

Unpublished Manuscript for Presentation at the 2008
International Family Therapy Association

Now I See a Person

The Poetics of Learning Therapy – A Supervision Story

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May 2007

With Loma Linda University, Marriage and Family Therapy, graduate students:

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INTRODUCTION

CHRISTOPHER

We present a moment, an event of family therapy supervision provided to graduate-level university students. We believe that this particular moment/event might unfold creative, responsive and renewing possibilities in the realm of supervision for students and supervisors alike.

We suggest supervision is an experience that does not have to be:

- about the *negation* of actions and attitudes determined to be undesirable by the supervisor, by his regime of training, or by the institutions the supervisor is connected to;
- nor about the appropriate, professional *reaction* to the Other in supervision, particular to the Other of the student/worker upon whose body the supervision is to be implemented. We are referring to *reaction* as: 1) the forming of response in connection with that which is distinguished as undesirable; and 2) the diminishment and undoing of creative action.

Negation and reaction – two aspects of the ‘will-to-power’ Nietzsche¹ talked of, and two actions that seem all-too pervasive and bent on destructive impulses. Much of the therapeutic world, including the work of supervision seems to have been built upon these two modes of action.

Negation

The therapeutic domain assumes that there are problematic items circulating within bodies, families and other human arrangements that, with appropriate remedial action, can be removed, can be negated – gotten-rid-of. Many books and other forms of documentation have been dedicated to elucidating these problematic items -- from Freud, to the DSM (Diagnostic Statistical Manual), to innumerable intake and assessment processes adopted by human service organizations. And, large industries have developed which give language and lines of authority to these forms of negation.

¹ Nietzsche’s thinking on negation and affirmation is discussed in Thus Spoke Zarathustra (1969), but is perhaps most clearly described by Deleuze (2001) in a chapter titled “Nietzsche”.

The politics of human services necessitates processes of negation before any monies are permitted to flow – money moves toward *problems*, and only those problems which have been clearly identified, fit within previously designated categories and sub-categories of negation, and are plainly visible to political and economic authorities.

Reaction

The second action described by Nietzsche is that of *reaction*.

Reaction takes on at least two types of movement. The first is movement *against* something.

What characterizes reactive forces, on the other hand, is their opposition to what they are not, their tendency to limit the other...

Deleuze (2001), p. 74

Reaction also moves in opposition to creative action.

Creation is about assembling, arranging pieces of life into something that bears newness within and around it. It is something that breaks through the normal, the expected, fashioning an *original* upon which life can continue to take form. Creation is never, can never be pure and perfect. It is the assembling of imperfect fragments, broken chunks and little bits into something of a renewed and renewing beauty.

The philosopher supposes that the value of his philosophy lies in the whole, in the structure; but posterity finds its value in the stone which he uses for building, and which is used many more times after that for building – better. Thus it finds the value in the fact that the structure can be destroyed and nevertheless retains value as building material.

Nietzsche (1967), p. 176.

Reaction is about undoing the creative. It is about dis-assembling the creations of other hands, dis-easing the actions of creative hands. It is about taking the goods which have been formed and discovering flaws, holes, missing pieces, misplaced pieces, thereby seemingly undoing the creation. A re-languaging of the creative event occurs through these negations. Reaction can be an academic process, though it certainly is not limited to that. Reaction can appear in a righteous garb, a religiosity, even in the zealotry of political correctness, professional correctness. Reaction is not just a simple act or question, it is a spirit that floods, that overwhelms, that flows toward the undoing of the creative invention.

The Path of Negation and Reaction

Nietzsche suggested that these progressions of negation and reaction lead inevitably toward nihilism; that is, to ever

expanding circles of negation that descend into crushing and destructive violences – to aggressive and extreme negation.² This intensifying path of negation and reaction forms machine-like things, increasing numbers of them, things that resemble concentration camps and nuclear warheads; machine-like things that doesn't act like most machines, but, instead, produce worlds where homosexuals are murdered, lovers imprisoned and compassion and joy are trivialized.

Negation and reaction -- turning, expanding, overturning; at the same time, organizing and sanitizing all they touch. Reactive forces which culminate in a terminus of negation that attempts to engulf all.

A Renewed Supervision

However, we wish to talk of a supervisory experience which feels to be outside of negation and reaction, even outside of the therapeutic. We are suggesting a supervisory experience:

- where affirmation encircles/embraces,

² Some have attempted to connect Nietzsche to Nazi thought which came many years after his death, however, Nietzsche warned of the end results of such systems of thought. He created a world which eschewed the typical perspectives on power, control and institutional life. Nietzsche had no room for manners of life built upon the actions of negation and reaction -- two central activities of Nazism.

- where joy is always close by,
- where surprise and a not-knowing generate a spirit of experimentation,
- where the gifts people bring flow outward, freely, to expanding worlds, rather than where the logic of negation pushes potential gifts inward, into protective hiding places.

This experience is reminiscent of the desires of Deleuze (1977). He talks of...

A secret link that resides in the critique of negation, the cultivation of joy, the hatred of interiority, the exteriority of forces and relations, the denunciation of power, etc.

SUSAN

This document has a distinct history. It followed an event in May, 2007 where Lynn Hoffman and Christopher Kinman came to Loma Linda University for a one-day workshop. They both talked of things such as rhizomes and gift exchanges. They talked of authors such as Gilles Deleuze and Jacques Derrida, of Gregory Bateson and Michael Bakhtin. They talked of a work beyond the therapeutic, a work which is communal and enlivening. They talked of things that I knew I was most familiar with, that I connected intimately with, that gave language to a felt experience.

In preparing this document I reviewed the tapes of conversations I was involved in with my students. In watching and listening I could not keep from smiling and feeling joyful.

I can remember when I began my therapy work – it was with Harry Goolishian in Galveston, Texas. I was shy and unsure of myself. However, Harry loved these qualities in me. He thought highly of me, to the extent that he told the executive director of that small agency that I was brilliant. What a thought for me. What words! Words which made me fly. I remember the last thing Harry spoke to me about before he died. We were in an Armenian restaurant. He said that it was his wish for me to teach and do research. This I have attempted to do -- to honor his wish, to take up his torch, to add myself to his legacy. I was young when I met him. There was an attraction in heart and soul. He was my mentor. Sometimes he was even my eyes and ears at times -- he spoke my words. I never felt a disagreeing thought with him.

Today, Harry lives in everything I do. I am certainly not a mini "Harry", more akin to a daughter who dearly loves the ideas of her friend and mentor. He died at a time when we most needed his controversial voice. But I can be like Harry, a bit too controversial at times. Kind of the Columbo type -- not necessarily saying what is appropriate, rather finding that my passion rises to my mouth. Or perhaps to my nose -- sneezing ideas. In this spirit, I find that, even after 24 years, I am as passionate about making a difference in the field, as I first was when I was the intern.

With respect for Harry's legacy, I engage in supervisory work. I feel alive with students. I find that they continue to teach me, to improve me, to give innumerable gifts, seen and unseen. And, in my desire to acknowledge these gifts, in my desire to see them flying in their own way, on their own journey, I realize that I wish to lose the therapeutic hate words, I wish to lose hierarchy and labels, I wish to lose the sadness which we as therapists and supervisors so frequently (though often inadvertently) create for others. So Chris, we both challenge. And now I do not have the fear to do so.

In regards to this document, I carefully transcribed these reflecting conversations which my students engaged in. Chris took these words and reassembled them into a poem. The words of this poem are all the students' words. Now, however, they are permitted to speak with their own poetic rhythms and powers. Beside the poem, in a separate column, is an ongoing correspondence between Chris and me in response to the students' words. In a third column we provide quotes from some of the authors whom we find ourselves moved by. We discover new thoughts emerge as the thoughts from these writers interact both with the poem and the correspondence between Chris and me.

NOW I SEE A PERSON

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POEM	CORRESPONDENCE -- Susan & Chris	THOUGHTS FROM OUTSIDE
Before I read her chart I thought I read her thoughts	<i>Hello Chris...</i>	Stories are a form of poetic activism...
I thought She was just repeating to me What she had told the prior therapist All these other things All these notes from the past And the diagnoses And my understanding that She would not progress But stay anxious And depressed	<i>I want to share with you a moment of supervision; one supervision event.</i>	Lynn Hoffman (2002), p. 168.
But now I saw	<i>We had nothing pressing to do that day in my supervision class. The students were not quite prepared to present their final cases. So, we just started talking. I stopped early on, however, and asked them if we could tape our conversations for the words and thoughts they were giving were so rich, powerful and full of heart. We went into another room, it was hot and stuffy, but no one seemed to care about that for we were all so excited to participate in this journey.</i>	Only if words are felt, bodily presences, like echoes or waterfalls, can we understand the power of spoken language to influence, alter, and transform the perceptual world.
All the tremendous hurt and rejection She had over the years This is what she was dealing with	<i>I still had in my own mind and heart the conversations from the event just a couple of weeks prior with you and Lynn Hoffman at Loma Linda University. These two events were combining for me. In the class, our conversations resonated with such a sense of numerous gifts circulating through</i>	David Abram (1996), p. 89.
So I apologized For giving her the assignment	<i>what was there...</i>	And especially about

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