the relatives' organisations in Norway the psychiatric patients relatives' organisation in Norway and Sweden and they have invited us to be with them in their meetings that has very encouraging, we have made pretty big conferences and let the professors be on stage and the patients and their relatives

Finding new ways

E So it was not a defeat it was more of a retreat

Y Yea maybe a defeat was a stupid word the group was abandoned

E Because you have come back

T Yes sure .. as I said if it does not go the one way there must be another way

C Lost the battle but not the war

S I was getting an image of guerrilla warfare when the ..head for the hills. I was thinking what lessons there are for therapists in the UK and many other countries around this, I think that in the early 80's the trainees going back into the public health services don't try and change things don't try and be a systemic expert in the hospital or whatever because they have experiences of a similar kind when the therapist that was doing something different became dangerous to the accepted truths and these ideas are still useful, how do we behave in public services in order that we work with clients for their benefit and also not to be shown the door, there is maybe too much I was thinking about the descriptions of your struggles how you have developed something so vital from that experience something that we could learn a lot about and think of quiet ways, invisible ways we could cultivate some of the aesthetic of that and maybe some of the practices

T and at the moment I believe that everybody must do what they believe in, those who the opposite way must do it, please do it, and I do what I believe in. For myself there are so many people that want something different in psychiatry and they are the patients and the relatives and those who are with the patients all the time, those who are lowest in the hierarchy they want something different and some of us who have been giving a sort of influence here or position I think has not only the responsibility but the obligation to to speak for all these voices, as an obligation not only responsibilities the few of us we have been given that position we must speak for those who don't dare to speak or don't have all the words don't have a voice very important.

E It's like an opportunity as well as the same time an obligation is it a burden as well

T It is more than an opportunity it is a political responsibility

Being reflective to perceived injustice

C the word responsibility: one idea is that thinking about responsibility is having the ability to respond you are showing your ability to respond in a quiet unspoken which communicates a very powerful message, how else do you think of responding in a moment of injustice

T There is so very interesting work in a prison in the south of Sweden. The director of the prison is a very noble man and he hired a social worker/family therapist and she introduced reflecting talks having one man talking with one a bit trained and one of the guards, one of them talk with the man and the other listen and then they talk, it has totally changed the whole prison and inmates want to come there and er we wanted to learn what happened with the men after they came out to other institutions or to freedom so we have some of them to come back, some with their relatives, couple of times a year and in that meeting we have men and relatives are sitting on one wall and the people in the prison is sitting on the other wall, the director guards etc, and then people from the outside are sitting on that wall and we have brought in more and more, we have

had the director of criminal affairs in Sweden on the wall, representatives from parliament on that wall, priest and bishops, department of justice in Norway, and we talk with them first what would you want to know? And they raise the questions, are there changes, do the men change, is it superficial, do they have to do this, is it free, has it had any meaning, and they ask interesting things is this a method, what is the method, and the other just listen and some said last time what shall I do as a politician to decrease criminality in Sweden? Then when they speak they listen and they listen and then I speak with them and they listen and they listen and they start to comment saying that I am very eager to know what happened to these men that I know so well I have been think of them so much and when they ask is this a method it is not a method this is a matter of trust and when they have spoken the men speak and they listen and they listen so one man said it's right this is no method when they (pointing to guardsmen) they showed me trust and I could trust them I denied in court my crime but when I met this trust I could tell.

Reflections that emerge as re-search into meaning

E So what do you call trust? Could you say more about trust?

T Trust is that an English word trust? (Laugh)

E Yes

T You use the word trust, you trust profoundly people, that kind of trust they are talking about. And when the men talk like that they become pretty. And the man says they were interested in what shall we do in Sweden to decrease criminality? Do you have to start in the school? No You have to help the parents so we don't drop out and one mother who was sitting along that wall says I must say my son when he came out (they wanted to know what happened after they came out) my son has been sitting in house for two years and now he does'nt talk anymore he went to the office social we don't want people like you and he went to the office of unemployment and said we don't like people like you and she cried and she said I tried to help him but my love is not strong enough and I said did somebody help you? For instance your parents and the boy who was sitting with her said they died six months before we left Bosnia. So you did all this by yourself, I said to her? And she cried profusely but very quiet and the man said there is something strange in this talk to have two such wise people listening to me and then in addition talk about what I said that is fantastic, so I learnt to understand how I think. And so the young boy said I can talk I can be social now I can be with people. Another one said before I did first and thought after now and now it's opposite and I'm so glad and they are very moved over there. I call it research. I call it co-research. They research to understand what are the meanings. And this is the research that reaches explanations, which are so important in the physical sciences. We reach understanding which are important in qualitative research and we reach something more, people along that wall can feel in the body the significance of these talks and that's important. That makes people act. So the people from the Parliament say "We must go back and tell them, we must have such in the prisons"

Reflecting team as action research

C The reflecting team method is also a research method that provides the research in action.

T Sure

C I was listening to your description of what happened and feeling the joys and gifts that emerged through that method, peoples lives being changed through that conversation and how those conversation will go out of the room into the world and continue to create more change, is Tom Andersen's idea

T No No No ...I have just generated it, just flowing through I happened to be the person no they have been there all the time

C So you're a channel for the ideas

T Yes, but some way of talking for instance in the academia have hold the talk

E It feels like a participant researcher ..Together

T Yes

E With everybody else in the process they are all engaged without knowing where they are going

T If in that work if you can establish a network while they listen to each other and let those who want to speak speak, every thing goes well we don't need anything more.

We don't need plans or solutions just keep networks going.

C Could we think more about your being a channel for these ideas

T Well that's too big a word. Just generated, flow through

E How can we feed that back into the system like the care system this process which seems to enable people to move and to act how can we feed that back into systems that act on the basis of data and statistics and diagnosis

Receiving and awaiting an invitation

T I think we have to wait until they invite us in. And then we can say yes I have an idea would you be interested to hear it? And if they are interested they can hear it.

C Are there other ways to receive the invitation, how else might we know when we are being invited?

T Actually (name)Is more and more invited into the Norwegian mental hospitals, it has changed dramatically the last year. And even myself am invited now! I couldn't believe it.

C Do you think you think these ideas will flow through you in the years beyond your professional life

T Yea I will die one day and then I will stop but I think they are such strong ways

C They will continue to flow

T Yes, I think so. I don't think this have anything to with individual persons this is a strong tendency which has been flowing through people for a long time and suddenly become the dominant language

C Do you ever ask why me? Why is this flowing through me?

T No I don't. I will let that be a mystery. (Laugh)

C Is it important for it to be a mystery

T Yes

S I was thinking about pieces of the conversation so far and thinking about your story about the work with the ex-prisoners and the politicians. I was very moved by that because two things that struck me, one was that when politicians and policy makers are dealing with things they normally ..they report with pictures and that is a totally different experience, my sense in this country is that politicians and policy makers insulate themselves from that kind of experience, probably precisely because they don't want to be changed something they are not in control of. I was thinking in terms of the theme of the conference what an event of hope that was. You can see how when people do get together and can hear and talk that something different can happen as well as in the individual lives of the ex-prisoners that might have been a hopeless case they were talking with hope

C and trust

S Yes well and being able to relate to people, talking and listening is one experience in which to feel their connectedness but also for the politicians experience they're connected with others

T For instance planning of public services can be done in the same way, let all the perspectives be in one hall and speak with one perspective at a time for instance in the mental hospitals speaking with the psychiatrists from one perspective, the administrators from one perspective the board from one perspective the patients, relatives, one at a time, no paper work, will make the plans in six hours, very cheap.

E Maybe others speak in one voice, creating a community where we speak in one voice, (unclear) ... it seems too easy to do this in these groups that assumes they have already got one voice together.

S I was wondering what the invitation is that you make that allows them to come to that place and even if they are not in one voice to hear one another.

T In the prison we call it return meetings, I have a long introduction, we have come together to investigate what has happened after these open talks inside the prison? We are coming from different perspectives so we will have different descriptions and understandings of what that work is and let us keep those different descriptions alive. And then we speak with one perspective at a time when speaking the other just listen, and we will reach three kinds of knowledge, the knowledge we call explanations, understanding and experience in our body. Along introduction, very demanding I've been very requiring.

E How do you see your role in that as facilitator or coordinator, in these discussions

T Could be .. conductor, conducting an orchestra or something.

C I was thinking when you're conducting an orchestra there are certain parts of the orchestra that you want to amplify and some you want to damped down

T Yes very simple in a way but very demanding.

C Going off at a different tangent, Tom what brought you here to this conference?

T I was invited.

C You waited for the invitation

T O yes, I didn't wait it came.

C How come you responded to the invitation by coming

T When I saw who should come, I very much appreciate John Shotter and his writing, very. And then I feel sometimes conferences become too intellectual for me, I can live up to the intellectuality I was a bit worried,

Experience of being and joining together

C I was wondering what your experience of the conference is, what will you be taking away with you?

T The workshop with the two of you (Chris, Ana)

C Is there anything about that in particular that you will take away with you

T Ah .. everything of it (pause)

C Shall we talk about it some other time?

T No we can talk about it.. it was a gift, a gift.

C You (S & E) weren't there so are curious about what we are talking about?

S You dropped a hint earlier!! Your title was a bit of a give away. But tell me more what did you get from being there? As the conductors.

C Well it was about the gift of life and the gifts of living and Tom was part of living the moment of that workshop and we had lived many moments in thinking about how to prepare for the workshop which bared little relationship to our living of it.

T You made it very personal

S I was thinking that is something that you can't, well the preparation is something that you do but then the performance of it is something else, you lived that.

C Yes the preparation is dealing with the anxiety the gap between now and doing it

Quiet space

C I am thinking about the stillness and silence that we have arrived at some how word are not so much at the point of our conversation, is that something that connects for you Tom?

T Yes I thought of Chris in the workshop he had been talking with a man who was in the situation that Chris had once been in himself and Chris was thinking shall I tell him, or do I not and shortly after the man asked Chris what he knew about it? And I think in such moments when two people talk, one's own story come very much back and doesn't leave. Even if you say this is not for you leave it in your thoughts it stays, I think that belongs to the conversation, and we can say to the other when we talk from our talk some things stay with me and doesn't leave me, are you interested in what comes from our talk to me? Most of the people say " yes I want to hear" If you told him I'm pretty sure he would start to interview you,

C Well that happened (laughter) That gave me the idea that if you are connected with your own experience as you are interviewing transparency will happen without mentioning it, without putting it into words transparency is communicated in some way.

T In the talks it can be seen in our eyes and that's what people see, that why it so important that when we speak with people to have a friendly inner talk. I think that is why a psychiatrist in a more traditional way of working has a big problem. Because they have so much negative going on about the person That the person can see.

C On Monday evening you talked about seeing the goodness in the world's leaders, heads of

state, this brings us back to that connection. I was curious about how you would do that, how would you connect to the goodness of those people?

T Ask Bush if your mother were to describe you how would she do that?

E Are you waiting for an invitation from him?

T I would be very glad if he did. I am very angry at that side he shows so much

E Would you take that invitation?

T Sure

C This makes me wonder what is the message we send that lets someone know we are inviting them?

S What inviting them to invite us

C Yes

E It's a kind of openness isn't it. An openness to be there. But I might have thought of it as sometimes a burden to be available in this way you need to be ready to go.

T But as I said if there are some other things I have to focus on I would say that. My dog need me much in this moment so I'm sorry I can't...laugh

E some invitations we can decline

T O sure I say I can come in two years from now. Sure I have to do that, I have to take care of myself also.

E do you think you also have a moral obligation to yourself? Sometimes

T No not to myself, myself, what is myself, I am part of a network so I have to think of that network and I say to it I take care of myself. My children, grandchildren, friends, colleagues. I think people make me too special that's the problem, I'm just one in a network.

C the network is special

T always special

C We keep connected to the network

T and it does not stop it goes all over the world, one network is linked to the next network, our voices and ideas, the voice of the network that highlight solidarity ! democracy! (laughter) a good network!

C We talked about if whether this talk should be half an hour or wait till we fall asleep what do you

T I'm ready to stop

C Thank you

T How are you going to use it? Make it very short.

C we will type up the transcript, send it to you

T where will it appear?

C Peter is going to think about collecting the interviews other people are doing to maybe put it together as a conference report or

E It will probably first need to be negotiated

T Could we ask what the students of theology have been thinking?

M Trying to get people's perspectives and to get them all in a room it just struck me as a wonderful way of solving things, grappling with things, letting people be heard which is so

important. Wonderful!

TT The emphasis on open conversation and dialogue within a trusted situation something that obviously makes connections between people which is deep and real, it's good to hear

T What about you Ana?

A I could start another hour's conversation, we connected with lots of ideas, for me the political was very important in my world, I've recently been having conversations with government about childhood bereavement I was really interested in how you have managed it and relating to some of your stories. I love the idea of justice and the job being about justice I connected with my own families work with people affected by HIV and AIDS in South America and my brother is also out there working.

T South Africa

A South America Ecuador so when you were speaking about that it connected me to them and I want to invite you to come and visit them because we have been there as a systemic team to teach clinicians some systemic ideas so that is why it all connected.

T I travel much in South America

A well you must visit

T Yes

A You will be very welcome

T Ecuador we are going to Peru in October

A We are going to hopefully be there ourselves so if you want to hop over to Ecuador you will very welcome

E more networking it's an invitation

T then you will have to have my card

T are you from the country

A I was born there and lived till I was ten my parents are British but have lived there most of their lives working with the indigenous people

T Is your father an MD

A No he is a missionary, a medical missionary he was working to eradicate tetanus and tuberculosis in certain tribes and started to work with the Ecuadorian people as they came out of the indigenous tribes and that related very much to the thinking we are having, so I was thinking when you asked some of the questions what was it that changed things for me in the past and part of it was not feeling I had the voice to say some of the things I needed to say but actually when I found the voice to say them other parts of the network also changed. If that makes sense

T Sure

A So it's been a good journey

T Make it very short

Co-creating a bond to these ideas.

In sharing these reflections and the cultural memory that was created in the conversation we want to connect to the work of Klass et al (1996) who developed an understanding around the continuing bonds between the person who has died and the people who relate to them. We would

ask you what bonds to Tom do his words shape and form and what do we take with us on this journey of discovery in the therapeutic encounters we have.

White (1995) used Klass ideas in a narrative therapeutic setting, in which he introduced the concept of the externalisation of the other in the continuing relationship with the person who has died. This in turn leads to the idea that the ‘goodbye’ of the funeral is extended to other times (this being more of a realist position in the context of bereavement). We would ask you when will you say ‘hello’ and ‘goodbye’ to Tom? As therapists, we need to develop the concept that meaning emerges from context, which challenges us to look at the cultural understanding and therefore meaning this creates. This understanding shifts us to understand the complexities of the ongoing bonds we form, in that they are not only context-dependent but also episodic and relational in nature.

As we mourn the death of Tom, we are reminded of Walter (1996: pp7-25) who echoes some of the above thinking in an article entitled ‘A new model of grief’, in which he says:

The purpose of grief is therefore the construction of a durable biography that enables the living to integrate the memory of the dead into their ongoing lives; the process by which this is achieved is principally conversations with others who knew the deceased. The process hinges on talk more than feelings; and the purpose entails moving on with, as well as without, the deceased.

To enable this process of talk to occur there is a need for a community of mourners to remain engaged with each other. This idea therefore suggests that grief occurs within an interdependent web of relationship. It also implies that each member operates in a pattern of co-ordination within the structure of grief as it is expressed and lived out within the narratives told about the person who has died.

So these are some of our stories about Tom, his vision and passion goes on in the flow of our therapeutic work as we move on both with and without him.

Please address correspondence about this article to: Ana Draper, 5 Tamworth Close, Northwood, Middlesex. HA6 2GF UK
Email ana.draper@sky.com

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