I Could See Myself in Her … Practising Insider Witnessing in Supervision

Catherine Mengelle[1], Sophie Bouhier[2], and Sandrine

Technical credit for recording and transcription: Hervé Schindler

The characters in this article, as well as certain details of the story, have been deliberately changed in order to respect the person's private and professional history. This does not alter the process and sequence of events, which have been preserved in their entirety and which we are sharing with you here.

This article is meant for our French narrative community, which is familiar with outsider witnessing practices (OWP) but not insider witnessing practices (IWP).

For ease in reading, for each subheading, the name of the speaker will be included in parentheses.

Part 1 – Presentation of the practice (Catherine)

This practice was conceived and developed not so long ago by David Epston and Tom Carlson. Both mentioned it during their respective visits to France (masterclasses at La Fabrique Narrative in 2016 and 2017). I later attended a workshop in Paris where we practised holding 'insider witnessing' conversations at the initiative of Pierre Blanc-Sahnoun.

Here's how David and Tom talk about it in the *Journal of Narrative Family Therapy* (2017):

> We take this name, 'insider witnessing practice' (IWP), as the obverse or counterpoint to Michael White's 'outsider witnessing practices' (OWP) (White, 1995). It is our belief that the purposes of OWP and IWP are very similar (Epston, in press). How do we find ways for

[1] catherinemengelle@yahoo.fr

[2] sophie.bouhier.sb@gmail.com

> clients to apprehend and appreciate our respect for them? How does one dignify the other? Here, clients, in a manner of speaking, take into their own custody the regard of another. In the case of OWPs, the regard is conveyed by strangers or outsiders; in the case of IWPs, the regard is conveyed by an intimate other (e.g., their therapist) (Bakhtin, 1993; Carlson & Haire, 2014; Levinas, 1981). Both OWPs and IWPs are descendants in a long line of similar performative narrative practices (e.g., consulting your consultant, co-research, the articulation and archiving of insider knowledges, performative letter writing, collective practices, relational accountability in couples, etc.). (Carlson & Epston, p.19).

More specifically, David Epston and Tom Carlson (as cited in Sax, 2017) describe this new practice as follows:

> Through a one-session performance, clients become witnesses to a hope-biased portrayal of their lives as performed by their therapist. […] As a result, clients become both an insider and outsider to their own lived experiences and are afforded the unusual opportunity to experience their own selves as if they were an 'other.' From this insider/outsider vantage point, they are able to experience heightened levels of meaning making, self-compassion and self-appreciation. (para. 2).

Here is the process. To make things clearer and help you understand who is who and who does what, I am applying it directly to the case that Sophie and I present in this article:

1. Sophie brings up for supervision the story of a woman she is coaching, Sandrine. Sandrine is not present; it is a classic supervision session, albeit a narrative one!

2. Sophie expresses the difficulties she feels she is encountering at this stage.

3. Catherine initiates a conversation with Sandrine (who is not there) through Sophie, addressing Sandrine directly.

4. Sophie 'plays' Sandrine. This conversation is recorded.

5. During their next scheduled session, Sophie plays the recorded conversation to Sandrine, and they use it as a basis for continuing the conversation.

But before going any further, I would like to clarify some ideas regarding the terminology chosen in French. Insider/Outsider have been translated literally as *Intérieur*/*Extérieur*, which I feel diminishes the meaning. Without insider knowledge, the outsider witness can only make assumptions. Here, Sophie was introduced by Sandrine to her life story. In French, I would rather say *initié*, which is another meaning for insider. When she speaks as Sandrine, Sophie therefore does not intervene from outside this story, as an outsider witness would, but from within the story.

It is therefore more about acknowledgment than resonance. The idea is not to ask Sophie how Sandrine's story resonates in her own life. The idea is to show Sandrine how much her story has been acknowledged by Sophie. Again, our French word *reconnaître* seems a poor translation of the English 'acknowledge'. Here is what I found when I looked up the etymology of acknowledge, intuitively finding the French verb *reconnaître* too weak to convey the narrative meaning, or at least what I believe it to be: a mixture of Middle English *acnowen* (to admit, to show one's knowledge) and *knowlechen* (to discover, to reveal). There seems to be a difference in English between recognise and acknowledge: acknowledge is more than recognise (but maybe I'm wrong), and that is why the word is very narrative. To recognize is to identify a past knowledge internally; to acknowledge is to accept this knowledge as true publicly. It seems like 'acknowledge' needs an audience. This is the idea I use when I write letters of recommendation for the people I coach, letters in which I acknowledge the person's (preferred) story to the point of vouching for them to others, which gives the acknowledgment an additional and very powerful dimension, regardless of how the person

subsequently uses the letter. This is also partly the purpose of definitional ceremonies with outsider witnesses, which aim for both acknowledgment and resonance.

With that in mind, and by way of illustration, we will now unfold the experience that the three of us had, commenting on it in terms of understanding, intentions, precautions, and effects on the various protagonists.

Part 2 – Presentation of the situation brought up for supervision (Sophie)

Sandrine came to see me following a recommendation from a friend who knew about my work as a narrative practitioner. Having also heard about narrative practices in her work, she thought she would give it a try.

Sandrine is a young woman who appears to have it all. She has a happy family life and a job she loves, even though it is a difficult one. This feeling of a 'happy life' contributes to her difficulty in understanding, when she comes to see me, what is paralysing and distressing her. Sandrine does not want to take antidepressants or anti-anxiety medication because she tells me she wants to remain lucid. She is the kind of 'strong woman' who is capable of managing her emotions and, as Catherine sensed, strong enough to assert her ideas and make her own decisions.

Since our first meeting, she has described the problem she is struggling with as 'unexplained anxiety'. How can you explain such anxiety when you have a 'happy life': a supportive partner who shares the same vision of family, a loving family, young children in good health, and a job you love? It's a demanding job, but it's in line with her values. Sandrine works in the challenging field of social and family support.

She talked to me about her professional stance. We know she is wholehearted. She has her own ideas about injustice, strong professional values, and a non-judgmental attitude towards families. She deals with families in great difficulty and children who are suffering greatly. The suffering of these children moves her deeply.

We worked on the effects that the problem has on her life. There were many: the problem isolated her, exhausted her, and prevented her from looking after her children. However, there is one aspect that she described as positive: it brought her closer to her partner.

We also discussed the pressure she had been under to remain strong in the face of what had happened to her, which had encouraged her to suppress her emotions. I could see that her family was kind to her, but there was something in their religious culture that seemed to push them to accept life's trials as God-sent, which she did not fully agree with.

I realised that 'unexplained anxiety' was beginning to take hold as I was falling into the same trap. I tried to thwart her tactics with questions, trying to help Sandrine take a stance on the effects by looking for exceptions. But Sandrine arrived at our next appointment saying that things were even worse. The problem persisted, creeping in like poison, making me believe that it was poison and that it would drive her mad.

What I noticed and found significant was that Sandrine always brought her water bottle with her. I had observed this because I always offered her a glass of water, which she declined, placing her water bottle next to her.

I had several intentions in mind as I worked with her. The first was to help Sandrine feel that I acknowledged her problem and the pain associated with it. What she was feeling should not be ignored. Another intention was to find the beginning of a counter story, a resistance to this problem, to bring her back to shore, a metaphor often used by Catherine and one that I really like. I didn't want to plunge her back into that anxiety during our sessions and, above all, I didn't want to get caught up in the game of unexplained anxiety.

Part 3 – Applying Insider Witnessing Practice to this situation (Catherine)

When Sophie talked about the situation to the supervision group, I was struck by her concern that she was going round in circles. She even felt that things had gotten worse for Sandrine between the first and second sessions. But I knew what

Sophie was capable of. So, my main intention was to reassure Sophie and perhaps Sandrine as well. My interview would have to serve Sophie and Sandrine as much as possible.

We did not ask Sophie any additional questions in the large group as we usually do to clarify the situation. I preferred to start from Sophie's raw account, as if it were an individual supervision session.

I had in mind that Sandrine's father viewed his daughter's difficulties from a religious perspective, considering them a trial sent by God. I also seemed to hear Sophie making some connection between Sandrine's job, the rather violent institutional context in which she worked, and the 'unexplained anxiety' that had crept into her life. I had also heard the force with which Sandrine tried to say that her life was beautiful, as if this prevented her from complaining. Sandrine touched me as much as Sophie did. Perhaps it wasn't as clear as I'm making it sound now, but I think it was all there, in a way that was perceptible if not intelligible.

Here is the transcript of my conversation with Sophie-Sandrine, then Sandrine-Sophie, interspersed with comments analysing the process or attempting to translate what may have guided my questions and remarks.

Catherine: Sophie, we are testing a process in front of the supervision group. You told us a little already about Sandrine and the 'unexplained anxiety' sharing her life. You told us a number of things and said that you could see she was suffering and that you felt you were going round in circles with her. We thought this IWP process might be useful. Do you agree?

Sophie: Yes.

Catherine: OK, this might seem a little weird at first, as it's being recorded, but the idea is that Sandrine will be able to listen to this conversation

with you again at a later date. Do you have any questions before we start, or is there anything you'd like to add?

Sophie: No.

Catherine: OK, that's fine. In that case, I'm going to ask you to close your eyes … Really close your eyes … and from now on, I'm going to talk to Sandrine directly through you. Can you try to imagine that, for the duration of this conversation, you are Sandrine … It might be important to close your eyes; it will take you somewhere else, back to the conversations you've had together … Is that OK?

Sophie: Yes.

Even though Sophie knew the process I presented to the group beforehand, I found it important to set the scene to get her in the right frame of mind. It was also important to allow Sophie to settle into Sandrine's shoes. I don't know anything about hypnosis, but I think the beginning of the conversation is a bit like that.

Catherine: Sandrine, I'm very honoured to meet you. Sophie told me a little about you, but I don't know much, except that you live with this 'unexplained anxiety' that you both call 'poison,' or at least that you, Sandrine, call 'poison.' From the work you've started with Sophie, I also know that this 'unexplained anxiety' starts as soon as you wake up and that it's not very understandable to you, given that your life is otherwise great. But what's also troubling Sophie is the impression that it's gotten worse from one session to the next. She told us about the effects it has on you: this 'unexplained anxiety' prevents you from going out on your own and from making appointments. Sophie feels that it is actually getting worse. And that's why she talks about going round in circles. Sandrine, what makes you come back to see

Sophie? What has perhaps been important for you in these conversations with Sophie? What has changed for you?

I was meeting Sandrine for the first time, which is why I explained the context of our meeting. I called her Sandrine twice to make sure Sophie was in character, and I talked about Sophie in the third person. Personally, I preferred the expression 'unexplained anxiety' to 'poison' because poison seemed more like an effect. And in the expression 'unexplained anxiety', 'unexplained' was just as important as 'anxiety', in my opinion. With my question, I also wanted to highlight the work Sophie had already done; I find that supervision too often focuses on practitioners' shortcomings rather than the progress they have already made. I was working on the assumption that Sophie and Sandrine had not been going round in circles, restoring knowledge to Sophie and Sandrine.

Sophie's Sandrine: I need to be listened to. I listen to others a lot. I have a family, children, a job that isn't easy, but I love it because I love helping others. Children who are suffering are … are something that affects me deeply. But no one listens to me; I'm always fine, I'm a very strong person. I'm a good thinker, and people know they can count on me no matter what. I'm someone who listens to everyone, but no one ever listens to me, and when I come to see Sophie … She asks me where I want to sit, and I choose the armchair, and then she just listens to me … and that feels good because … no one ever listens to me. I really feel like I need to talk. I need people to pay attention to me.

This idea of 'not being listened to' was new to me. Sophie hadn't mentioned it before. I was surprised, and I had to get rid of the idea of dealing with

'unexplained anxiety'. Hence the next question, which allowed me to 'rebuild' myself!

Catherine: I'd like to ask you a silly question, Sandrine. Why did you choose the armchair?

Sophie's Sandrine: I need to sit down, relax, because tension is painful. My brain is racing all the time. It tires me out, it tires me out enormously, it's … And then I need to sit down, relax, yes … to let go, to settle down. I sit comfortably in the armchair, well, I do what I can to be comfortable, because it's not easy to be comfortable with … with the pain of anxiety, but … but then I sit down, and I can breathe.

Catherine: Are there one or two questions that Sophie asked you that surprised you or interested you?

I'm not sure where to go, so I choose to rely on Sophie's work.

Sophie's Sandrine: When she asked me about my father … I don't think I fully understood … what my father says is that I have to go through this; it's a test for me. You see … in our religion, there can be trials, and he tells me that this is a trial for me and that even if it's painful and I'm suffering, I have to take it on because it's a trial sent by God. And then I realised, when she asked me the question, and I don't remember the exact question, but the idea was: what did I think about it? Actually, I wanted to say that this way of seeing things prevents me from being sad, from suffering, from being angry. In fact, it prevents me … I don't know why I say 'angry' … it prevents me from letting myself feel my emotions. I'm not allowed to have emotions … and that … that …

Catherine: Because it's God's will?

Sophie's Sandrine: Because my father tells me that it's God's will. And so, I can't feel anything, I can't let myself go, and even though everything in my life is fine, I'm suffering, and I'm all alone with this anxiety. And no one listens to me.

I found it interesting when Sandrine replied: 'Because my father tells me that it's God's will'. As if she didn't agree with that, as if she had her own view of things. And indeed, we had brought out an important idea, which is that viewing difficulties as trials to be endured by God's will deprives people of the right to complain. But I didn't want to cut Sandrine off from her father by criticising his beliefs. The person is not the problem, nor is her father. I did wonder, however, how Sandrine came to think differently from him. I could have pressed her more, because I suppose it takes a strong character to question your father's beliefs in this type of family culture. It requires principles that are far superior to belief and very firmly established.

Catherine: How did you come to this conclusion, Sandrine? This family idea that it's a trial sent by God and that you have to accept it … How did you come to this other idea that it can prevent you from being sad or take away your right to be sad?

Sophie's Sandrine: Actually, when I do this with the people I work with, children who are suffering and being bullied, I happen to see so many things … If I do the same and come to think that it's a trial and not listen to them or consider what they're going through, then I'm not helping! I'm not acknowledging their suffering! … Well, I … I … And that's how it makes me feel. I couldn't do that to people. I couldn't just tell people: this is your destiny; you have to live with it. Am I going to tell children that being raped is their destiny? And tell them that they

have to live with it, that they're suffering, but everything will be fine, cause God sent this to them! I can't do that.

Catherine: When you can't say that in the face of these children's suffering, it's like you choose a different stance. You seem to choose to do things differently … Where do you think that stance comes from, do you know?

Here, she said what she didn't want to do with the children and families. I emphasised the fact that she chose to do things differently. If her attitude didn't come from her father, where did it come from? Where did Sandrine learn that she could think and act differently, or that she could counterbalance fate when it's rotten?

Sophie's Sandrine: I talked about it with Sophie. I was talking about listening. She smiled; I think it reminded her of something … I was talking about listening and … I think it comes from my mother … but my mother … she never says anything. My mother is originally from Portugal. She's a very, very intelligent person who came to France … She pursued higher education, but now she cleans houses. She tells herself it doesn't matter because she's not in her own country and she accepts it as it is … and I think, I don't know why, but there's something gentle about my mother. But I'm sad because she accepts things because it's not her own country. I find it hard to understand why she accepts it.

Catherine: Is there anything in particular that makes you say, Sandrine, that your mother is a very intelligent woman?

Sophie's Sandrine: I would find it difficult to say, but she *(a lot of hesitation)* … she is very intelligent because she is really good at listening, and she is

very gentle. And that's what makes me say that she is a very intelligent woman. I wonder if that's why. Maybe it's more my sense of injustice that makes me want to work with children having hard times. I wonder if it is because of that care and gentleness. I want to be gentle with the children. I want to be gentle with the families. Besides, we're not given any resources, so the only thing I can do is listen to the families and help them … In fact, I have a lot of anger inside me. I do have a lot of anger inside me.

Catherine: Maybe you have an idea of what these children are going through … maybe … for these families …

Sophie's Sandrine: Yes, it's unbearable what these children and families are going through, but because of the system and the lack of resources, well, we don't have much choice … I do not believe in the system any longer, so I do everything I can to help the families because otherwise they're let down. There are no resources; they're being let down, so I just get on with it. I listen to the children and work with their families to make things better for them. But it's unbearable, really. The system is letting them down. The system is really letting them down.

When I re-read this transcript, I think I could have continued exploring gentleness and listening as signs of a shared intelligence between mother and daughter and as the beginning of an alternative narrative to the unexplained anxiety, but I had the impression that Sophie had made a connection, and I wanted to explore it. I thought that the 'unexplained anxiety' might come from her difficult work with families and children in great distress. Sandrine's anger towards the system allowed me to do so. I could also have gone further with the idea that, since the system had let them down, she was 'making do' in her own way. Which way? Based on what ideas and strengths of moral character? I also think it would have

been interesting to allow Sandrine to stay in touch with certain 'parts' of her mother despite her life choices, which were incomprehensible to Sandrine.

Catherine: Sandrine, when I hear all this, I think I can understand. I've met a lot of people working in this sector. When Sophie was talking to us earlier about this support, I had the feeling that she made a connection between injustice, suffering, and ultimately misery—not necessarily financial, but the misery experienced by these children and families—and maybe sometimes, I don't know, I'm just guessing, maybe sometimes a feeling of powerlessness in the face of this system that we can't change … Do you think, as I think Sophie may have thought, that there could be a link between that and anxiety?

Sophie's Sandrine: I don't know. I don't know to what extent … I told Sophie that it had happened to me once before. I stopped working, but it wasn't as intense. I took a month off work. I was able to take care of myself at that time. And then when I came back, things were better, and it was … And I feel supported by the team anyway; I love this job. But I also feel like I'm part of a system that doesn't listen. I feel like I'm part of the system too, and that means that the injustice and the problems are part of me. It's not like they've invaded me …

Catherine: As if you were accomplices?

Sophie's Sandrine: No, not accomplices *(change of tone)*, definitely not accomplices, but in fact it invades my whole life and even my personal life … No one listens to me. At work, I feel like we're a team and we listen to each other, and it's not easy, but I still feel like I'm doing something good. But not being listened to at home is difficult for me.

I realised here that Sandrine's issue was not work, where she feels listened to, but her home. This changed everything and closed my previous hypothesis about 'unexplained anxiety'. I acknowledged this new idea, took the time to note it down and check it out.

Catherine: I take my time sometimes, but that's because I'm taking notes … You're emphasising quite strongly, Sandrine, that you don't feel listened to at home. Is this something that you would say is very important, more important than not being listened to at work, equivalent, or how …

Sophie's Sandrine: No, because not being listened to at work is not an issue in the institution I work for. We're a team, and we listen to each other. There are psychologists … There's a listening culture …

Catherine: OK, so you work in a kind of institution where people listen to each other …

Sophie's Sandrine: Yes. Since the larger system doesn't provide any resources, we do what we can, but at least we help each other … and we do what we can. But at home, I'm not recognised. I'm tired. Something's not right, I'm not recognised, no one recognises me … it's as if I live in two worlds: on the one hand, there's my professional life, where there's suffering and where that suffering is acknowledged, and on the other, I come home and there's a kind of … denial, something that … But my mother, it's completely unfair that she came from abroad and can't live as she really is, that she has to do cleaning and is constantly being downgraded. She's a foreign woman in her own country, France … and there are lots of things like that …

At that stage, my wish was to separate the lives of these two women living in different contexts. I'm not sure at all that that was the right thing to do, but my hope at that stage was to put Sandrine back in the context of the women of her time, not of her mother's time. They're linked by their listening skills, certainly, but not really by similar life experiences. Now that I think about it, I can see better why this idea of her mother accepting what I would call 'unfair' treatment was so important to Sandrine. I should have asked more.

Catherine: But you're talking about … are you talking about your mother again, Sandrine? …

Sophie's Sandrine: Yes.

Catherine: What connection do you make between the lack of listening you experience within your family and your mother?

Sophie's Sandrine: Well, my mother kept quiet. She's withdrawn; that's how she is. She's a woman and *(long silence between Catherine and Sandrine)* … She chose to keep quiet, my mother did.

Catherine: I see.

I allowed the silence to give Sandrine time to reflect on her mother's deliberate, chosen position. However, we were reaching the end of the time we had set aside for this conversation.

Sophie's Sandrine: It's a choice, because as I told Sophie, she always said it was fine that way.

Catherine: It's a choice, as you say, that was made in a very specific context, don't you think? Which is that of your mother and her arrival in

another country. The paths of migration are not easy paths, or at least they are somewhat unusual paths. Is your personal background similar to hers, or is it different? If it's different, how might it help you to think about it? Or would you prefer to think about women in general within the family, and more specifically, women who work? Because you mentioned that people could count on you. Would you be interested in thinking about this, about the pressures women are facing? Women like you, like Sophie, all women who are working mothers, wives, etc. The pressure they feel to be strong and to be as strong at home as they are at work. Is this something you might be interested in exploring?

I had two ideas here: consider that her life is different from her mother's and see what that might change for Sandrine. Or discuss the place of women in our modern society and the pressure to remain strong. I didn't quite understand the answer I got, but I didn't really have time to ask any more questions. However, throughout this exchange, Sandrine very often said that she 'talked to Sophie about it'. I sometimes felt a bit useless … But I didn't take offence, imagining how much Sandrine would appreciate, thanks to me, that Sophie remembered her stories, showing that she had listened to her. Perhaps my job should be more to show that Sophie listened, understood and acknowledged, to the point of 'acting it out', rather than finding new ways to move forward.

Sophie's Sandrine: Yes, I remember talking to Sophie about a family with a child who had been in social care a lot, a family with a lot of problems, and because they didn't have the means, and the mother had a lot of problems, she was said to be dysfunctional. There were a lot of problems with the mother, but she was there, and sometimes when she came back, she was there for the child. At one point, I decided that I had to give her back her consideration, that I had to work with

her. I can't do it without the mother. I have to work with her. Since the system doesn't allow it, I must give empowerment to the mother. Maybe it could be interesting to work on what my mother went through and what I'm going through in this family, and also the importance I place on my work. My work is very difficult. It's difficult, full of suffering. I want to work with the mothers who are there, since the system isn't going to help them regain power over their lives. I want to try to help them with their children, since anyway … Yeah, that's an idea we could explore …

Catherine: What comes to my mind, Sandrine, is how much we depend on ourselves as women, how much we need to be strong, and we could talk about that. It would do me good, even me, to talk about that. We're coming to the end of this conversation, Sandrine, and I just want to say that it seems important to me, based on the thoughts we've shared in this little conversation, to help other women discuss these ideas of strength and the way we count on them, taking away their ability to complain. You could say that being a strong woman is great, yes, but the mothers you talk about, who are sometimes present and sometimes not, have the right to be mothers, even if they are less 'strong'. That's where I am in my thinking. Sandrine, would it be OK for us to stop there, or would you like to respond to what I said before we go?

Sophie's Sandrine: It's fine with me to stop there. I'm really OK with stopping there. Thank you very much.

I can understand why Sandrine thought it was better to stop! My last comment was a bit rambling … but I never knew how to conclude …

Catherine: Sophie … if you'd like to come back …

Sophie: Yes, it's not easy …

Catherine: How are you feeling? Maybe we can … or no, let's continue with the recording.

Sophie: At the end, I felt, as Sandrine, some quietness coming up, something peaceful.

Catherine: To debrief on the exercise itself, what was it like to step into Sandrine's shoes?

Sophie: It's not that easy because when you're having conversations as a therapist, you're involved in the conversation and sometimes you choose one path and sometimes another … So it's not easy to be on the other side, but at the same time, your questions and 'me as Sandrine' opened me up to other possibilities. I'll have to analyse it a bit with some hindsight, but …

Catherine: It would be good to do this analysis with Sandrine after letting her listen to this exchange.

Sophie: Exactly, I think it's very important to co-construct something with the person. I'm offering to co-construct with her. And Sandrine is a really nice woman. And really, yes, the feeling I got was that she's not being given a voice. Of course she must be feeling things. She can't say them, and she can't rest, she can't be weak …

Part 4 – Continuing the conversation between Sophie and Sandrine (Sophie)

Following this supervision, I decided to use this recorded conversation by playing it back to Sandrine.

Not really knowing where I was going, as this was my first time trying this practice, I hoped it would help move our conversations forward. I chose to use it as one might sometimes use documentation written for clients that reflects our discussions. Of course, on this occasion, she had not participated in the

discussion. I decided to play her the recording (without our supervision comments) and see where it would lead us.

I prepared a series of questions with the intention of using the technique developed by Michael White for outsider witnesses. It seemed obvious to me that this would allow her to become a witness to what I, as Sandrine, had said about her. Like mirrors reflecting other mirrors. At the end of this, I hoped that she would be able to grasp the ideas suggested by Catherine or perhaps find new ones … by opening new doors.

It turned out that Sandrine called the process we had together 'Mirror'.

I took care to explain to her the context in which we had conducted this 'Insider Witnessing Conversation' with Catherine, following my request made during supervision. I knew she would understand, as she herself regularly interacted with a multidisciplinary team for her work, including psychologists, etc. I also told her that I might have been mistaken and apologised in advance, but that she should feel free to say so, as she had a say in the matter. This is not a technique of enchantment or magic. I always take care, as taught in narrative practices, to consider the client as the expert and allow them to tell me if I am wrong.

It turned out that, on that day, Sandrine surprised me. I saw her arrive without her water bottle and looking a little happier. What had happened? Had I not been going round in circles after all? As usual, she took her seat in the armchair.

I started listening to the recording with her, which made me a little uneasy because I admit I wasn't very comfortable with the idea. What if I had been completely wrong? She was very attentive and focused, as usual.

From the very first moments, she began to cry. I noted in my notebook the moment when this emotion appeared, coinciding with the passage about children who are suffering. Was this a lead we could explore?

“I need to be listened to. I listen to others a lot. I have a family, children, a job that isn't easy, but I love it because I love helping others. Children who are suffering is … is something that affects me deeply.”

I promised myself that I would ask her this question once we had finished listening to the recording. I had planned to ask her what had particularly touched her when she listened to it, what she had particularly remembered, how listening to herself through me could help her move forward, and what ideas could be explored as a result. But I asked her what had made her emotional when she heard the part about children who are suffering.

She replied that it wasn't so much the subject matter as the fact that she felt recognised and listened to. She was very moved to hear herself speak. She even used the expression, ‘I was able to read into her.’ ‘Read into her’ is a strange expression, I think. As if she had access to a story, like reading a book. She also said that listening was something valuable for the people she supported.

So, Sandrine entered into the game of herself through me. Vulnerability moved her deeply. This situation touched her greatly. And she opened a door that had never appeared before.

It began with ‘I feel like I've come to the end of something.’

She then described a situation that went wrong for a family she was engaged with. She usually takes great care to build relationships with families before starting anything. She takes the time to listen to them. However, she was urged to make a report about a family she was meeting for the first time. She didn't agree to do so without first establishing a relationship with the family and getting to know them. From experience, she knew that these were necessary conditions for things to go well for the child and that reporting was not necessarily the solution. The consequences were disastrous for the child, the family, and ultimately, for her. She was unable to build the relationship that was so important to her, and that would have enabled her to provide support in the future.

At this point in the conversation, Sandrine began to question how well she listened to herself, her mental load, and the fact that she would like to be listened to more, particularly within her family. She has two young children, and like many women, she is the one who takes care of them in the evening, feeds them, bathes them, puts them to bed, etc. She talked about her work-life balance and started to consider reorganising her working hours. She talked about being listened to and listening to herself as a vital need for her, 'in order to exist'.

We concluded with the idea that she needed to listen to herself and let go of the pressure, including within her family. This conversation highlighted that the issue was not only that she did not feel listened to at home, but also that the system in which she currently worked did not—or no longer did—correspond to her values. Listening and building relationships are values and skills that enable her to feel when tension arises during meetings and to respond in a simple way, such as offering a glass of water, and to take care of others, including her colleagues.

All this struck her from the very first moments after listening to the recording, when she said, emotionally, "I felt recognised, considered, and that I had come to the end of something."

Let me add that any mistakes I may have made about the details of her life during the interview with Catherine were not important in the process and were very calmly dismissed from the outset.

The reflection, the mirror, this image used by Sandrine to describe what she had experienced during this conversation is an interesting metaphor because if she was able to see herself through me, what made her feel recognised? What had I acknowledged in her that was perhaps due to my own history, my history as a woman, and surely the history of many women? I shared her emotion, which I could feel from within. At the same time, she could recognise herself through me. And so, we came together.

'Being able to read into her' is a metaphor I really like, as if it gives meaning back to a story …

As far as I am concerned, I feel like a door has opened.

Part 5 – Additional theory following feedback from Sandrine and Sophie – with help from David Epston

I (Catherine) do not find it surprising that Sophie feels attracted to Sandrine's expression that she was able to 'read into her'—'from the outside'—given Sophie's initial training in anthropology and ethnology. I am reminded of the story of Kirsten Hastrup, a professor of anthropology at the University of Copenhagen. David Epston recounts Kirsten's story with Tom Carlson in the article "Insider Witnessing Practices: Performing Hope and Beauty in Narrative Therapy: Part Two." I learned afterwards that Sophie had read it before and had made strong connections between Kirsten's story and this experience of being an insider witness.

Rather than talk about it less favourably than David, I took the time to quickly translate the following relevant excerpts for our French narrative colleagues:

> In 1995, I (David) chanced upon a chapter in a book of Hastrup's entitled 'Passage to Anthropology'. [...] Hastrup tells how, in 1987, the Copenhagen theatre group 'Odin Teatret,' led by Eugenio Barba, approached her with the unusual proposal, not unlike that of an Act 1 of IWP, to create a theatrical performance 'of my history' (Hastrup, 1995, p. 127).
>
> […] She then started meeting with the entire cast of the theatre company. They asked varied and diverse questions of her such as, "What did you sing as a child? How do you call cows in Iceland? …" took extensive notes and created a common language. Barba then requested that during the meetings with the company members that Hastrup tell them "the 21 most important events in my life" (p. 131). She found that "the events poured out in no obvious pattern, and I saw how my life had indeed been a process and not only a series of sequences … Writing myself produced me both as a text and as a person" (pp. 131–133).

She remembered that “as the group became increasingly focused on the performance, I experienced an increasing degree of off-centeredness and could not see what role Kirsten was going to play. I was not given any clues about the actual performance … I had a feeling 'Kirsten' was taking on a life of her own.” She was finally invited after some months to a rehearsal at which, “I watched, laughed and cried … […] Most important, I was represented by another woman” (p. 134).

What might very well be pertinent to consider in IWPs was that her first response to seeing this representation of herself came as a surprise to her: “As it happened, when I first saw ‘Kirsten’ on stage, she was no longer me. She was not-me” (p. 134).

After watching more rehearsals, Kirsten wrote, “As the tears in my eyes would reveal, I was overwhelmed with the precision with which the group had grasped the essence of my stories. They had told the ‘truth’ about ‘Kirsten’, but it was not-me … It made me see myself more clearly than before. Through the selective fiction of not-me, my reality became focused. But there was a crack in the mirror allowing a separate reality to be seen: a reality of not-me. I was enchanted by it. The presence of other spectators entailed an astonishing reorientation to my view of Kirsten on stage: she was no longer not-me, but had become not-not-me. It is a general truth about performances that they catch their audiences by being not-real and not-not-real at the same time” (p. 136). […] “I could neither identify with nor distance myself from Kirsten on stage. She was neither my double nor another. She restored my biography in an original way, being not-me and not-not-me at the same time. I was not represented, I was performed” (p. 141).

[…] Hastrup concluded, “I became an invention to myself … Barba extended and challenged my identity in ways that are barely knowable, but which surely led me to courses of action that I would

> not otherwise have considered possible. Possibly I had actually become more of a character" (p. 144).

In conclusion to our article, and to explore further in deconstructing supervision methods (or intervision or altervision, whatever the term), could we not ask an even more dizzying question:

Why is it that the person whose subject is being discussed in supervision is precisely the one who is not present? Why even use a recording? Where does this idea come from, in the history of psychotherapy, coaching, and social work, that supervision should take place without the person, family, or team whose situation is being examined? How did this practice develop, and on what foundations? Is it possible to imagine removing additional barriers (which reflective teams in family therapy, followed by outsider and insider witnessing in narrative therapy, have already begun to break down) while still maintaining professional ethics and protecting the persons and those who support them? Wouldn't the person, family, or team be the first to have valuable assets for supervising their own coach, therapist, or social worker? Or, at least, be present? With the practice we describe in this article, are we not still maintaining some position of power, legitimised by so-called knowledge, which is so opposed to the aim of narrative practices, i.e., to re-situate useful knowledge and skills for personal agency into our clients?

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