

“From social control to a humanistic approach of mental disorders”

or **“The individual doesn’t exist” (Carl Whitaker)**

How to make the mental health institutions ‘family minded in the Netherlands

Introduction:

Dear colleagues and friends,

This talk will not be linear.

Not from A to B and then logically to C,D and E.

Instead I will share with you some of my observations while working in psychiatry.

Share with you some of my worries

Share with you some of my inspirations.

For me they are all logical connected, but maybe not for you.

Don’t worry

I started my journey as a professional in mental health care as a movement therapist in a large catholic psychiatric clinic in the Netherlands, St. Bavo, in 1971.

This was 25 years after the end of the second world war.

It was a time when many social changes took place, like Bob Dylan, one of my inspirations expressed in several songs, such as ‘Blowing in the wind’, ‘The times they’re a’changing”, “Masters of war” and “With God on our side”

The cold war was still not over, just like the war in Vietnam.

It was a time of young people with long hair, protesting against ongoing wars, and the dominant patriarchal white man. Also the movement of woman liberation (boss in their own belly) grew stronger and stronger

At the same time the impact of the church became less important and discussed, which made many people insecure. Even my clinic, Saint Bavo changed its name into Bavo, center of psychiatrie, removing the religious connotation.

Psychiatry was losing its hierarchical and medical clothes and tried to find new ways of treatment; socio therapy, movement therapy, creative therapy, group psychotherapy and family therapy entered the field of mental health

I was working in a therapeutic community following the principles of Maxwell Jones (two-way- communication; social learning by social interaction here-and-now; democratic principles, non-directivity and so on). It was a shock for the old psychiatry and exciting to work in it.

Reading at that time a book about Jiddu Krishnamurti, who was a 'world teacher' and very well known all over the world. It was a book for teachers in which he wrote that teachers/ parents had learn as much from their children and students as children and students had to learn through them and not because of them.

My experience at that time at the university was completely different.

I had to read the books of the professors and to accept their authority. They were really not interested in the students.

In the same time as Krishnamurti, Ronald Laing, a Scottish psychiatrist was taking the expressed feelings of his patients as valid descriptions of their personal experiences rather than simply as symptoms of mental illness. He regarded

schizophrenia as a theory not as a fact. Let patients learn through you, don't tell them what to do.

Once in the seventies, I visited a congress in Bruxelles in Belgium where the pioneers of family therapy were giving workshops and lectures.

One of them was Carl Whitaker, a man who has always been a huge inspiration for me.

When Carl Whitaker explained that 'individuals didn't exist in his work', I asked him a question about that. He replied: I don't know if it is you ask this question or if it is your teacher, supervisor or your education.

Although I had a vague idea of what he meant, it became more clear for me when we as an 'Andolfi' group visited him in Oconomowoc, Chicago several years later.

In his work, he did not believe in individuals, he believed in families and their resources.

Then in the nineties economical principles and managers became dominant. Money was the central issue in combination with working with the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, the DSM.

This led to the end of most of the therapeutic communities. That's why I wanted to start this meeting with the song of ABBA: money, moneyjoke.

At the moment, we live with several wars, poverty, immigrants all over the world, young people suffering from burn-outs and a growing rate of suicides.

And we live with the new edition of the DSM, which is the Bible for the health insurance companies.

These companies are controlling the work and decide whether you will be paid or not. They demand hard data and the hierarchical mental health organizations with managers, to control their workers about productivity. The only directive is to achieve your targets of treatment and working according to evidence based practice instead of working with practice based evidence (stressing the satisfaction of the client and her or his system/ environment/ neighborhood).

There is a huge discussion now in the Netherlands about this DSM and about the use or mis-use of it. But still the DSM is the important bible for the health assurance companies for paying the 'individual' treatments in the mental health organizations. Family care in the mental health organizations is still not possible.

We all know that costs of health care are skyrocketing. The other day I was reading an article by two well known psychiatrists in a Belgian journal. One of the psychiatrist mentioned the situation in Trieste, Italy, where family and friends are participants from the start when a client needs help from an institution. He said that the care costs were much lower in Trieste than in the Netherlands (for example compared to the city of Utrecht), and that they had much lower rates of suicides as well.

But to my surprise he said that it was impossible to incorporate this way of working in the Netherlands because of the different culture.

That amazes me.

Does Trieste have a better family culture?

Instead of suggesting other ways of working in our psychiatry institutions, he suggested that our architects should design houses for parents to deal with grand-parents with problems. That is a way of pushing the responsibility on the shoulders of parents/ children, under the blurring title of informal care.

In my opinion culture is not dominant but a different paradigm: to see that everyone lives within several contexts (family, friends, neighborhood and so on) and that it is also important to see the relationships between the different contexts.

That is what Gregory Bateson emphasized, and later his daughter Nora Bateson (who not only made a beautiful movie about her father, but who also created 'warm data labs', to bring people from different backgrounds in a learning context.

It seems that we are back in our sixties and beginning seventies, when the new generation started protesting against the wars, nuclear threats, energy, nature catastrophes and more.

Look what is happening now in the Netherlands, the United States, French and other countries in the world.

Nationalistic movements are growing, black colors matters, slavery histories and colonialism, me-too movement, lhbt movements doesn't lead to more cohesion in our community, but in the contrary it leads to more fights and conflicts

In the Netherlands, I think not only in the Netherlands, we are individual oriented, and that started already a long time ago. Treatments are individual oriented. We have lost our 'ubuntu' way of living.... The difference between different cultures (the we-culture versus the I-culture).

It is only when there is a big crisis such as natural disasters, earthquakes and wars (if it is in Europe of course), we are good in collecting money and sending help.

Even in the beginning of the Corona, there was a feeling of we-ness as Carl Whitaker described it, but just after one year it turn around in a kind of fight against the government, the police and caretaker in the hospitals.

We in the are also fear oriented.

There is a lot of fear going on in the Netherlands, such as following the United States in becoming fearful of being sued. There is fear in hospitals, brothers of the ambulances fear bystanders when they are coming to help, family doctors fear their patients who demand treatment, workers in health institutions fears violence or being sued

Fear is all around.

Fear instead of TRUST

Trust is one of the key factors of working in BuurtzorgT, a mental health organization started by Nico Moleman and Jos de Blok. The philosophy of this organization of which I will tell you more later on, gives me hope to make organizations more family minded.

In BuurtzorgT, translated in English: neighborhood care psychiatry, but I will go on speaking about BuurtzorgT, is TRUST one of the 10 symbols for the workers to endorse.

Before I will speak about BuurtzorgT, I will talk a little bit about 'the Rotterdam Circle, which I started at the end of the 80's with some colleagues in Rotterdam.

Several people of this circle are here now, one of them is Frank Asmus....

To become member of the Rotterdam Circle there was and is only one condition: to be enthusiastic about systemic work!

We started with a mixed group of nurses, social workers, psychologists and psychiatrists who were or trained as family therapist or interested in systemic work. We are less interested in theories than in the practice of our work.

Apart from exchanging experiences and discussing our practices, an important inspiration is found in learning from the masters of our profession.

We organize evenings with video's of many founders of family therapy, such as Virginia Satir, Sal Minuchin, Carl Whitaker, Murray Bowen, Maurizio Andolfi to learn and share with each other our feelings and or questions about our profession. It was fun to hear from Maurizio that he organized the Perth Circle.... And also a colleague from the South, working in the centre Ethiopia in Leuven video evenings with the founders of our profession. He was in the beginning of the Rotterdam Circle one of the participants.

My interest in learning from 'masters' started in the 70's at my first organization The Bavo, where I invited Al Pessó to demonstrate us psychomotor psychotherapy by experiencing it in 3 days workshops. Experiencing traumas that are stored in the body.

It was amazing to see colleagues psychiatrists and psychologists, social workers that beside their professional roles, they also had personal faces, personal histories and pain issues. You have to remember it was in the seventies..... The well-known Dutch professor Bessel van der Kolk wrote a very interesting book: "the body keeps the score", which says it all. Last year he was interviewed in a t.v. program that took three hours, where he was talking about his experiences with Al Pessó and how he learned from Al to work with the body of traumatized people.

Many memories of my period with Al came up

Also the memory of a 3 days symposium with the title : the body in the family in 2006, organized by my organization with the free university of Amsterdam and the Rotterdam Circle. It was there that Al Pessó and Maurizio Andolfi were giving live consultations together with Russel Haber. Looking back I am proud and honored that I could organize this symposium together with my best friend Ruud.

For more than 30 years we have organized a lot of symposia with Maurizio, giving live consultations to a lot of families.

And also invited other influential speakers like Marcel Pakman from Argentina and of course Nora Bateson and more.

How do we listen, how do we observe, how do we touch, how do we smell?

A well known psychiatrist from the Netherlands Glen Helberg, who was born in Curacao, wrote a book, like Maurizio did in his last book: the gift of truth / the inner journey of the therapist, a book about his professional and personal life with the intriguing title: 'When I listen'. Only the title is beautiful.

Glenn wrote also about his education as a psychiatrist. Once when he was talking with his supervisor from the university, Glenn showed this professor how he was emotionally touched by the improvement of one of his clients. The professor give him a reprimand that is was not professional to have emotions regarding clients...

How many times therapists start to react on a client or system, without understanding what is said by the client or one of his family members... how do we listen (head, hart, guts)?. And how do we check it?

Are we capable of a dialogue or do we re-act (see also the work of Krishnamurti and one of his students David Bohm, fysicus and Nobel price winner.

Talking about inspirations, I have to mention another colleague from th Netherlands, Jan Olthof, who wrote a book about Cruijffian thinking in narrative system therapy.

As you all know, or should know, Cruijff was one of our most creative soccer players, who is still very much alive after his death in 2016.

His way of thinking and formulating was very special.

Jan Olthof clarifies the difference between open systems and closed systems between horizontal organizations and vertical organizations and also the difference between complexity and complications.

Complications are related to fragmentations, which are the favorite elements in the thinking of most of the managers and vertical, hierarchical organizations.

Dividing wholes into parts and deal with the parts, is fragmentation (sometimes of course necessary, but it is limited).

Complexity you cannot control and requires curiosity, creativity, connectivity.

This is where the thinking (and playing) of Johan Crujff comes into play.

Several of his quotes are famous in the Netherlands.

1. Playing soccer is simple, but playing simple is very difficult
2. You cannot score if you don't shoot
3. The attack starts with the defenders
4. Every disadvantage has its advantage
5. You will only see it when you get it
6. I have never seen a bag of money score a goal
7. Quality without results is pointless. Results without quality is boring

All of these quotes are worthwhile to think about in relationship with to our work. Just replace soccer and throw it in psychiatry. One more for the fun of it and for the right moment to deliver. Crujff said: there's only one moment in which you can arrive in time. If you're not there, you're either too early or too late.

complications are fragmentations, like the thinking of the managers, only thinking of individuals and hard data. Thinking only in terms of goals and not in processes.

Hard data's and 'warm data's have to live together as Nora Bateson stated in one of her lectures, or have to find a way in living together.

Finally we arrive by BuurtzorgT

Through the Rotterdam Circle I met a colleague and psychiatrist Frank Asmus, who was working at that time for a new organization Molemann Mental health.

Molemann was founded in 2004 by 2 psychiaters Nico Moleman and Ronald Mann. Their mission was to make mental health care better and more accessible for people.

Inspired by the consultations Maurizio did with the Rotterdam Circle, Nico Molemann contacted Maurizio Andolfi and organized through his organization to make an impressive video: Maurizio Andolfi, teacher in the school of life.

His organization also invited Maurizio for consultation and lectures and translated two of Maurizio's books into dutch and made also some inspiring video's of the way of working of Maurizio.

When Nico Moleman met Jos de Blok (Jos is founder of Buurtzorg/ neighborhood care focussed on communities, which he started in 2006) Nico was immediately enthusiastic about the complete different way of thinking about health care and together they founded BuurtzorgT.

That was the moment for Nico to leave Molemann and to start this new project BuurtzorgT.

Jos started his professional career as a male nurse, working with the clients in their homes, completely free in using his professional qualities without any controlling manager.

When he start working in an official organization with managers, he realized that everything became more

complicated and finally he started in 2006 Neighborhood care, focussed on communities. At this moment there are 1000 teams all over the Netherlands, giving care to 10.000 people. It is also special that several family members of Jos are working in this organization.

During the last 10 years or more, he is invited in many countries all over the world (may be except the Middle -east) to present his 'simple' work with governments and health organizations. Many international projects are going on (today there are a lot of requests from Estand and Argentina). He is decorated in many countries for his innovative work in health care.

And like our famous soccer player Johan Cruyff, he use the expression: it is very easy to make things complicated in organizations, but it is very difficult to make things easy,

Jos wrote me a mail with suggestions for the development to a more family approach of mental care:

“Dear Cor,

Why a more social and family minded approach of mental care is needed and gives better outcomes:

Mental problems have been approached the last century in different ways. From locking up till open all institutions and see mental problems as part of society: the anti psychiatry.

In the Netherlands we ended up with a mix of visions and approached that led to institutions where healthcare professionals are payed for delivering services/interventions they don't believe in.

With BuurtzorgT we wanted to show that building an organization where the professional ethics of the professionals and a clear vision on the dynamics between the patient and the environment (family, friends, social network).

Treating the patient in its own environment and knowing the circumstances where they are living gives for the patient and the professionals a very different and trustful relationship.

Based on this relationship the professionals (psychiatric nurse, system therapist, psychologist or psychiatrist) can work towards the most sustainable outcome.

Working with interdisciplinary and selforganised teams, they can develop a good relationship with the formal and informal networks in the neighborhood.

They even become part of the neighborhood.

This ethical and human approach leads to more sustainable outcomes and a more resilient environment for patients.

Building an organization around this teams leads to a very affective network of support and low overhead costs.

BuurtzorgT and its founder Nico Moleman showed that this approach leads also to an attractive workplace:

BZT has been the fastest growing mental care organization in the Netherlands for years”

Jos and Nico wrote a book about the book in 2022

“BuurtzorgT“ thuis in de psychiatrie (at home in psychiatry) together with Joost Bijlsma.

This book is a kind of bible for the workers in Buurtzorgt and in that book we find a inspiring dialogue of Nico with Maurizio about the art of therapy; to make real connection and to talk with clients instead of about clients and to take off your mask, making you more available to the client.

I hope that this book will be translated in other languages.

In this book they used 10 symbols, which I will mention shortly:

1. craftmanship

vakmanschap

2. Simplicity

eenvoud

3. Close promimity	nabijheid
4. Self governing/ steering	zelfsturing
5. Focussed on recovering	gericht op herstel
6. To trust	vertrouwen
7. Systemic	systemisch
8. Organic	organisch
9. Wholeness	heelheid
10. From ourselves	van onszelf

Cor Vreugdenhil