

# Book Reviews

## Discursive Perspectives in Therapeutic Practice

**Andy Lock and Tom Strong (Eds.)**

Oxford University Press, 2012, 321pp,  
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*Review by Kirsten Dierolf*

SF practitioners sometimes feel like lonely cowboys in a barren landscape full of hostile gold-diggers – nobody understands why we don't do what they do, why our standards of practice differ from those of other practitioners. We seem naïve (at best) and incompetent (at worst). “Discursive Perspectives in Therapeutic Practice” felt like entering a saloon full of like-minded people after a long ride through the desert.

The book offers a collection of articles which mainly focus on theory. Some also give an outlook on or a description of practice. You find views of prominent researchers of various discursive approaches: Rom Harré, Kenneth and Mary Gergen, John Shotter, Gale Miller and Mark McKergow among others. Discursive perspectives are illuminated from many different vantage points: SF, narrative practice, social constructionism, collaborative therapy, complexity theory, positioning theory, just therapy or neuroscience. The practical examples include: an example of “talking to listen” by Louis Shawver, transcripts of a family dinner and the distribution of rights and duties by Rom Harré and Mirjana Dedaić, excerpts from a session with a patient described as “bipolar”, a description of conversations with a patient suffering from the loss of her infant by Maureen Duffy, and a description and transcript

of the case of a woman with uncertainties around her employment by Mark McKergow and Gale Miller.

All of the approaches share a focus on interaction and language as one of the most important aspects of therapeutic practice. They also agree that the co-construction of a different “reality” in conversation is one of the most important factors for change. They reject the medical model which aims at problem description, explanation, diagnosis and expert-induced treatment.

For an SF practitioner it can sometimes be a chore to get our minds around the various philosophical and psychological writings that are relevant for the credible foundation of our approach: Wittgenstein, Ryle, Vygotsky, Foucault, Derrida, Merlau-Ponty, Lyotard, Weakland, etc. In “Discursive Perspectives in Therapeutic Practice” the reader is offered a well-explained glimpse of all of these – it would make a very good textbook for an advanced course in SF practice. Louis Shawver analyses the history of the “tivotol” – talking to listen – giving an overview from Pinet to Sullivan. Mark McKergow and Gale Miller give a great introduction on how complexity theory can be useful for understanding SF practice. Lois Holzman and Fred Newman connect Marx, Vygotsky and Wittgenstein as a backdrop of their “social therapeutic method”. Ronald J. Chenail, Melissa de Vincentis, Harriet E. Kiviat and Cynthia Somers conduct a “systematic narrative review of discursive therapies research” focusing on SFBT, narrative therapy and collaborative therapy, and Robbie Busch discusses the social context of evidence-based therapy, giving a very good overview of the factors leading to the incommensurability of evidence-based therapy and discursive practice. John Cromby describes how neuroscience can fit with discursive practice, giving an interesting account of recent findings.

I recommend “Discursive Perspectives in Therapeutic Practice” to anyone who is interested in understanding better where SF sits in the world and who is standing around the same bar somewhere in the desert. Each article is well-written and easy to read. So if you feel like you “should know about these things” but haven’t got around to

actually sitting down and finding out about them, buy the book and read a chapter a day. By the end of two weeks, you'll have a very good basic understanding without having to read 2000 pages of philosophy.