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Editor's Introduction

An interpretive methodology applied to existential psychotherapy

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“The central or pivotal issue in [a] patient's life is not to be discovered in her 'unconscious'; it is lying quite open for her to see (as well as for us) though this is not to say that there are not many things about herself that this patient does not realize)” (Laing, 1960/1990, p. 56).

“The sense of a text is not behind the text, but in front of it. It is not something hidden, but something disclosed. What has to be understood is not the initial situation of discourse, but what points towards a possible world, thanks to the non-ostensive reference of the text” (Ricoeur, 1976, p. 87).

Introduction

One of the challenges in psychotherapy research has been finding ways to investigate not just the outcomes of therapy but the process whereby those outcomes are achieved. This challenge is becoming increasingly pressing as the need to demonstrate the effectiveness of therapeutic approaches has increased with the growth, and what some see as the encroachment, of managed care. This special issue of Methods contains a set of papers that, both individually and collectively, illustrate one approach to the study of therapeutic process. It is a hermeneutic approach, employing an interpretive methodology. This approach focuses on what people do: on the phenomena of human action and interaction. Such action is, we presume, situated in its character, practical before it is theoretical, organized by ongoing tacit concerns rather than reflective plans, negotiated and improvisatory, and open to historical and cultural contingencies.

In broad terms our hermeneutic approach seeks to uncover and elucidate the ontological work that people accomplish in their everyday practical activity, including the interchange that takes place in therapy. This work includes the ongoing construction and reconstruction of social reality, and especially the production and reproduction of persons. Much of this work is done by means of (through the medium of) language, and so our interpretive methodology incorporates the analysis of language pragmatics: the conversational actions that make up discourse.

The papers in this issue of Methods apply this interpretive methodology to the videorecording of an interaction between psychiatrist R. D. Laing and a volunteer named Leila. The interaction provides an example of Laing's particular existential psychotherapy, however the tools of our analysis and the logic of our inquiry can be used

to illuminate what is happening in any therapeutic process. In this introduction I will locate our approach within postmodern inquiry, introduce the notion of “ontological work,” describe the occasion of Laing’s demonstration, sketch a quick overview of the way we have utilized conversation analysis, explain how we have drawn on Heidegger’s analysis of Dasein to articulate the ontology of conversation, and finally give a brief summary of each of the four papers that follow.

The pragmatics of discourse

Jean-François Lyotard has proposed that the way to address the crisis of knowledge that marks postmodernism is by attention to pragmatics. He writes that he has “favored a certain procedure: emphasizing facts of language and in particular their pragmatic aspect” (1979/1997, p. 9). According to Lyotard, in the postmodern perspective on society what “governs our analysis” is the principle “that the observable social bond is composed of language ‘moves’” (p. 11). And he has suggested that pragmatics has profound implications for our understanding not just of knowledge but of the knowing subject, the human being.

Pragmatics is, in a nutshell, the study of what is done with language (cf. Levinson, 1983, p. 5ff for discussion of the difficulties in defining the term). Talk is used to do things; utterances are actions, what Austin (1975) called performatives. Pragmatics attends to what Wittgenstein (1953) called “language games,” the “forms of life” in which people participate (cf. Bernstein, 1983). The postmodern project, then, is one in which: “language itself [is seen] as an unstable exchange between its speakers, whose utterances are now seen less as a process of transmission of information or messages, or in terms of some network of signs or even signifying systems, than as (to use one of Lyotard’s favorite figures) the ‘taking of tricks,’ the trumping of a communicational adversary, an essentially conflictual relationship between tricksters” (Jameson, 1997, p. xi).

Interpretive inquiry

For a number of years I have been developing a hermeneutic approach to the study of human interaction, one that would enable me, as a developmental psychologist, to understand how people change. It is an approach that grants the both the semantic character of human action (this was the emphasis in, for example, Packer, 1984) and its pragmatic character: the ways in which words move and change us. In this introduction my intention is not to provide a detailed explanation of interpretive research, for such can be found in my own and others’ writing (cf. Packer, 1985; Packer & Addison, 1989a; Thompson, 1990; Hiley, Bohman & Shusterman, 1991). I will content myself with a few general remarks about the interpretive analysis of psychotherapy.

The difficulty that confronts any study of the process of psychotherapy, one that seeks to open the black box of therapy and peer inside, not content with efforts merely to measure its inputs and outputs, is that therapeutic conversations are not readily coded and categorized. Or, to put it more accurately, this can be done, with greater or lesser degree of ease, but at the cost of destroying the temporality and contextuality of what is going on. A hermeneutic approach, in contrast, aims to hold onto both these characteristics, in part by recognizing the “text-like” character of action, and in part by recognizing the way that texts, and talk, have effects. Texts, and text-analogs, are used to act. It is a method, or more accurately a methodology, a logic of inquiry, that takes the “interpretive turn” that many of the social sciences have undergone in the past twenty years (cf. Rabinow & Sullivan, 1979).

An interpretive methodology seeks not to replace our everyday understanding of people and events, but rather to mine, articulate, and where necessary critique this understanding. Its procedures are not primarily those of quantification (though this has its place), but those of careful exegesis. Its products are typically not abstract conceptualizations, but detailed and situated accounts. The result is an expanded understanding, such that we can begin to appreciate the constituted character of things we have become accustomed to considering natural. Our society, and its institutions and practices, may appear natural and inevitable to us, but in actuality it is an ongoing achievement, the product of continual human activity. Interpretive inquiry enables us to go beyond the first glance and articulate this productive activity. It is a matter of articulating what I call the ontological work with which society is produced and reproduced.

The social construction of reality is however nothing, in my opinion, compared with the social construction of we who live in it. People are constituted too, and it is surely the task of psychologists to figure out how this is done. For the most part we take gender, ethnicity, even class, perhaps personality, surely cognition, as natural properties of the biological species we call human, but, again on closer examination, all of these are evidently cultured characteristics, the results of human activity. Our children (and of course we ourselves) are social products, raised to contribute to the ongoing reproduction of our society. We still know very little about the way this happens. The aim of an interpretive investigation of this matter is to again elucidate the ontological work that is done. In this case it is the work accomplished in everyday interaction that determines who and what people are.

As I noted earlier, I approach this last matter as a developmental psychologist and educational researcher (cf. Packer, 2001; Packer & Greco-Brooks, 1999; Packer & Goicoechea, 2000), with minimal expertise in clinical phenomena. But the clients of psychotherapy are the products of society too; and surely the conduct of psychotherapy is a social process in which, hopefully, the client changes. The same interpretive

approach that I have used to study children on the preschool playground (Packer, 1994) and the way school changes who children are (Packer, 2001) can bring us a fresh understanding of psychotherapy too.

Laing's demonstration

In 1985, at the first Evolution of Psychotherapy Conference, organized by the Erickson Foundation and held in Phoenix, Arizona, Dr. Ronald Laing gave a demonstration of his approach to therapy. He met and talked with a woman, Leila, who had been diagnosed as paranoid schizophrenic, while cameras recorded the conversation and relayed it to the audience. The New York Times described the occasion:

“R. D. Laing, the British psychiatrist whose methods owe much to such existential philosophers as Sartre, interviewed a paranoid woman from a Phoenix shelter for the homeless. The interview seemed to be no more than mere conversation. It began with the woman stiffly telling Dr. Laing of a grand conspiracy against her while their conversation was broadcast by closed-circuit television to a nearby audience of more than 1,000 therapists.

By the end of the interview, Dr. Laing and the woman had achieved such a rapport that she seemed much less troubled and spontaneously offered to join him on the podium in the nearby lecture hall, where she answered questions with lucidity from the assembled therapists.

The elusive nature of the therapeutic exchange was highlighted by the fact that some people in the audience maintained that nothing much had happened in the interview, while Dr Minuchin, the family therapist, rose from the audience to praise the interview as an example of the highest clinical art. Still others objected to Dr. Laing's explanation that it is as important just to be with someone in deep rapport as it is to try to change them. That event seemed emblematic of the vast differences in perspective that plague the field” (cited in A. C. Laing, 1994, p. 224).

For the past five years I have asked students in my masters research methods course to analyze the videorecording of Laing's demonstration at this conference. The video-recording offers a rare opportunity to see the famous existential psychotherapist in action. It also provides an opportunity to study in detail the process, the praxis, of psychotherapy, and to demonstrate the power and utility of interpretive analysis. The course introduces students to the logic of inquiry of interpretive research, and the papers in this issue of Methods are developed from exemplary student work. The four students collaborated with me on a presentation at the American Psychological Association annual meeting in 2000 in Washington, D. C. (Bortle, Goldman, Harper, Hwang & Packer, 2000). Each of their papers approaches the interaction from a somewhat different

perspective, and together they provide an account of Laing's work that shows us the ontological features of this kind, at least, of psychotherapy.

During the discussion that took place after the demonstration a member of the audience asked Laing, "I was wondering what you thought went on therapeutically in that interview?" Laing replied, "What do you think went on therapeutically?" "I'm mystified, to tell you the truth," the questioner responded, "So maybe you can explain it to me." "If you're mystified," Laing said, "I can't explain it to you."

This exchange might seem to confirm the worst suspicions about existential psychotherapy, that it is unscientific, opaque, and elusive. And yet we believe that the process of this kind of therapy, like any other, can be described, and its outcomes explored. However, as Laing himself suggests, observers and even researchers will remain mystified about the process of psychotherapy until they attend to phenomena of talk that are central and crucial but typically go unnoticed. One of the aims of the papers in this issue is to articulate several of these phenomena.

Techniques of objectification

Paul Ricoeur has proposed (1976) that interpretation requires a phase of objectification and "productive distance" (p. 89)--that there is a necessary dialectic of understanding and explanation where "in explanation we explicate or unfold the range of propositions and meanings, whereas in understanding we comprehend or grasp as a whole the chain of partial meanings in one act of synthesis (p. 72). Productive distance "means methodological distancing" (p. 89): "understanding... is more directed towards the intentional unity of discourse, [while] explanation... is more directed towards the analytic structure of the text" (p. 74; cf. Thompson, 1990, p. 278). This phase is "one stage--albeit a necessary one--between a naive interpretation and a critical one, between a surface interpretation and a depth interpretation" (p. 87). It provides an intermediary that takes us from "understanding" to "comprehension"; from "a naive grasping of the meaning of the text as a whole" to "a sophisticated mode of understanding, supported by explanatory procedures" (p. 74).

The explanatory framework that Ricoeur himself employed was structuralism, but to my taste this entails far too radical an objectification (cf. Thompson, 1981, p. 161). The choice of technique (if that is the appropriate word) should surely reflect the kind of material being studied. First-person accounts would call for some kind of narrative analysis; films for a technique attentive to mise en scene and montage. Conversation requires an objectifying technique that will attend to its pragmatic features within the general logic of interpretive inquiry. Next I give a brief overview of the specific technique that we have drawn upon in our analysis of Laing's demonstration, conversation analysis. After that I will describe the ways in which we go beyond conversation analysis to explore the ontological work accomplished in conversation

Conversation analysis

Conversation analysis has become considered one of the major approaches to the pragmatic analysis of conversation (Levinson, 1983, p. 286ff; Nofsinger, 1991; Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson, 1974). Often known simply and affectionately as "CA," it employs a game metaphor of "turns" and "moves" and so remains consonant with Wittgenstein's notion of language game. CA is an analysis of talk in terms just like those emphasized by Lyotard: "not as a syntactic code, or as a medium that reports events in some external world, but rather as a mode of action embedded within human interaction" (Goodwin & Duranti, 1992, p. 29). It is assumed that:

"Conversation is a process in which people interact on a moment-by-moment, turn-by-turn basis. During a sequence of turns participants exchange talk with each other, but, more important, they exchange social or communicative actions. These actions are the 'moves' of conversation considered as a collection of games. Indeed, conversational actions are some of the most important moves of the broader 'game of everyday life'" (Nofsinger, 1991, p. 10).

In order to grasp the character and goals of CA it is helpful to consider one of its roots, ethnomethodology (see Garfinkel, 1967; Turner, 1974):

"[Ethnomethodology] arose in reaction to the quantitative techniques, and the arbitrary imposition on the data of supposedly objective categories (upon which such techniques generally rely), that were typical of mainstream American sociology. In contrast, it was argued cogently, the proper object of sociological study is the set of techniques that the members of a society themselves utilize to interpret and act within their own social worlds -- the sociologist's 'objective' methods perhaps not really being different in kind at all. Hence the use of the term ethnomethodology, the study of 'ethnic' (i.e. participants' own) methods of production and interpretation of social interaction" (Levinson, 1983, p. 295).

Ethnomethodology was itself influenced by the social phenomenology of Alfred Schutz, a student of Edmund Husserl who focused on everyday practices in the lifeworld (e.g. Schutz & Luckmann, 1974). (Schutz also had a large influence on one of the earliest explorations of the "social construction of reality, that of Berger and Luckmann, 1967). Like Husserl and like Schutz, ethnomethodology examined the problem of intersubjectivity--how individuals can act together in a common world. Rather than assuming a pre-existing and unproblematic context, or that everyone comes with the same assumptions, ethnomethodology sought to investigate "how members negotiate or achieve a common context" (Goodwin & Duranti, 1992, p. 27). It offered a fresh approach to social scientific inquiry, an effort at "systematic analysis of how members of a society build the events they participate in... [T]he way in which social order and social organization are constituted" (p. 27).

It will be useful if I quickly sketch some of the features of talk that CA pays attention to. When we are trying to understand a particular utterance or conversational action it is important to consider where and how that action is located in a sequence with other conversational actions. When people speak in an ongoing conversation they do so in the light of what has just been said, and in anticipation of what might take place in the future. They “design” or “construct” their own speech, and understand the talk of other people accordingly. They also shape their utterances to take account of the identity of the speakers and what they take their interests to be. The force of an utterance--the way it is interpreted, and the end for which it was designed--depends, then, on its context, both verbal and non-verbal.

An illustration of this can be found in the fact that conversational actions often occur in pairs. We speak of an “exchange of opinions” and an “exchange of greetings” because many conversational actions call for a particular kind of conversational response in return. Greetings and farewells typically call for another utterance of the same type. Other actions call for a different type of action: invitations for acceptances (or rejections); congratulations for thanks (or demurrals); offers for acceptances (or refusals). Such pairs of conventionally linked conversational actions are said to be “adjacency pairs” or “two-part pairs” made up of a “first pair-part” and a “second pair-part.”

One adjacency pair may follow another (question, answer; question, answer). For example, a “presequence” occurs when some preliminary action is taken before initiating the first part of an adjacency pair, and the preliminary action itself involves an adjacency pair. Before making a request, for instance, it often makes sense to check whether the other person has the item one wants. Or before asking a question, preliminary work often needs to be done. For example, early in their conversation Laing declaims to Leila, “Ah, I don’t know anything about (.) you at all, ah, and I don’t know what (.) to ask you about yourself” (line 12), before going on to ask his first question.

Or one pair may be embedded within another. An “insertion sequence” occurs when the person towards whom the first part of an adjacency pair has been directed undertakes some preliminary action before responding with the second part. For example, a request for clarification by the recipient will take place after the first pair part, but before the second pair part. For example, after Laing asks her a question about her “mom and dad an that sort of thing...” Leila inquires, “Who my parents?” before offering her reply (286-290).

Participants in a conversation show their grasp of the ongoing talk to one another. Each utterance displays some kind of interpretation of prior utterances, as well as projecting what is to come. Assessments (“That’s good”), newsmarks (“Oh, wow!”), continuers (“uh huh”), formulations (offering the gist of what’s been said), and collaborative completions (finishing another’s utterance), all provide evidence to the speakers of how their talk is being understood. “Conversation, as opposed to monologue,

offers the analyst an invaluable analytical resource: as each turn is responded to by a second, we find displayed in that second an analysis of the first by its recipient. Such an analysis is thus provided by participants not only for each other but for analysts too" (Levinson, 1983, p. 321).

When alignment is lost and misunderstanding occurs, "repair" must be done to fix the conversational breakdown. Breakdowns will include misunderstandings as well as disagreements ("I think you're wrong"), rejections ("No, I won't"), and other difficulties. "Revisions" occur when a speaker anticipates that trouble is likely and reformulates talk before this happens. Actions taken to restore alignment can be requested or self-initiated. For example, a sequence of repairs is made after Laing tells Leila "...in that sense I'm a Christian." She requests repair work, saying "You're a what?" but Laing's reply, "Heh?" displays his misunderstanding of her request. She has to reformulate, "I didn't hear your last word," before he can repeat what he said to provide the requested repair (lines 226-230).

Alignment is displayed and adjusted not only in responses to an utterance and repairs but also in advance. "Preventatives" such as disclaimers ("I really don't know much about this, but...") are one kind of such "pre-positioned alignment devices." "Pre-sequences" (see above) do this too. After a five second silence, for example, Laing announces, "If we were just sitting here without these, uh, uh, cameras on us and these microphones, I wouldn't say anything just now. But, eh, I feel impelled to eh eh make an effort to keep talking for the sake of eh people who are listening to it. Maybe shouldn't bother" (lines 99-104).

Ontological work

Attention to these conversational devices--adjacency pairs, displays of alignment and its breakdown and repair, and so on--can help us understand and interpret the kind of conversational action each utterance has been designed to perform. And interpretation of these conversational "moves" helps us understand the language-game being played, and its consequences. In this way CA, in the spirit of its origins in ethnomethodology, has been used to investigate "the way in which social order and social organization are constituted" in everyday interaction (Goodwin & Duranti, 1992, p. 27).

But equally important--and of greater interest to psychologists--is the systematic analysis of how the members of the social order are constituted. As Lyotard has put it: "A self does not amount to much, but no self is an island; each exists in a fabric of relations that is now more complex and mobile than ever before. Young or old, man or woman, rich or poor; a person is always located at 'nodal points' of specific communication circuits, however tiny these may be.... The atoms [of society; that is to say, people] are placed at the crossroads of pragmatic relationships, but they are also displaced by the messages that traverse them, in

perpetual motion. Each language partner, when a 'move' pertaining to him is made, undergoes a 'displacement,' an alteration of some kind that not only affects him in his capacity as addressee and referent, but also as sender"

(Lyotard, 1979/1997, pp. 15-16).

We must try to understand how an utterance has the power to change people. This is surely necessary if we are to be able to illuminate the 'talking cure' that is psychotherapy. But how to study such "alteration"? The ontological work accomplished in a conversation is undoubtedly the collective, collaborative result of the pragmatic force of the moves in the language game. What makes it possible to accomplish this work, however, is the particular ontological character of human being, and of the cultures in which we live. Our analysis, consequently, goes beyond the turns and moves of conversation and further articulates what becomes apparent from using CA by mining the ontological analysis undertaken by Heidegger (1927/1962; 1982).

There is much to find distasteful about Heidegger, and I believe that one should draw from his philosophical writings only with caution. Nonetheless there is something very valuable and profound to Being and Time, for example, not because it is mystical (Heidegger's writing is sometimes mystifying, but it is a mistake to see his point or purpose as mystical) but because it is simple and everyday.

Heidegger offered a historical and cultural account of being. He raised the question of "the meaning of being," and by this he referred not to the question of the significance of the word "being," but to the question of what makes it possible for a thing or a person to be. What are the conditions for the possibility of something existing? Being, Heidegger argued, is not a fixed and timeless essence. The being of objects is not simply "substance"; that of humans is not simply "mind." Rather, the being of an entity--and the being of humans, too--is contextual and temporal. Being is historical and cultural. What Heidegger calls the "meaning of being" is the "ground" upon which it is possible for something to be.

Heidegger insisted that we typically pass over, ignore, misunderstand or presuppose what he called "the phenomenon of world" (p. 104). World is the "totality of equipment," (97), the "referential totality," (107) the "totality of involvements which is... 'earlier' than any single item of equipment" (116). As he explained in The Basic Problems of Phenomenology:

"How do the beings with which we dwell show themselves to us primarily and for the most part? Sitting here in the auditorium, we do not in fact apprehend walls--not unless we are getting bored. Nevertheless, the walls are already present even before we think them as objects. Much else also gives itself to us before any determining of it by thought. Much else--but how? Not as a jumbled heap of things but as an environs, a surroundings, which contains within itself a closed, intelligible contexture.... What is given to us primarily is the unity of an

equipmental whole, a unity that constantly varies in range, expanding or contracting, and that is expressly visible for the most part only in excerpts" (1982, p. 162-3).

We know this whole, and the entities in it, practically, not reflectively: this contexture stands in view "not for the contemplator as though we sitting here in order to describe the things" but instead "completely unobtrusive and unthought, [in] the view and sight of practical circumspection, of our practical everyday orientation" (p. 163).

And world provides the ground against which entities show up. It provides the "upon-which" of being--this is what Heidegger called, rather confusingly, "the meaning of being." World, context, "narrower or broader--room, house, neighborhood, town, city--is the prius, within which specific beings, as beings of this or that character, are what they are and exhibit themselves correspondingly" (p. 164).

John Caputo calls this upon-which "the nourishing principle" which makes it possible for an entity--and for Dasein--to be. As Caputo points out, "Heidegger was never concerned with a simple Being/beings distinction.... There was always a third thing, beyond Being, which ultimately held his interest" (Caputo, 1987, p. 85). This "third thing" was world and context, culture and history. Heidegger wrote, for example, that "in order to understand in the contexture of their functionality the beings that are closest to us and all the things we encounter and their equipmental contexture, we need an antecedent understanding of functionality-whole, significance-contexture, that is, world in general" (1982, p. 171). In this respect, Heidegger "is already engaged in a destruction of ontology, an overcoming of the metaphysics of Being as presence" (Caputo, 1987, p. 85).

World is, ontologically, "a characteristic of Dasein itself" (Heidegger, 1927, p. 92). World is not what is, or even the totality of things that are. It is not the physical universe; it is "so to speak, Dasein-ish. It is not extant like things but it is da, there-here, like the Dasein, the being-da which we ourselves are. [T]he world... has Dasein's mode of being" (Caputo, 1987). In other words, world is social, cultural, a human production, the product of collective human activity.

The being of humans is defined by the context of "world" too. To be human is to understand and interpret: to have an understanding, albeit tacit, partial, and unarticulated, of the being of entities, of our own being, and of the world we are in. We encounter entities with a kind of concern that grasps them and puts them to use, not with a bare perceptual cognition. To grasp an entity in practical activity is to project it into and onto the world that is its context. What shows up is the being of the entity, and at the same time we get a practical sense of who we are:

"For Heidegger, our everyday action always embodies an interpretation of who we are, albeit one generally concealed and misunderstood. Each of us grows up in and into a traditional way of interpreting ourselves, which lays out

possibilities for our being. Grasping these possibilities, we take a stand on our existence. Heidegger's analysis loosens up and dissolves the hardened paint of the traditional picture of individuality, subjectivity and objectivity, knowledge, reason and emotion, thought and action, identity, and inquiry. Sixty years later, the flux he initiated continues to swell" (Packer & Addison, 1989).

Heidegger pointed out that the things around us are not first of all objects for our inspection, they are tools or items of equipment. When action is going smoothly what we are aware of is the point of the activity of project for which the tool is grasped. And a tool functions as a "prosthetic device," like an extension to the body: it provides the tool-user with a feel for the material being worked on, and a sense of how they are doing, as well as a way of making something.

Notice how compatible this way of thinking is with the presumptions of conversation analysis. An utterance is one kind of entity, like any other except it is made on the spot, off hand, in the moment: it is an improvised artifact. When we say that an utterance is a "conversational device" we mean that it is produced to make a point, and that its use provides the speaker with a feel for the other person (through their response), and gives her a sense of herself (she discovers herself in her words), as well as a means to accomplish something socially.

To understand a speech act is to grasp it in practical activity; to recognize its point. It is a matter of grasping where the speaker is coming from, not in the sense of beliefs that are expressed, but in the sense of grasping where they are going, what they are getting at—what their practical concern is. And just as the way a tool is projected will depend on (1) the ongoing project in which it is employed; (2) the "upon-which"; and (3) the practices of the "anyone" (what Heidegger called the "fore-structure" of interpretation), the way an utterance is understood depends on (1) the ongoing conversation of which it is a part, (2) the context: the here-&-now, and (3) familiarity with the public conventions and maxims of language. The conversation is an ongoing project, a way of being involved: the "fore-view."

And if context is crucial for Heidegger, so to is it crucial for the conversation analyst. Because everyday conversation itself depends on and works with context in complex and critical ways, the analysis of conversation requires careful attention to context. Indeed, speech acts can be treated as first and foremost operations on context (Levinson, 1983, p. 276). Context is important both in the form of surrounding discourse (what Lyons, 1995, p. XX, calls "co-text"), and in the form of the broader social settings in which any conversation is located. Robert Nofsinger points out that:

"utterances are both context-shaped and context-renewing. That is, each utterance is interpreted in the context of the talk that preceded it and forms part of the context of talk that follows it. This aspect of context is constructed, maintained, and modified turn by turn as the conversation progresses. Context,

in this immediate and narrow sense, is composed not just of what people know, but of what participants do to show each other which items of their shared knowledge should be used in making interpretations. The conversational actions produced by participants create an interpretive resource that is used to align conversational understanding" (Nofsinger, 1991, pp. 142-143).

And Goodwin and Duranti remark that it is very often the case that a "focal event cannot be properly understood, interpreted appropriately, or described in a relevant fashion, unless one looks beyond the event itself to other phenomena (for example cultural setting, speech situation, shared background assumptions) within which the event is embedded" and that often "features of the talk itself invoke particular background assumptions relevant to the organization of the subsequent interaction" (1992, p. 3). At the same time it must be acknowledged that "the scope of context is not easy to define... one must consider the social and psychological world in which the language user operates at any given time" (Ochs, 1979, p. 1, cited in Levinson, 1983, p. 23).

Indexicality has been called "the single most obvious way in which the relationship between language and context is reflected in the structures of languages themselves" (Levinson, 1983, p. 54). Indexicals point: think of ones index finger, the one used for pointing. To understand the sense, to get the point or feel the force, of an utterance that contains an indexical, one needs to know something of the context. To judge whether "I am Tom" is true or false, one has to know the identity of the speaker. Hanks (1992) has written that "verbal deixis is a central aspect of the social matrix of orientation and perception through which speakers produce context." There is a variety of ways grammatical features can tie talk to context: pronouns ("he," "she"), demonstratives, time and place adverbs ("here," "there," "now," "then"), as well as features such as verb tense. Tracing the indexicals of a conversation allows one to identify the contexts invoked and what is being done with them. An utterance has the power to index referents and thus invoke context. Understanding this is central to grasping the way talk can change people.

Conversation analysis offers a way to describe talk that is sensitive to context and temporal organization--the phenomena that I suggested earlier are lost by coding-scheme approaches to therapeutic interaction. Deployed within a non-dualistic ontology attentive to the "upon which" of being, conversation analysis is the first step in an articulation of the ontological work in which people position themselves and are positioned by others, are moved, and are changed.

The interpretive analysis of existential psychotherapy

Each of the four papers that follow tells us something about the therapeutic process as it is exemplified in Laing's psychotherapy demonstration. Each uses the

techniques of conversation analysis in order to articulate what is accomplished in the ongoing dialogue between Laing and Leila. But each goes further, showing us the ontological work that is done. Scott Bortle draws from Heidegger's notion of the ontological power of context; Yael Goldman explores Laing's own writings on the genesis of schizophrenia; Jenny Hwang extends the pragmatic analysis into a consideration of pragmatic paradox; and Lynn Harper re-contextualizes the demonstration within the larger setting of the conference. Let me briefly summarize the work:

Scott Bortle, in the first paper, "Building context: Transpersonal reality in existential psychotherapy," looks at the way several distinct contexts are invoked in the course of the conversation. He describes how the "here-and-now" of the interaction is as a result progressively enriched, to build what Laing will later call a "transpersonal field," with the consequence that both Laing and Leila have a richer understanding of who the other is. The contexts of family and Christianity prove particularly important, because it becomes evident in Leila's contribution to the discourse that her personal history is one in which these two contexts are laminated together, melded. The result, Bortle proposes, is an ontological muddle, which Laing both recognizes and is able to help Leila find a way out of. Bortle notes the central role that the concept of context plays in both Heidegger's ontological investigation in Being and Time, and in conversation analysis. He draws on Heidegger's argument that context has an ontological priority--that it is the "upon which" of being, to show us that it is through a sensitive response to the lamination of the contexts that Laing accomplishes therapeutic change. The "unfaithful daughter" finds that she could instead be "happily indifferent," a stance that is legitimate within both contexts; a way to be both a daughter and a Christian. Now she knows who she is.

In the second paper, "Speaking with the Gospel," Yael Goldman picks up where Bortle leaves off, and shows how the enriched here-and-now of the conversation enables Laing to achieve a therapeutic "short-cut" that accomplishes repositioning and ontological change. The conversation begins with Leila in an ontological muddle, in confusion over who she is. Is she paranoid? Is she a Christian? Is she an unfaithful daughter? Goldman's analysis maps how Laing helps Leila clarify the basis of this confusion, and open up an alternative. Goldman draws our attention to several respects in which the discourse of this demonstration departs from what we would typically consider the norm for therapeutic discourse. In particular, she examines Laing's citation of a passage from the New Testament, and argues that this citation functions as a pragmatic short-cut, enabling Laing to make quick and efficient use of the laminated contexts that Bortle has described. It does some of their interactional work for them, by providing a short cut, by exploiting and explicating the interwoven contexts.

Goldman also makes reference to Laing's writing on "making madness comprehensible," and suggests that he uses the bible passage to make the point that separation from the bonds and knots of family life may be necessary for one's sanity. At this point in the demonstration Laing and Leila have already aligned with one another as skeptical, even radical, Christians. Now an entire metapsychology is encapsulated in Laing's citation, in a form designed for a deeply religious recipient. And its appropriate reception depends on her recognition of his religiosity.

In "A reading of pragmatics and paradox," Jenny Hwang extends the analysis of the pragmatics of the demonstration to include an interpretation of the logical properties of the conversational action, including what Watzlawick, Beavin and Jackson (1967) called its "pragmatic paradoxes." Hwang traces the way Laing challenges Leila's formulations, countering her pessimism and despair. Hwang describes Leila's changing attitude and changing ontological commitments as she becomes more certain who she is. Laing's citation of the bible passage can be understood, Hwang proposes, as a metacommunication, an intervention in the paradoxical language game that Leila has been playing, that involves "prescribing the symptom."

And in "Therapeutic inversions," Lynn Harper recontextualizes the interaction between Laing and Leila, reminding us that the demonstration occurred at a difficult time in Laing's career and life. She raises the question of who the demonstration was designed to benefit: Leila, Laing himself, the conference organizers, or the attendees? Her answer is that there is an inescapable ambiguity here, even contradiction, and that an equal ambiguity attends the outcome of the demonstration. When Leila accompanies Laing onto the stage to face the audience, is she cured, truly no longer showing symptoms, or is the demonstration in fact continuing, Leila still an entertaining spectacle for the audience? If the world is crazy, as Laing was fond of saying, it is "stupid," "ugly," and "inexpressibly confused," if "the conference is a conspiracy," then what is the benefit to overcoming schizophrenic withdrawal to become a participant again? This ambiguity, Harper argues, runs through the entire interaction, as Laing repeatedly adopts the stance of expert authority and at the same time disavows and undercuts it. And the demonstration places Laing, not just Leila, in the position of the person who is observed, judged, and evaluated.

Conclusion

Psychotherapy research has typically focused on the outcomes of therapy rather than its process, and when process has been the object of study, coding-scheme approaches have generally decontextualized the phenomenon and failed to capture therapy's temporal organization. Our purpose here is to illustrate an alternative approach to the study of psychotherapy, one that maintains talk in its context and temporal organization. We hope to demonstrate how a hermeneutic methodology can

disclose what other analyses do not. It investigates the pragmatics of language, the power of talk to bring about ontological change. It explores how context is invoked and utilized, and how the temporal sequencing of talk, i.e., its turn-taking structure, is organized. Studies that categorize and code talk in order to measure what happens necessarily decontextualize, removing each utterance from its place in the sequential organization of discourse and stripping it from its contextual background. If, as I have argued here, the power of context is crucial to our understanding of the process of psychotherapy, and to the way the outcome of psychotherapy is achieved, this decontextualization is deadly. The baby is thrown out with the bathwater.

The four papers show how much detail will become evident in therapeutic discourse when one looks at it closely. They show how complex is the task of studying therapeutic processes. Arguably we have made our task easier by studying an approach to psychotherapy that is consonant with our own philosophical assumptions. Laing's existential psychotherapy is particularly sensitive, it would seem, to the power of language; to the difference between what is said and what is accomplished by saying. Yet even with this choice of material to work with the analysis has not been easy. The interpretations offered by the four papers do not neatly converge; differences of emphasis and conclusion will be evident to the reader. But I don't consider this an indication of any weakness in our hermeneutic approach; rather it serves as a reminder that any study of psychotherapy must make judgements and evaluations based on values and criteria about which researchers may genuinely and appropriately differ.

Nonetheless I hope we show the reader that attention to the pragmatics of therapy can throw light on the ontological effects of talk, and this in turn can help us understand the outcome of therapy as involving change on an ontological level. Much work remains to be done, and we ourselves have much to learn, but the papers in this issue offer, I think, much that is new and exciting.

Note

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