The Willow and the Oak:

From Monologue to Dialogue in the Scaffolding of Therapeutic Conversations

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Abstract

This article draws on a case study of a narrative therapy session to explore issues related to relational responsiveness in therapeutic conversations. The central question posed is "How is it possible to both honour client expertise while also bringing discursive ideas and processes (such as narrative externalizing) to the conversation?" Drawing on Bakhtin and Vygotsky, the authors suggest that externalizing can be understood as a speech genre which furnishes a scaffolding for constructing meaning, and that this practice promotes a move from monologue to dialogue in relation to problem experience. They also caution that this or any practice designed to "promote dialogue" paradoxically does the contrary when the therapist is not responsive to the client. Using segments of a transcribed session and post-session interviews with therapist and client, the authors portray a linguistic shift from oppositional to accommodative metaphors more in keeping with the client's preferred relationship with her experience. The authors conclude that it is not therapist expertise per se, but the failure to engage in a relationally responsive manner, that constrains the possibility of therapeutic dialogue.

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This article explores a conversational conundrum experienced by therapeutic practitioners. It hinges on the challenge of both privileging clients' meaning making while also bringing certain conceptual resources to a dialogue. In a sense, this dilemma pivots on the notion of expertise: how to balance client knowledges with therapist knowledges, how to make room for two traditions (Gadamer, 1975) in the construction of new ways of going forward?

More particularly, this challenge is raised here in the context of the narrative therapy practice of externalizing conversations (White and Epston, 1990). Externalizing is a linguistic practice that breaks from conversational convention (Bird, 2000), and situates persons as being in relation to experience—a position from which a person can adopt a reflexive stance and exercise enhanced choices for action. This conversational practice has generated a wealth of clinical possibilities (e.g. Bird, 2000; Freedman & Combs, 1996; Madsen, 1999; Monk et. al. 1996) and has furnished us, as practitioners, with useful resources for engaging clients in constructive dialogue. This is not to say, however, that the import into a conversation of externalizing practices, or any unconventional linguistic practices conventions, is not without its potential pitfalls. In this essay, we will explore considerations related to the question of how to invite clients to adopt certain ways of making meaning around problems (specifically externalizing ideas) while simultaneously being responsive to their preferred ways of construing problem experience.

The question concerns dialogue. To pose it differently, how can we be relationally responsive (Shotter, 1993), utterance by utterance, in our engagement with persons who consult us while *also* bringing some unusual ideas to the conversation? The work of two influential Russian theorists, Mikhail Bakhtin (1984; 1986; cf. Lysack, 2002) and Lev Vygotsky (1978; 1986), provides a wealth of ideas for addressing this dilemma. We will explore the issues by drawing on their ideas and grounding them in the specifics of a narrative therapy session.

Externalizing Conversations

The practice of externalizing problems was first introduced by Michael White (1984) as a means of separating persons from the identity claims imbedded in problematic accounts of their lives. Externalizing is a novel form of speech that creates that possibility. For example, a client's claim that "I am a failure" can become fodder for a conversation about the current epidemic of "consumer fever" and how it encourages him to assess his worthiness by tallying the monetary value of his personal possessions.

Narrative therapy is much informed by the work of Michel Foucault, who wrote widely about the dehumanizing impact of dominant discourses manifest in institutional practices. Foucault was particularly critical of practices of assessing persons according to arbitrary norms and categorizing them according to purported deficits (cf. Foucault, 1979). This critique of dominant ways of speaking and acting is evident in a recurrent narrative metaphor of problem as a manifestation of these and other forms of social oppression. Further entailments (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980) of this metaphor include depictions of problems being "defeated, escaped, and left behind" (Tomm, Suzuki &

Suzuki, 1990, p. 105), among other possibilities. In short, externalizing conversations

typically establish an adversarial relationship between persons and problems.

This adversarial positioning may provide fertile ground for constructing a sense of

personal agency (Tomm, 1989); however, it is only as helpful as its *fit* for the person

with whom we are in conversation. In the transcribed therapy session we will explore

here, the therapist (Mishka Lysack, hereafter ML) responds to the client's stated

preference for an alternate way of relating to problems, abandoning the adversarial

metaphors for language that speaks of accommodation and flexibility. Borrowing from

Bakhtin (1984) we will argue that without this responsiveness, therapy becomes

monological. In the case of narrative therapy in particular, a monological engagement is

an imposition of meaning that paradoxically duplicates the discursive ills the therapy

seeks to redress (Larner, 2003; Paré, 2003).

Our interest here is in how this relates to the mutually responsive coordination of

talk that Shotter (1993) calls "joint action". The therapist's import of an unconventional,

and elaborate, body of ideas and conversational practices into a narrative therapy session

poses challenges for a mutually coordinated (or shared) conversation. If relationally

responsive therapy is a bit like dancers responding to the subtle movements of their

partners, it makes sense that a therapist would "lead" an externalizing conversation while

the client learns the steps. We believe that when the therapist does not relinquish that

lead, the work more closely resembles a monologue than a coordinated dialogue.

<div style="text-align:center">The Research Context</div>

This essay focuses on a single session, one among a series of sessions videotaped

and transcribed as part of David Paré's (hereafter referred to as DP) research into

therapeutic dialogue. The conversation contributed to crystallizing various distinctions developed here; it also serves as an empirical example for illustrating them.

Some remarks on the dual meanings of the word "discourse" will be helpful to provide a sense of the research focus. As *noun*, "discourse" refers to those bodies of ideas and belief which stand behind the therapist--what Parker and colleagues (Parker, Georgaca, Harper, McLaughlin, & Stowell-Smith, 1996) describe as "systems of statements about the world that create lived realities" (p. 10). A therapist who engages a client in discussion of "repressed conflict", "irrational self talk", or "male entitlement" is introducing elements of various discourses (Freudian, cognitive, feminist), as reflected in the vocabulary used. Discourse as noun also extends beyond theoretical systems to other webs of cultural meaning that may be associated with gender, socioeconomic class, family of origin, and so on.

Discourse as *verb* here refers to the act of performing (Newman and Holzman, 1997) meaning. Like the sound of a tree falling in the forest, meaning only exists when it is received--in the bridging between text and reader, speaker and listener, utterance and response. The practitioner who introduces discourses (as noun) *does* something with those ideas and beliefs in the therapeutic session. The expression of meaning is always also an enactment of discourse, a relational *doing* (Gergen, 1999). In this sense of the word, discourse is action: we do things with words[1].

In analyzing the session described here, DP was looking for instances of discourse in both senses of the word. In that respect, the research is related to traditions of discourse analysis (DA) *and* conversation analysis (CA) (cf. Billig, 1999, Fairclough, 1992). It should be emphasized, however, that our analysis of our participants'

contributions (in both the session and their subsequent interviews) does not focus on "adjacency pairs' of exchanges between speakers, which garner more attention in both DA and CA. It is more accurate to say this work hovers on the borders of those two discourse-oriented research traditions, as well as sharing some features of Schutz's (1967) social phenomenology.   It is assumed that therapists inescapably meet their clients with a range of discourses (as noun) that stand behind them as they engage in therapeutic dialogue (discourse as verb). In addition, it is assumed that therapists attempt to influence clients in helpful ways, drawing from various discourses in doing so. This "drawing from discourses" is evident in the content of the exchanges--the vocabulary used--but also in the process, the "shape" or "contours" of the relational engagement itself (Katz and Shotter, 2003, in press)[2]. This latter aspect is more subtle and more easily overlooked, because it may not ostensibly involve introducing new language or concepts into a conversation. But staying close to the client's language, adopting a "not knowing" stance, and making room for the "not-yet-said" (Anderson, 1997) are nevertheless all ways of going forward no less informed by discourse (as noun).

The research of which the session analyzed here constitutes a part involved the videotaping of sessions, after which researcher and therapist (and in a later interview, researcher and client) viewed the tape and analyzed the session. The post-session interviews were built around Interpersonal Process Recall (IPR) (Rennie, 1990): researcher and participant viewed the videotaped session together, stopping and starting as they went. Therapists were asked to identify moments where they felt they brought some additional ideas and processes to the conversation, to describe these, and to share their impression of the impact on the conversation. Clients were asked to identify

moments where they felt the therapist had brought something new to the conversation, what it was and what impact they felt it had had. These interviews were also taped and transcribed. Transcripts of the session and interviews were shared with the participants. After preliminary analysis of all tapes and transcripts by DP and research assistant Nahal Akbari, DP presented a summary of emerging findings to the therapist and client in a joint meeting where further discussions were generated and recorded. In the session featured here, the therapist draws widely on narrative ideas (discourse as noun) and introduces them into therapeutic conversations as a conversational process (discourse as verb). In this case, that process is the linguistic practice of externalization. Of interest in the interplay between therapist and client is the manner in which they settle on particular externalizing metaphors to make sense of the client's experience.

A Narrative Therapy Session

The therapist in the session is the second author, Mishka Lysack (ML), who has practiced family therapy for 12 years and has identified himself as a narrative practitioner for the past 11 years[3]. He offers trainings in narrative therapy and writes about narrative practice in professional journals. The client is Tanja[4], a white, heterosexual woman in her mid-thirties. She had met with ML approximately eight times previously.

At the outset of this session, Tanja tells ML about the ambivalence and distress she feels in the wake of a new job offering. The job would call on her to present frequent workshops—something she says she is "anxious" about. She also indicates there are "many positives" about the development and she is excited about the potential challenge of the position.

Within the first two minutes of the session, Tanja speaks of her worries about taking on the new responsibilities and wonders aloud if this is "the fear talking". While this turn of phrase is not uncommon, it also happens to have an externalizing quality: fear is anthropomorphized and made out to have a voice. After Tanja tells the story of a previous stressful incident presenting a workshop, ML picks up on the externalizing language Tanja used earlier, asking what '"the fear" is saying.

T: It probably is also saying that ... ummm ... kind of ... you 're going to get <u>so</u> anxious that you'll self- sabotage.

Tanja has now offered "self-sabotage" as another issue to be discussed[5]. But while the "fear" is now being construed as separate from Tanja, she here uses "self-sabotage" as a verb, which construes it as an action she does to herself. Three conversational turns later ML introduces further externalizing language, so that self-sabotage becomes an "idea":

ML: OK ... Now and, and is that related to this earlier incident, is that ... ummm ... this idea of self-sabotage, like where…

Four more turns and ML introduces the notion of self-sabotage having a voice:

ML: So with the voice of, stay with the self-sabotage, the voice of self, self-sabotage, do you, do you hear any other, any one else's voices in there with that?

This movement from individualizing talk to externalizing talk occurs in various places through ML's conversation with Tanja. For instance, Tanja says her parents characterized her as a "shy" person. ML talks about this as the "idea that …you're just a naturally introverted, shy person", and then later refers to "shyness", which he depicts as teaming up with "self-doubt". These conversational moves of ML are consistent with

narrative ideas and practice. Drawing on narrative discourse (as noun) in his engagement

with Tanja, he introduces the conversational process (discourse as verb) of externalizing.

In the IPR interview following the session, ML spoke of introducing externalizing

talk and of conversational moves intended to "personify"[6] some of the problems Tanja

described, including fear, shyness, self-sabotage, and introversion. When I (DP) sat with

Tanja afterwards, I began by checking to determine if she could identify in general terms

anything she felt ML "brought in" to their conversation. Although she did not explicitly

name the practice of "externalizing", Tanja referred to ML's practice of "objectifying"

things, and named "fear", "self-sabotage" and other externalizations that emerged in the

session. She described the practice as useful to her, as it "allows me to see it one step

back so that I can…see things a little more clearly".

<center>Scaffolding and Therapeutic Conversations</center>

Because of the 'tenacity' of certain ways of 'seeing' the world, moving from one

way of 'looking' to another may be described as a process that "is absolutely impossible

for one person, but that becomes a reality for two" (Vygotsky, 1986, p. 256).

One role of the therapist is to introduce new voices into counselling, i.e., alternate

ways of speaking and thinking which open up the conversation from a self-enclosed

monologue into a more richly textured polyphony of conversations. As therapists, our

intention is to disrupt and disempower the taken-for-granted 'truths' or constraints, so

that more empowering and open 'voices' may enter into the conversation. With this

process of evoking multiple voices emerges a greater "narrative multiplicity" (Penn &

Frankfurt, 1994). Penn and Frankfurt suggest that "these voices, often newly discovered

or invented, allow our narrative discourse to expand and multiply" (Penn & Frankfurt, 1994, p. 217).

When we (DP & ML) meet with people in our practice who are in crisis, our sense has been that people position themselves in relationships through 'hardened' narratives--on-going, self-enclosed monologues. In his exposition of Dostoevsky, Bakhtin describes monologue as "finalized and deaf to the other's response …Monologue manages without the other …Monologue pretends to be the ultimate word" (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 293). Drawing on Bakhtin, Penn and Frankfurt refer to the monologic nature of the conversations and thinking of people in crisis as appearing to be "single-voiced, absolute and closed. These negative monologue…listen to themselves and are unresponsive to others' (Penn & Frankfurt, 1994, p. 223).

We are equally interested in promoting multiplicity on the therapist's side as well. Not only is it important to invite the client to move from monologue to dialogue, but therapists also have an ethical responsibility to avoid the same monologization of their own contributions. This movement of the therapist from monologue to dialogue will be described in a later section.

One way for the therapist to promote movement from monologic to dialogic ways of thinking and speaking is to provide "scaffolding" which assists in expanding meaning making. The term "scaffold", as applied to therapeutic conversation, bears much in common with the temporary structure used for aiding in the construction of a building to which the word more typically refers. A conversational scaffold is a language-based heuristic—it provides a malleable linguistic framework for conversational partners to utilize in co-constructing meanings. White (2001) has suggested that this notion of

therapeutic conversation and dialogue as a form of scaffolding is derived in part from

Vygotsky's writings and his research into the construction of knowledge within a

structured relationship between children and others (teachers, peers, etc.) in an

educational context.

For Vygotsky, scaffolding takes place within the realm of language. Vygotsky

considered language to be one of the primary psychological tools, mediating between the

human person and the world. He suggests that thought "development is determined by

language, i.e., by the linguistic tools of thought and by the sociocultural experience of the

child" (Vygotsky, 1986, p. 94). It is Vygotsky's idea of language as a form of perception

or "vision" which is particularly striking, when he insists that the "child begins to

perceive the world not only through his eyes but through his speech" (Vygotsky, 1978, p.

32). Shotter (1999) highlights this distinction between the instrumental notion of

language as a tool *by which we act* "into" the world to influence others, and the prosthetic

sense of language as a tool *through which we perceive* and understand the world.

Externalizing talk is one example of the deliberate use of language as a 'tool' or

scaffold by which we are acting into the conversation with the intention of inviting a

person to entertain new possibilities. In this case study, the first "segment," as it were, of

the scaffold being highlighted is the notion of problem as pitted against person in an

oppositional stance. In this case, the therapist introduces the segment with the intention

of facilitating a joint construction process; but we also believe that clients can and do

bring material to therapeutic conversations that subsequently provide structure for co-

shaping meanings. Like the non-metaphorical sense of the word—a temporary structure

for aiding in construction—the "scaffold' that ML introduces is subsequently re-shaped

and modified by both he *and* Tanja through their responses to each other. However, it is Tanja who exercises the final authority and selects the meanings she finds most conducive to "seeing" more clearly.

Bakhtin described how "speech genres" act as linguistic forms of scaffolding that have a heuristic function, offering ways of seeing and interpretative frameworks. "Genres (of literature and speech) throughout the centuries of their life accumulate forms of seeing and interpreting particular aspects of the world" (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 5).We regard externalizing talk as an example of a prosthetic linguistic form through which we see and communicate with others.

We find the ideas of both Vygotsky and Bakhtin helpful in making sense of the linguistic practice of externalizing. Externalizing conversations, like other forms of discourse as verb, shape and influence our interactions with others. These metaphors of 'vision' and 'seeing' which Vygotsky and Bakhtin attribute to language and speech genres is echoed in Tanja's description of how externalizing conversations allowed her to "step back so that I can … see things a little more clearly."

If scaffolding takes place in and through developing a shared language as a form of 'vision,' scaffolding itself can be understood as a "loan of consciousness" (Bruner, 1986, pp. 74-76). We assist each other in making meaning by sharing "construction materials", as it were. This fits with Vygotsky's view that "the true direction of the development of thinking is not from the individual to the social, but from the social to the individual" (Vygotsky, 1986, p. 36).

Vygotsky (1978) used the term "Zone of Proximal Development" (p. 86) to highlight and contrast what a learner can do by themselves versus what they can

accomplish in relationship with another person. We view the therapeutic relationship as a specialized Zone of Proximal Development, a dialogical space where the therapist is involved with an intentional scaffolding of conversations in order to expand the client's options from making meaning.

<div align="center">Relationship with the Problem: Alternate Views</div>

As mentioned earlier, the scaffolding that is externalizing talk typically offers a frame that pits person against problem. The conversation between ML and Tanja exemplifies this: they speak about a variety of problems "teaming up" against and having "power over" Tanja. ML then inquires about how Tanja may "turn the volume down" on self-sabotage, and depicts her as "recapturing [her] life back from" introversion. For the first half of the session, ML and Tanja frame the relationship between client and problems in these oppositional terms.

Despite the widespread use of oppositional metaphors in narrative approaches to therapy, narrative practitioners are not exempt from advocating alternative formulations. Roth and Epston (1996b) critique the idea that in externalizing conversations, one "aims to eliminate, conquer, or kill off problems" (p.150). Similarly, Freeman and Lobovits (1993) are critical of metaphors that "appear to be somewhat militaristic in nature …. They may serve to support tendencies toward practices of dominance and aggressiveness in social relationships" (p. 194). As an alternative to the image of power over the problem, they propose using the metaphor of "power in relation to the problem" (Freeman, Epston & Lobovits, 1997, p. 67). Stacey (1997) seeks "alternative definitions of resistance that are distinct from the patriarchal notions of resistance as a protest" (p. 29), and, drawing on Tomm's (Tomm et al, 1990) work, distinguishes between "outer

externalizations" that are concerned with *separating* the problem *'out'* from the person, as compared with "inner externalizations" that are focused on the *relationship between* the person and problem (Stacey, 1997, pp. 36-47).

Others have been concerned about the limitations of externalizing conversations as a culturally-bound practice, and have sketched out some alternatives. For instance, Tomm and his colleagues (Tomm, et al, 1990) suggest "the notion of externalizing the problem may not be readily applicable in Japanese culture" (p. 104), which favors an orientation of compromise and co-existence with problems.

They cite the example of the Kan-No-Mushi or a mythical "angry worm," which traditionally is believed to dwell inside of children. The metaphor facilitates the emergence of an image of "peaceful co-existence" with, for example, the temper of the child, rather than "a struggle against the temper or an effort to try to escape it" (p. 105). While this way of speaking about experience still permits a separation of person from problem, it resonates with the language of accommodation that, as we shall see in the next section, emerged in the conversation between ML and Tanja.

Pivoting on a Client Preference

Standing up to problems, or relating optimally with them, are contrasting ways of going forward set in action by two different ways of speaking about problems. In effect, these are related speech genres, variations of externalizing that can help clients move from a monological to a dialogical engagement with their experience. But no discursive process is *inherently* dialogue-promoting. Sustained dialogue is a dynamic flow, not a discrete and singular achievement. The process is never finalized.

In their IPR interview following the session, both ML and Tanja spoke about how they came to feel the oppositional metaphors were not fitting for Tanja. One view—of Tanja aligned *against* self-sabotage, shyness, self-doubt etcetera—had prevailed to that point. On reviewing the session video, both drew attention to a moment when ML introduced a different and more accommodating metaphor. This shift in language persisted for the remainder of the session and was the subject of considerable attention from both conversants in the post-session interviews and discussion.

The shift in the session was preceded by comments from Tanja about pre-presentation nervousness. She indicated the notion of viewing nervousness as though it were a harmless spider wasn't helpful, because it led her to criticize herself for her fear of an ostensibly benign creature. Tanja followed this with a description of a tug-of-war between the fearful, self-critical messages, and the messages (frequently conveyed by others) that she is good at presenting and would do fine.

T: *I'd like to be able to kind of get over to the side of, "I know I can do this", and "I'll be great at it", um, but I guess it's almost like, you know, fear's got a hold of my ankle…*

In response to this comment, ML selected "nervousness", a term Tanja had been using alongside the word "fear", and asked:

ML: *What will, what would happen to that tug of war if um … if you changed your relationship with nervousness…*

Following the session, ML described this as an "important moment" where Tanja instigated a change in *his* languaging of the issues she faced:

ML: ...she uh… influenced <u>me</u> by, by… bringing forward new information that made

me realize the scaffolding uh… that we now need to sort of, there's some other stuff

here that we're missing, and maybe even the fundamental kind of model of the

opposition between…which is very much part and parcel of the externalized

conversation, that we have to have a different kind of model.

In ML's words, the conversation pivoted here in response to Tanja's apparent

preference for a less adversarial orientation to her experience. Five turns after introducing

the notion of a relationship with nervousness, ML suggests nervousness is "kind of being

over reactive"—a softening of the metaphor of nervousness as being against her. A turn

later, he asks:

ML: ...is that a possibility, that [(C: uhum)] it's sort of, rather than sort of seeing it as

all black and as an enemy, it's, it's, it has, it sort of does have your best interest at

heart but it's kind of really misguided [(C: uhum)] and gets out of hand and tries to

take over [(C: uhum)] but it does have, it does, can kind of offer you something as a

companion, would that be…

Tanja indicates this "would help" and elaborates on this alternative to an

oppositional stance:

T: ...to kind of be present with it and accept and … almost kind of feel it, understand

it, and learn from it, as opposed to, you know, not feel it, not allow it in, get angry with,

you know…

The conversation from this point forward becomes sprinkled with new metaphors

of accommodation. ML refers to the martial arts notion that the oak, being strong and

rigid, breaks in the wind, while the willow is flexible and bends without being harmed.

Tanja picks up on this and describes a powerful meditation she once had on the movement of a tree outside her window. Both relate these ideas to Buddhism and Eastern thought—interests Tanja has previously shared with ML. With this shift in languaging, ML becomes curious about what self-sabotage might "have to offer" Tanja, and suggests that rather than "turning down the volume" on it, they might want to tune in. By the end of the conversation, shyness and self-sabotage are construed as houseguests, alongside other (perhaps more obviously helpful) guests such as acceptance, curiousity, and non-judgmentalness.

In reviewing the session, Tanja remarked on the relief of viewing things not as a "battle". She said the objectifying of experience (i.e. externalizing) is a helpful move, but the experience is still a part of her, and that it didn't make sense for her to *oppose* it, because "it's part of me".

Just as ML introduced externalizing talk as a way to support Tanja in moving to from monologue to dialogue, it was necessary for him to remain open to Tanja's response in order to avoid merely imposing a new monological regime in the form of a purportedly liberatory discourse (Paré, 2003). In his own words, ML must be open to being "influenced" by Tanja. Dialogue is not possible without this relational responsiveness.

Relational Responsiveness

In the previous section, we described how a pivotal moment emerged when I (ML) sensed that Tanja was no longer finding the form of scaffolding which I had introduced (oppositionally-oriented externalizing) helpful in making sense of her experience. Tanja's responses to the metaphors in the course of the dialogue became more hesitant; there were more gaps and greater silence in her replies. At this point, I

experienced a greater sense of "heaviness," as the conversation was "slowing down" and becoming progressively more "laboured". The scaffold was apparently not serving our conversation—it was not contributing to productive mutual meaning-making.

If I had persisted with this particular scaffolding, my own responses would likely have become more monologic in texture, "deaf" to my interactions with Tanja, increasingly single-voiced. Instead, I perceived her actions as an invitation for me to converse differently, and responded by introducing an alternate scaffold: externalizing conversation with an inner externalization or "power with the problem (Tomm et al., 1990).

We believe there is no inherent contradiction between a relationally responsive approach to dialogue and an approach like the one described here that involves the deliberate employment of scaffolding to support clients in therapeutic conversations. We all draw on bodies of idea and practice (discourse as noun) to make sense of our experience—these are "prosthetic devices" (Shotter, 1993)[7] which support us in going forward. To offer such devices is one of the contributions we as therapists bring to the dialogue and as described above, they may help in moving from monologue to dialogue. The challenge to the responsive practitioner is to hold lightly to this device, to treat it as a tool which client and therapist may employ in co-customizing a scaffold to fit the unique conversation at hand.

For Bakhtin, utterances in conversation are not isolated occurrences, but rather are moments in an ongoing living responsive stream of communication. "Any concrete utterance is a link in the chain of speech communication of a particular sphere." (Bakhtin, 1986, 91). Every act of responsive communication is but a 'note' in a larger and more

complex song, which cannot be understood outside of the web of relationships. Among other things, Bakhtin draws our attention to the fact that utterances point backwards to other utterances which precede it. Bakhtin (1986) names this feature of communication *answerability* or *responsivity*: "Each utterance is filled with echoes and reverberations of other utterances to which it is related by the communality of the sphere of speech communication. Every utterance must be regarded primarily as a *response* to preceding utterances" (p. 91; emphasis in original).

When I (ML) reflect on what was going on for me at what I described as the pivotal moment in my conversation with Tanja, I remember noting her immediate presentation, which included nonverbals indicating a level of disengagement. I also remember making connections in that moment with previous dialogues, previous utterances. These included conversations with Tanja about Buddhism, and also included the article by Tomm and colleagues (Tomm et al., 1990) which suggests alternatives to the oppositional forms of externalizing. All of these were at play as Tanja related to me her metaphor of the fearful spider, and I responded. This is what Bakhtin means by "answerability" and it figures in the conversational move from depicting nervousness as enemy to nervousness as companion.

We always "bring" discourse as both noun and verb to conversations—and this is a good thing. As Anderson (1997) has said, therapeutic conversations need to be different from those that clients have been having with themselves and others. New ideas and new ways of talking introduce difference, and we believe it is in our responsiveness to the other that we will arrive at the helpful distinction that Gregory Bateson famously called a difference that makes a difference. Whether we berate our clients with unflinching ideas

about "irrational self-talk", or we tentatively make space for the "not-yet-said", we introduce this difference. It is in how we coordinate our talk with each other that will determine whether novel ideas and practices will lead to new understandings. As Gadamer (as cited in Shotter and Lannamann, 2001) has written, "To reach an understanding in a dialogue is not merely a matter of putting oneself forward and asserting one's point of view, but of being transformed into a communion in which we do not remain what we were" (p. 603). We believe these ideas speak to a profoundly relational way of thinking about our therapeutic conversations in general.

Knowing and Not-Knowing in Therapeutic Practice

In the research shared here, we have been informed by both DA and CA traditions in attending to discourse as both noun and verb within therapeutic dialogue. We believe this dual meaning of discourse opens the door to many possibilities for the micro-examination of collaborative dialogic processes. By relating what we "do" with words to the contexts from which those words originally spring, we've attempted to highlight the linkage between theoretical and other discourses to their implementation in therapeutic practice.

We all inhabit multiple speech communities, and bring the language of those communities into our conversations, therapeutic and otherwise. In that sense, we never "walk alone". We are supported by (and sustain and reinvent) a rich array of vocabularies developed over the course of countless prior conversations, many of which long preceded our coming into the world. If conversation has much in common with musical improvisation, these vocabularies are like traditions of musical theory that provide points of departure, but not final destinations.

We believe that the welcome emphasis on "not-knowing" associated with collaborative therapeutic practice is sometimes coupled with an unwarranted critique of discourses which therapists may bring to their work as a "knowing". We agree with Anderson (1997), who writes: "I do not want my not-knowing position to be misperceived as knowing nothing or withholding knowledge. Rather, it is related to *what I do* with what I know or think I know" (p. 247, emphasis added). The discourses we bring as content and process to therapeutic conversations are tools for making meaning and it is what we do with them--how tightly we hold them, how generously we relinquish our grip--that determines whether we are promoting or constraining dialogue.

Responsiveness to the other, what Smith (2003) calls "relational attunement", makes it possible for both our hand and the client's hand to grip and indeed *refashion* the tools we use, as occurred in the session described here. And while a tool may be introduced via the therapist's knowing, the openness to sharing in its use is made possible by the therapist's not-knowing. Relationally responsive practice calls for this paradoxical combination of knowing *and* not-knowing (Larner, 2003).

As warranted as we believe it to be, the critique of expert knowledge so prominent within the constructionist community frequently lionizes a description of conversational process that fails to capture the hermeneutic complexity of dialogue. To celebrate a client's knowing does not entail leaving our discursive inheritances at the consulting room door. It cannot be done. It is in the way we handle our knowing, how we offer it up for shared consideration (Paré, 2003), how we respond to the other, that we promote mutuality. It takes two to dialogue.

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Footnotes

1. In strict grammatical terms, we use the word discourse as a noun throughout here, but use the dichotomy of noun/verb to distinguish idea/belief from action/performance.

2. Naming content and process separately is not without its limitations: it suggests a hard-edged distinction where it could also be persuasively argued that content *is* process and vice versa. Nevertheless, we find the division of the terms useful here to illuminate some distinctions of interest.

3. The primary research texts of this study are the session, the transcribed IPR interviews and the subsequent 4-way debriefing and discussion. Subsequent to these phases of the research, ML joined DP in writing up and theorizing about the study.

4. The client's name has been altered to preserve confidentiality.

5. The word "anxious" is also newly offered; ML chooses to pursue the issue of "self-sabotage".

6. To construe them as actors separate from Tanja, so that she could explore alternative ways of responding or relating to them.

7. While Shotter uses this term in relation to language, we believe the metaphor applies equally well to broader discourses, both noun and verb. A body of related ideas (eg. a Foucauldian critique), or a particular way of conversing (eg. externalizing) can help us "go on together" (Wittgenstein, 1953).