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Come live with me: Decision making in the therapeutic process from an intersubjective and synergetic perspective^{2,3}

Pridi živeti k meni: O odločanju v terapevtskem procesu s perspektive intersubjektivnosti in sinergetike

Abstract

In this article, decision making in the therapeutic process is analyzed from the perspective of Daniel N. Stern's elaboration of the intersubjectivity theory in the frame of The Boston Change Process Study Group, and from the point of view of synergetic generic principles. According to Stern the moment of decision can be an auspicious present moment or kairos in the Greek sense of the word, when established patterns of thinking, feeling, behaving and relating change. The kairotic principle is also one of the eight synergetic generic principles, which together with other principles makes it easier to understand discontinuous transitions or leaps that are typical of chaotic, self-organizing and self-organized processes in complex systems, such as psychotherapy. To concretely illustrate the decision making process in terms of present moments and synergetic generic principles a detailed description of a psychotherapeutic session is presented.

Key words: intersubjectivity, kairos, present moments, decision making, synergetics, generic principles, therapeutic change, self-organization

Povzetek

V članku je podana analiza terapevtskega procesa s perspektive teorije

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- 3 This article is dedicated to my teacher, colleague and friend Günter Schiepek, who taught me about application of synergetics to psychotherapy.

intersubjektivnosti, kot jo je razvil Daniel N. Stern v okviru Bostonske raziskovalne skupine za procesne spremembe v terapiji, in z vidika sinergetičnih generičnih načel. Po Sternu je trenutek odločitve ugoden trenutek prisotnosti ali kairos v starogrškem pomenu, ko se utečeni vzorci mišljenja, čustvovanja, vedenja in odnosov lahko spremenijo. Kairotično načelo je tudi eno od osmih sinergetičnih generičnih načel, ki skupaj z ostalimi načeli olajšuje razumevanje diskontinuiranih prehodov ali preskokov, ki so tipični za samoorganizane in samoorganizirajoče se procese v kompleksnih sistemih, kakršna je tudi psihoterapija. Za konkretno ponazoritev procesa odločanja z vidika trenutkov prisotnosti in sinergetičnih generičnih načel je predstavljen podroben opis psihoterapevtske seanse.

Ključne besede: intersubjektivnost, kairos, trenutki prisotnosti, odločanje, sinergetika, generična načela, terapevtska sprememba, samoorganizacija

*To see a World in a Grain of Sand
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
And Eternity in an hour.
William Blake*

1. Introduction

In this article decision making in the therapeutic process is analyzed from:

- the temporal intersubjective perspective⁴ as developed by Daniel Stern (2004) and The Boston Change Process Study Group (2010; Stern et al., 1998), where decision making on important therapeutic content is understood as possibly fruitful “present moment” or kairos for therapeutic change;
- the point of view of synergetics (Haken & Schiepek, 2006) and its “generic principles” (Schiepek, 2008; Schiepek et al., 2005; Schiepek et al., 2015), which can be helpful to therapists and clients for their better understanding and realizing of conditions under which decision making on client’s important topics can produce therapeutic change.

Although Stern and the Boston team relied on the theory of nonlinear dynamics of complex systems when developing their elaboration of the intersubjectivity theory (Thelen in Smith, 1994), a more explicit link between intersubjectivity

⁴ The originator of the theory of intersubjectivity is Colwyn Trevarthen (1979; Trevarthen and Aitken, 2001). He did his research with the help of a video camera, recording the baby’s and the mother’s face at the same time, dividing one second into 24 shots. By replaying the clips back and forth, he could observe what was happening on the faces of one and the other at every moment.

and synergetics and its generic principles, which is outlined in this article, enables a broader view of the kairotic aspect of decision making and of the therapeutic process in general.

2. Decision making from an intersubjective kairotic perspective

In the stories we tell about our lives (likewise in our stories about decision making), we are used to place our narratives in the reality of *chronos*, of linear time, which we think of as a straight line running from the past through the present into the future. Chronos gives us the impression of objectivity. However, the ancient Greeks thought of time not only in terms of chronos, but also in terms of *kairos*. Stern (2004) warns us that in everyday life and also in psychotherapy kairotic aspect is neglected, so we know surprisingly little about experiencing in the present moment although we can be subjectively alive and aware only now.

2.1. The Greek concept of kairos

For the ancient Greeks kairos was a subjective time, which has its own limits and escapes the passage of linear, chronological time or exceeds it. Although it also contains the past, it is a subjective bracket in the chronos. For them, it was a gracious, benevolent, sympathetic, auspicious moment when something is born. In kairos, previously unrelated elements are connected in a new way. The emergence of new connections contributes to the fact that we experience such moments as special and refreshing. One of the original meanings of the word is associated with shepherds observing the stars. When the night falls and the stars light up, it seems as if they are rising in the sky and then sweep gently down again. The moment the star reaches its peak and when it begins to descend is kairos.

In an epigram, Posidippus of Pella (mid-third century B.C.) described a now-lost bronze sculpture of Kairós (only the relief image has survived to this day) by the sculptor Lysippos (last quarter of the fourth century B.C.) (figure 1). According to his description Kairós is a very handsome young man and thereby personifies happiness and lucky opportunities. He is completely naked, smeared with olive oil, and his hair is tied in a ponytail that hung over the middle of his forehead. He is constantly running fast along his paths, many times also passing people (that’s why he has wings on his heels) and meeting him has a quality of poignancy (that’s why he is carrying a razor). Many want to catch him. However, because he is elusive due to the oil, they can only catch him if they grab him by the ponytail in the middle of his head. If they are too fast, he avoids them,

if they are too slow, they grab him by the arm or some other body smeared with oil and Kairós slips away. Message or the lesson of this depiction, then, is that people must actively perceive and seize the right moment to make their wish come true and achieve happiness. It is interesting that the word happiness in Slovenian language (“sreča”) also comes from the word meeting (“srečanje”) - the meeting of a desire and those opportunities in the real world that enable the fulfillment of desire (Možina, 2007).

Figure 1

An example of the depiction of Kairós by Greek sculptor Lysippos (4th century BC) on stone relief (exhibited in Turin's Museo di Arte Greco-Romana).



2.2. Present moments and decision making in everyday life and psychotherapy

In psychology and psychotherapy, the view of the present from the point of view of the chronos has long been (and still is) predominant. However, our everyday experience - our subjective sense of liveliness or “vitality” (Stern, 2010) as we experience it from moment to moment locally - does not match with the idea that the present has no thickness or density. Our experience when we listen to music, watch a dance, or when we interact with someone requires a present that lasts. The same goes for life at the local level: “Kairos is both a subjective and a psychological unit of time.” (Stern, 2004, p. xv)

The psychological moments of the present must, on the one hand, last for things to happen and, on the other hand, must unfold in one, subjective now. Let's take an example from music: a short musical phrase (usually within two to eight seconds) is a fundamental unit in the process of experiencing listening to music. The phrase is a musical analogy for the “present moment” (Stern, 2004) in everyday life. We intuitively perceive a musical phrase as a fundamental unit with boundaries. We feel its duration. And most interestingly, the musical phrase as we hear it is experienced in moments that are longer than the instant, but at the same time we do not experience these moments separately as individual bits of written notes. We experience it as a connected, analogous, flowing whole in the present, in the now. In the now we usually are not aware of the passage of time, but at the same time we perceive the passage of time outside awareness.

Kairós can be an inspiration, »heureka« experience, and a moment when we realize that a new perspective has just enlightened us. Kairós means we are fully aware of our existence in here and now. It is transient, elusive moment in which something takes place and develops into something completely new, very much influencing the quality of our awareness. It increases our vigilance and presence in a given moment. It is a small window, an opportunity in our being and becoming.

During kairos previously unrelated elements link in a new way. The formation of new connections contributes to the fact that we experience such moments as special and refreshing. We realize in a more intensive way that the we cannot step into the same river twice. Even a well-known, trivial situation is revived in a new freshness. Kairotic moments surprise us and shake us. We cannot control them. Kairós visits us unexpectedly, he cannot be captured by will alone. Kairotic moments are a gift. Some would say they are a gift of the gods, the grace that we receive. On one hand they can be the most difficult moments connected with demanding life transitions, on the other hand in times of severe distress they can bring relief. They can have healing influence and are therefore important for all forms of treatment, including psychotherapy. Like a living spring water they can miraculously wash away even the worst pains. Like a patch for wounds or a medicine they can accelerate the healing process. Like sun rays they can illuminate the darkness of mental suffering, restore meaning, faith and hope.

In order for our desire and opportunity for its fulfillment would meet at an auspicious moment in our everyday life, however, we have to *decide* between two or more options. Thus, an important aspect of kairos is decision making. We have to decide *now* or the opportunity will pass. Many times life circumstances or events are such that we realize that we need to take action, do something and also take a risk *now*, to change our destiny - either for the next minute or for a lifetime.

If we don't take action, our destiny will also change, but in a different way, because we didn't take action, because we didn't do something, because we didn't decide on something.

Not only music but also poetry can most directly express the intensification of presence, when we find ourselves on a razor's edge, on the brink of existentially important decision. Sometimes it is even a matter of deciding between life and death, as one of the most famous verses of all times says: »To be or not to be, that is the question« (Shakespeare, 1961). The Slovenian poet Tone Pavček (1928-2011) in his poem *Open space* (*Čistina*) described such an experience as follows (Pavček, 1978, p. 49):

*“On-site I stand.
Alone.
In the open space.
And I'm not the only one
who does not know where to go.*

*Does it really matter
to the left
or to the right,
forward or backward,
or to stand on the site
at this naked open space
to wait in place...
Everything is open and bare.
The man himself in front of you.
As if a hundred thousand knives pierce
and there is no cover from the fight.*

*And you cannot run
from yourself, from your days
and no password is asked
to gain your release.*

*I stand at the site.
In the open space.
Should I work my way to the valley?
Or should I fall here, dead?”*

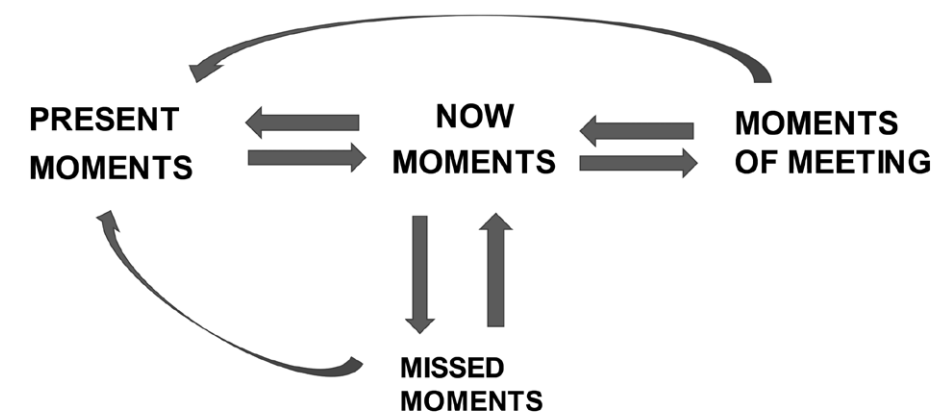
2.3. Present moments from the perspective of two-person psychology

Greeks understood *kairos* from the perspective of one person, but when we look at it from the perspective of two-person psychology, as Stern proposes, that is from a dialogical perspective, it reveals itself to us even more rich and varied. Stern et al. (1998, pp. 908-13) developed a model of three types of *kairotic* moments: "present moments" can grow into "now moments" and these can turn into "moments of meeting". If, however, we ignore them, they become moments of missed opportunities ("missed moments") (see Figure 2):

“The key concept, the ‘moment of meeting’, is the emergent property of the ‘moving along’ process that alters the intersubjective environment, and thus the implicit relational knowing. In brief, moving along is comprised of a string of ‘present moments’, which are the subjective units marking the slight shifts in direction while proceeding forward. At times, a present moment becomes ‘hot’ affectively, and full of portent for the therapeutic process. These moments are called ‘now moments’. When a now moment is seized, i.e. responded to with an authentic, specific, personal response from each partner, it becomes a ‘moment of meeting’. This is the emergent property that alters the subjective context.” (ibid., 908)

Figure 2

“Present moments” can evolve into moments when we are focused in the here and now (“now moments”), and these can grow into “moments of meeting”. It is also possible that we miss the opportunity for intensification of present moments (“missed moments”). (Stern et al., 1998, pp 908-13)



Stern and the Boston team (2010) gradually realized that the moments of meeting in therapy sessions are relatively rare and that more important are “*present moments*”, which are more frequent. A string of present moments is involved in “*moving along*”, a process of mutual regulation of communication aimed at a certain therapeutic goal, which can be explicitly or implicitly defined by the participants. This process is possible through the constant mutual tuning of interaction partners based on present moments. So moving along is predominantly non-verbal and unconscious and manifests in the interactions between the therapist and the client as joint movement, mirroring, imitation and attunement regarding feelings of vitality (levels activation or intensity, rhythms, arousal or calmness) and emotions (Stern, 2010).

Now moment emerge with the enhanced presence and attention, and put us in front of a choice and a decision - whether to stay in the established pattern of behaving and relating or not. And if not, what should we do? We find ourselves at a crossroads. Now moments force us into a non-routine response that is new according to a known pattern. They are unexpected and unknown in their form and time and can therefore seem strange, unusual to us. They are accompanied by confusion because we suddenly don't know what's going on and what to do. They are tied to an unknown future and can be felt as a stalemate or as an opportunity. They are distinctly personal, like some kind of moments of truth. Usually they are accompanied with expectations and fear or anxiety due to the need of making a choice or decision and risk is something we cannot avoid. Fortune favours the brave, the ancient Romans already said. We cannot make an immediate plan of action or find an immediate explanation. In now moments we find ourselves in an open space, as the poet Pavček convincingly described.

And how do now moments turn into *moments of meeting*? It is a complex non-linear dynamic process where only one of the many components can change slowly and gradually. In this case, the changes are hardly perceptible, unconscious, until they reach a certain point - a threshold, when the possibility of changing the context for the action of the other components suddenly appears. Now moments are the threshold through which interpersonal interactions pass into moments of meeting. When the client and the therapist catch the moment in communication, when they take a risk and openly explore it, “*deal with it*”, it can become a moment of meeting. That's when they meet on a personal level and break out of familiar roles. The moment of meeting cannot be the result of routine, habit or some technique: it must be something new that allows them to recognize the extraordinariness of the moment. This, of course, requires a great deal of empathy, openness, attunement, so that a new space, a new position, is born between them, which depends on their specific personal characteristics.

Due to the change in the interpersonal context, it leaves a special mark in the memory. Each, the therapist and the client, experiences a similar version of what happened here and now between them. Such encounters establish a new connection quality between the individual and the context and between the individual's interior and exterior, which would not be possible without special intersubjective quality of moments of meeting.

The emergent development of intersubjectivity from present to now moments and to moments of meeting is strongly connected with decision making in three phases (Stern et al., 1998, 908-13):

- *preparation phase* with the feelings of inevitability to the decision, which awaits us;
- *confusion phase* when an individual finds that he entered the unknown and unexpected interpersonal space;
- *decision making phase*, when the individual decides whether to grab this moment or not (or will he decide to move closer or away from an important person). If so, this leads to a moment of meeting. Otherwise, it means a missed opportunity to meet.

Let's look at a concrete example. When we fall in love, our presence in the now spontaneously amplifies in the vicinity of a beloved person. It's easy to focus on the admired face and already seconds can become as intense as hours. However, it can also be challenging if we do not know if the other person shares similar feelings of love for us and we are indecisive to share our feelings or not because we are afraid of rejection.

Herman Hesse in *Steppenwolf* describes how Harry Haller, the main hero of the novel, as a young boy fell in love with Rosa Kreisler. It was a Sunday afternoon in early spring, the day that on a lonely walk he met Rosa and greeted her shyly (Hesse, 1969, pp. 225-26):

»She came, that day, alone and dreamingly up the hill towards me. She had not seen me and the sight of her approaching filled me with apprehension and suspense. I saw her hair, tied in two thick plaits, with loose strands on either side, her cheeks blown by the wind. I saw for the first time in my life how beautiful she was, and how beautiful and dreamlike the play of the wind in her delicate hair, how beautiful and provocative the fall of her thin blue dress over her young limbs; and just as the bitter spice of the chewed bud coursed through me with the whole dread pleasure and pain of spring, so the sight of the girl filled me with the whole deadly foreboding of love, the foreboding of woman. In that moment was contained the shock and the forewarning of enormous possibilities and promises, nameless delight, unthinkable bewilderments, anguish, suffering, release to the innermost

and deepest guilt. Oh, how sharp was the bitter taste of spring on my tongue! And how the wind streamed playfully through the loose hair beside her rosy cheeks! She was close now. She looked up and recognized me. For a moment she blushed a little and looked aside; but when I took off my school cap, she was self-possessed at once and, raising her head, returned my greeting with a smile that was quite grown-up. Then, entirely mistress of the situation, she went slowly on, in a halo of the thousand wishes, hopes and adorations that I sent after her.«

Hesse with extraordinary subtlety describes the present moments, which, due to the indecision of both Harry and Rosa, do not develop into a moment of meeting, but into a missed opportunity to meet. However, thanks to the “magic theater” (which is a kind of imaginary therapeutic context), Harry was able to correct his mistake and relieve the situation so that he could experience the moment of meeting with Rosa (ibid., 226-27):

»So it had once been on a Sunday thirty-five years before, and all that had been then came back to me in this moment. Hill and town, March wind and buddy taste, Rosa and her brown hair, the welling-up of desire and the sweet suffocation of anguish. All was as it was then, and it seemed to me that I had never in my life loved as I loved Rosa that day. But this time it was given me to greet her otherwise than on that occasion. I saw her blush when she recognized me, and the pains she took to conceal it, and I knew at once that she had a liking for me and that this encounter meant the same for her as for me. And this time instead of standing ceremoniously cap in hand till she had gone by, I did, in spite of anguish bordering on obsession, what my blood bade me do. I cried: 'Rosa! Thank God, you've come, you beautiful, beautiful girl. I love you so dearly.' It was not perhaps the most brilliant of all the things that might have been said at this moment, but there was no need for brilliance, and it was enough and more. Rosa did not put on her grown-up air, and she did not go on. She stopped and looked at me and, growing even redder than before, she said: "Heaven be praised, Harry--do you really like me?" Her brown eyes lit up her strong face, and they showed me that my past life and loves had all been false and perplexed and full of stupid unhappiness from that very moment on a Sunday afternoon when I had let Rosa pass me by. Now, however, the blunder was put right. Everything went differently and everything was good.«

3. **Kairos and decision making in the psychotherapy process**

Therapeutic change is highly correlated with kairos and decision making. Psychotherapy is a much more fruitful adventure if both, client and therapist, can open up to the unexpected and new of kairos, and if they constantly risk decisions that maintain freshness and the uniqueness of each therapeutic encounter. Present moments strengthen the therapeutic alliance (Bordin, 1979, 1994) and enable therapist and client to become “fellow travelers” (Yalom, 2002) in their unique co-creation of the therapeutic process.

Psychotherapy is therefore a unique adventure not only for clients but also for therapists. If the therapist is open to kairos - and an important (if not essential) part of his training is to increase sensitivity to this aspect of psychotherapy - he will draw the client into the realm of this mysterious Greek god with his example and not just words. So just before a therapy session, it is recommended for the therapist to stop for at least a few minutes, slow down, sit in a chair where the client will sit, and focus on the breathing and perception - what can be seen, heard, and felt here and now. To open up for a handshake with the client at the greeting and for the first eye contact. In accordance with Buber's recommendation, the therapist should see and hear the client as if meeting him for the first time: “In spite of all similarities, every living situation has, like a newborn child, a new face, that has never been before and will never come again. It demands of you a reaction that cannot be prepared beforehand. It demands nothing of what is past. It demands presence, responsibility; it demands you.” (Buber, 1977, p. 44)

And then, when the therapist closes the door of his or her practice and he hangs a - *Do not disturb* - sign on the door, when he switches the phone off and when he fully concentrates on client or clients, in some way he starts to co-create a different world in which he is fully dedicated to the client and catalyzes the conditions for the visit of the god Kairós. Therapist is constantly tuning to the client, to his or her feelings that change from one second to the next. He turns on an invisible microscope, which increases the minimum movements, impulses, the mimic ... Like an experienced dancer he starts to tune into the client's rhythm and intensity, decrescendo and crescendo of his feelings. He breathes in the rhythm of the client's breathing. Subtly and discreetly he reflects the client as his mirror. As the therapist and client are increasingly developing joint movement (this can include, of course, also many untuned dance steps, overtaking, slippage, misunderstandings), a miracle can occur - the “kairos à deux”. Then they can see each other in the eyes of the other without masks, as persons, as human beings in the same boat, as a co-travellers in a great adventure

of unpredictable being and becoming. Two consciousnesses become connected in the kairotic intersubjective, interpersonal awareness.

4. **How can a psychotherapist help the client make important decisions by following synergetic generic principles**

Synergetics defines psychotherapy as the destabilization of dysfunctional and the emergence of new patterns of thinking, feeling, behaving and relating within a stable, confidential and secure relationship between therapist and client (Schiepek et al., 2015). Synergetics, theories of nonlinear systems' dynamics and chaos theory enable the mathematical formalization and simulation of physical, psychological, and social self-organizing processes in complex systems, which opens the door wide to research (Haken & Schiepek, 2006; Schiepek, Tominschek & Heinzl, 2014; Schiepek, 2020).

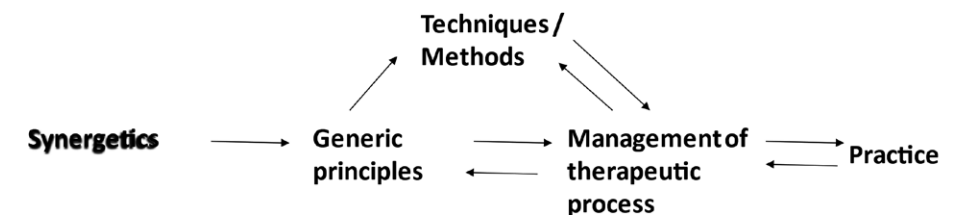
For psychotherapy practice, however, synergetics offers eight "generic principles", which make it easier for therapists to understand discontinuous, self-organized transitions, and of course also their own and clients' decisions (Schiepek et al., 2015, pp. 28-37):

1. *Creating conditions for stability*: therapeutic procedures to increase safety, trust in the therapist-client relationship, supporting the client's sense of self-worth.
2. *Identifying relevant system patterns*: identification of those dysfunctional, problematic relational patterns, patterns of thinking, emotions and behavior that the client wants to change, while recognizing patterns of the solution; description and analysis of problem patterns or system processes, as needed to define therapeutic goals and discover solutions.
3. *Considering the sense of significance*: for the client, the tasks and steps that allow progress and lead to goals must be meaningful to him at all times; the therapist acknowledges the client's process of change and considers the client's lifestyle and personal developmental tasks even if it does not match with his or her lifestyle, the goals should be tailored to the client, primarily meaningful to him and not the therapist.
4. *Identifying control parameters and motivation for change / enabling energization*: creating conditions that encourage the client's motivation; awakening of the client's resources; consideration of the client's goals and concerns.
5. *Destabilization and amplification of fluctuations*: experiments and paradoxes; breaking dysfunctional patterns of relationships, thinking, emotions and

- behavior; introducing new distinctions; exceptions - conscious and spontaneous; unusual, new behavior, etc.
6. *Considering "kairos", resonance and synchronization*: temporal coordination and coordination between therapeutic procedures, therapist's communication activities and the client's mental and social processes / rhythms; joint movements, joint "dance" on the therapeutic sessions ("moving along" in Stern's sense).
 7. *Purposeful symmetry breaking*: "symmetry" in synergetics means a state in which, in addition to the established ones, different, new relational patterns and patterns of thinking, feeling, behaving are equally possible or present; expectations and implementation of planned new patterns.
 8. *Stabilization of new patterns*: interventions for stabilization and integration of new thought, emotional, behavioral and relational patterns.
- The knowledge of synergetic generic principles of self-organizing processes can help psychotherapists to select appropriate techniques and methods for a better management of therapeutic process and for effective practice. At the same time the results of practice can inform therapists (feedback informed treatment⁵) for the management of therapeutic process with appropriate techniques and methods, and help to take in consideration adequate generic principles (figure 3).

Figure 3

Knowledge of the generic principles of self-organizing processes can enable therapists to organize, simplify, and justify therapeutic behavior (Schiepek et al., 2015, p. 35)



Important decisions (in the form of discontinuous transitions) are often associated with destabilizations that arouse fears and anxiety. In the phases of critical instability, there are marked fluctuations because the patterns in question loose

5 For feedback informed treatment Schiepek (2020) and his coworkers ((Schiepek et al., 2016) developed the Synergetic Navigation System (SNS), which is a highly flexible and generic Internet-based service for data acquisition, time series analysis, and visualization of outcome and process data as well as analysis of results. It allows for the implementation of various questionnaires or coding systems. Data can be entered and results can be checked by most web-compatible devices, including PCs, notebooks, tablets, or smartphones (ubiquitous computing). Also an SNS app is available.

their 'attractiveness' or even become uncomfortable for the client, and because at the same time the client can hardly predict how further development will take place. These fears and anxieties due to uncertainty, as well as the associated "sudden losses" (e.g. so-called relapses) to known behavioral patterns, are mostly interpreted as "resistances", but should not be interpreted as a client's lack of willingness to cooperate. "Relapses" and "mistakes" in phases of critical instability make even more sense, and people need support from the therapist and other people in the event of "relapses" and "mistakes," even through a "friendly attitude to mistakes" (Schiepek et al., 2020).

In the phases of instability, the client's sensitivity to minimal signs (for example, one word or a small non-verbal sign by the therapist) also increases, which can encourage him or her to make important life decisions and thus strongly shape further development. In chaos theory, this is known as the "butterfly phenomenon" (Schiepek et al., 2017), where the flutter of butterfly wings in Japan can trigger series and cascades in a complex weather system by developing a hurricane in America. In these phases, we can also help clients face challenging decisions with metaphors, images and verbal suggestions at different levels of (un)consciousness and on different sensory channels.

The difference between Stern's conceptualization of *kairos* and *kairos* as synergetic principle is that Stern derived his concept with phenomenological microanalysis of very small events in life and psychotherapy (Stern, 2004). *Kairos* as synergetic principle includes this micro perspective, but at the same time it also enables the inclusion of (de)synchronizations in larger scale, for example how client's everyday life (so called client's factors in common factors research) and events outside psychotherapy consulting room are temporarily coordinated with therapeutic procedures and how therapist's communication activities are synchronized with client's mental and social processes / rhythms (Schiepek et al., 2015).

Keeney (1983) in his cybernetic model of therapeutic change suggests that the therapist can help the client make important decisions by first saying "yes, do" this or that and arguing with reasons for such decision, then continuing with "no, don't do" this or that and arguing with reasons against⁶, and then tells a story or stories that, like Rorschach, allow the client to project into them what it is important for him to expand his associations, to stimulate his creative process, which helps him or her in decision making.

6 The therapist can of course also start with *don't do* and continue with *do*. But it is important not to say yes and no at the same time but successively, and to catch a good timing and surprise the client, helping him to get out of the usual patterns and step into the creative process. When the client already thinks that the therapist has decided for or against, the therapist surprises him and opens another option and maybe some more.

In the following, using a concrete case from my practice, I will illustrate how the knowledge of synergetic generic principles, Stern's intersubjectivity theory of present moments and Keeney's cybernetic model can be used for the microanalysis of one therapy session⁷.

5. **Come live with me: an example of decision making in a psychotherapeutic session**

To illustrate the decision making process in terms of synergetic generic principles and Stern's conceptualization of present moments, I will present a psychotherapy session I had years ago with 39-year-old John, a well-to-do craftsman with many employees. Prior to this session, he was in therapy for about eight years in intervals (altogether we had around 50 sessions).

One of the main focuses of therapy was his relationships with women. During our eight years of collaboration, he had serious love affairs with five women (and some more casual affairs). When I first met him, he was in a "boring" relationship (as he put it) with a woman two years younger. He no longer felt real charge and attraction and he was also occasionally and secretly unfaithful, but he also couldn't end the relationship, even though they had tried to quit twice before. Then he fell in love with a married woman who knew how to attract him, but at the same time kept him at a distance, so he gave up after a few months. However, this infatuation helped him to end the "boring" relationship. In the next, more serious relationship, he found out after a few months that she was unfaithful and immediately broke off the relationship. He continued with a widow who had an eleven-year-old daughter, but who lived in a place more than a hundred kilometers away. This weekend relationship with the widow unraveled in about two years.

At the time when our session took place, he had been in a relationship for a year and a half with a ten years younger Lisa, a bank clerk who also lived in a town more than a hundred kilometers away from John's town. They mostly met during weekends.

7 Beside that I find Schiepek's application of synergetics in the Synergetic Navigation System (SNS) (Schiepek et al., 2015) as an extremely useful tool to support feedback informed treatment, because it enables the therapist and the client to have better insight into the non-linear dynamics of therapeutic process overall, I was curious if I could also use the synergetic or SNS logic for the analysis of one session.

5.1. **Creating conditions for stability through stabilization of therapeutic relationship, building trust and security**

When John came to the session, he sank into a chair and after a few deep sighs, his first words were that he was depressed and tired. He looked lifeless and his voice was monotonous, speech slowed down. When he reported what was new since we last saw each other, he avoided the topic of Lisa, so after a few minutes I asked him directly about their relationship. He said they are continuing to weigh whether she should move to his house or not. This theme has been one of the main topics of our conversations in recent months and I have encouraged him in various ways that he will never know if they don't try to live together. The weekend relationship was a good framework at the beginning, but after a year and a half it was not anymore so. She pressed harder and harder that they should try and he hesitated more and more.

5.2. **Identifying the dysfunctional, problematic patterns and solution patterns**

In all relationships with women, including Lisa, John experienced strong ambivalence ("I would like to have a family BUT I'm not sure if this woman is the right choice"). In one part of himself he was hesitant and overly critical. On the one hand, he could be gentle, playful and sometimes even too gentlemanly in the relationship with women. And on the other hand, he kept a "black chronicle" in a special notebook, where he carefully recorded events in which his partners proved problematic and undermined his confidence that they might be suitable for his family project.

As usual, John also wrote a black chronicle from our last meeting about Lisa, which he brought with him. He carefully read to me the new black news. What bothered him the most was Lisa's »dramatic talent«, as he himself put it. She was much more direct in expressing emotions, both positive and negative, than he was, and she was much more reckless in her actions (for example, during sex she was not careful about contraception, instead she would like to get pregnant as soon as possible, because she wanted a child and he did not because he didn't want to have a baby with her until he would be really sure *that she is the right choice!!*). And more and more often they became entangled in the repetitive escalations of the »turtle and storm« type: the more she criticized his hesitant attitude and thundered angrily, the more he locked himself in his armor of negative and anxious thoughts. And the more he closed himself off, the more uncertain she was about their relationship and future, so she made more and more "scenes" in which, with undoubtedly dramatic talent, she was checking if he still loves her at all. And once, in a fit of rage, she even struck him.

And of course, this was almost the crown proof for him that he had to be even more careful with such an »aggressive woman«. »I shouldn't marry someone who will beat me, should I?« he asked me rhetorically.

On the other hand, from the very beginning of our meetings, he accepted my invitation to open a what we called, "white chronicle". I gave him the task of collecting as many positive observations about the relationship with Lisa as he could. At each session, I asked him to report from the white chronicle about what he was satisfied with, what were the resources and solutions he discovered. So he carefully recorded concrete descriptions of various events and regularly reported them to me, for example of a relaxed atmosphere on holidays, how they shared the joy of travelling, how he learned from her how to be more playful, childish and more open emotionally, how her spontaneity often complemented well his greater control and caution, how they developed more ability for constructive conflict and loving detachment in confrontations, how they had good sex, a common desire for a child and a family, and so on.

5.3. **Identifying control parameters, energizing and promoting the client's motivation**

To motivate or energize him in the synergetic sense, I went on to tell him the story of a client I worked with years ago due to a severe crisis and a depressive reaction after his second divorce. This client left his wife with two children, ages seven and five. He fell passionately in the "greatest love of his life", as he described it, with a woman who was eighteen years younger. After the marriage (his second) and ten years of living together, they were planning a child. However, she suddenly fell in love with another man and left.

The main message of the story I wanted to convey to him was: "To love means to *take a risk!* There is no guarantee in love!" I included this message in my story as a hypnotic suggestion, because while I was telling him the story he went into a trance with open eyes. He was a good hypnotic subject and we had many hypnotherapeutic sessions over the years of therapy.

5.4. **Considering the sense of significance**

I then went on (while he was still in an everyday trance with open eyes) to summarize his love relationships, encouragingly emphasizing how he learned, progressed, and personally matured in each. In the first serious relationship both he and his partner, tried hard to adjust to each other and nobody was satisfied. Then he fell deeply in love, but it was unfortunately one-sided. In the next two relationships, he gradually opened up emotionally even more and so did the two women. In the relationship with Lisa his experience was the most

positive of all. At the same time, as in all previous relationships with women, he was ambivalent again. On the one hand he wanted to develop a deep emotional bond and have children and a family life with her, and on the other hand he was distrustful, constantly wondering if perhaps somewhere an even better bridesmaid was waiting for him. He wanted certainty, a guarantee like when he was buying a new car or a new machine for his craft. But because of his age he was becoming more and more worried that with such a "guarantee" approach he could remain empty-handed, alone, without children and family.

5.5. **Destabilization and amplification of fluctuations based on the cybernetic model of change ("do - don't do - story") and kairotic moments**

I don't know exactly when during the session I spontaneously remembered one of Yalom's (2002) recommendations: that it is often effective if the therapist encourages the client to *do* something new in the session. Encouraging John to talk to Lisa and suggesting to him that they should try to live together for a certain period, no longer seemed fruitful to me, as I had already suggested this to him several times, but he hesitated over and over again. In our relationship we, too, have been spinning in a vicious circle for quite a long time. For some time it seemed to me that it was important that I joined him in the impasse at which he found himself, but I felt that in this session I should do something more.

So I decided to take a risk and try to invite John to take a step out of his "hesitation pattern" in front of me, during the session. It seemed like a good idea to me, but how to find the right timing for it, while staying in good contact with him. How to catch Kairós together with him? Before doing anything, I took some time for my "calibration", as I call it, and made a few inhales and exhales in the rhythm of his breathing while he was explaining something to me and I was preparing myself for the destabilizing intervention. Breathing together is one of my usual ways of intensifying my presence in the moment. When I am mindful I am able to more easily discover the moment for stepping out into the open space.

When I felt focused enough, I suddenly leaned forward, interrupted his monotonous complaining and, with the help of my dramatic talent, said with special emphases and meaningful pauses⁸:

⁸ I learned this kind of communication mostly from Milton Erickson's work (for example Erickson et al., 1976; Haley, 1993). To convey to the reader the kairotic perspective of the session with John, I used lines, dots and italics to indicate the rhythm of my verbalizations and emphases of our interactive dance.

"John, I think I know the solution!"

John was surprised and asked: "What do you mean? Tell me!"

"But you will have to *do* it,
in the moment I ask
you will have to *do* it!" (I emphasized the word *do*.)

John seemed ambivalent, but at the same time very curious.

"You have to promise me, *now* (I emphasized the word *now*),
that you will *do* it."

John paused for some seconds, pondered and then finally agreed: "Okay!"

"John, what I will say to you *now*,
is very, very important.
Are you ready?" (I wanted to intensify his expectation and motivation in the sense of synergetic energization.)

John nodded.

"John,
the moment of decision has come...
No more waiting...
You will call Lisa... *now*.... (he looked at me shocked in surprise)
and say to her:
'I have decided
- come live with me...'"

"What do you mean?" he asked me with his eyes wide open in surprise.

"Just like I said!"

Moments of deep silence followed, so that only our breathing could be heard. He didn't expect me to make such a demand. It was something new, fresh, unexpected, he was not used to me putting pressure on him. I could see that surprise deepened his trance and his inner work intensified. In synergetic sense I could interpret that John and our relationship moved to the moments of critical instability.

Then using the logic of Keeney's cybernetic model I softened the pressure, introducing the *no* possibility:

"Or you're going to say to her:
 'Let's take a break!
 Let's make a pause in our relationship!
 For at least a month
 we should not have any contact.'"

John frowned. I waited a little bit longer and softened even more:

"Or you are just going to have ordinary small talk."

He remained silent.

"What can you lose ...
 if you call her *now*?"
 ... (here I made a dramatic pause again)
 Nothing.
 You know well, you told me...
 that in recent months,
 the relationship with Lisa has gradually deteriorated...
 If you continue like this,
 you will break up...
 You are caught in a vicious circle –
 the more you hesitate,
 the more drama on her part.
 The more of Lisa's drama,
 the more you are afraid,
 the more you hesitate etc.

By calling her *now*,
 you can't lose anything...
 because if you will wait
 your relationship will end anyway.
 You know well,
 that if you wait
 she will leave you.

The worst thing that can happen
 if you call her *now*
 is that it will make it worse,
 which it will be anyway.
 You can't lose anything.

However, if you call *now*
 it can be better.
 As you told me,
 with Lisa
 you experienced the most positive things
 of all the women you had..."

Then I repeated some concrete good events that he described to me in previous sessions (how well they get along in sex, on holidays, how they can be playful, childish etc.). And invited him to imagine the future in a trance:

"Years accumulate...
 You are older and older...
 You are 39...
 You can see yourself as a father.
 You would like to *be a father now*...
 When your child is 10,
 you are already 50,
 When your child is 20,
 you are already 60.
 It is time to *be a father now*...
 if you want to be a strong
 and healthy father..."

So, take the phone
 and call, *now*...
 Indulge in the moment,
 in your feelings *now*.
 When you hear her voice,
 something in you,
 your unconscious
 will guide you how to proceed.
 You can tell her this ... or that.

You can only chat a little while.
 You don't have to think
 about how it will be.
 Let it be,
 let it flow.
 You don't know
 what you will do,
 but you will be able to feel
 here and now...
 if there is still hope
 and positive feelings in you
 to say:
 'Come live with me!'"

To give him some more time to make for the "fatal" decision and using Keeney's cybernetic model, I continued to tell him stories. First I told him the story of the movie with the title *Himalaya* (1999). Storytelling is namely one of my favorite ways of indirect communication in therapy. Because in the story I can embed suggestions that can be potentially therapeutic in such a way that the conscious, critical mind can be avoided, and unconscious process invited to find the solutions. In this movie, the chief of a small village in the Himalayas, after the tragic death of his older son, who was a caravan guide, asks his younger son, who was a lama and lived one day walking distance in a monastery, to come to his aid in guiding the caravan across the high pass. Father felt that because of his age perhaps he does not have enough strength to make it (which really happened, he then died on the way). The survival of the village community depended on the success of this caravan. The lama first rejects his father, then changes his mind and unexpectedly appears at the door of his father's house. When his father, pleasantly surprised, asks him why he changed his mind, his son replies: "I asked my supervisor for advice. And he replied, "The path of the Buddha is:

If you have two possibilities,
 always choose the harder,
 the more difficult one!"

This was my main suggestion and I immediately covered it with more details from the content of the movie. To make it easier for him to have deep contact with himself, I inhaled in the rhythm of his inhales, and while telling the story, I connected my speech with his exhales. He listened to me motionless in a trance,

with his gaze focused on me, but at the end of the story he still hesitated whether to call.

I had already come to terms with the fact that maybe my idea wouldn't move him, but I didn't want to pull back. I kept the tension going and trusted that he would decide for himself the best he can. Waiting for his clear yes or no answer, I continued to tell him stories. This time I decided to share some of my love experience.

Over the years of our collaboration, I have revealed to John several times some part of my personal experience. My self-disclosure always had a good effect on him and I thought it was the right moment again. The main message of my story was, that my search for love has shown the opposite characteristic of his: I knew how to take risks, many times even too much. If he was too withheld, I was too brave. And yet, despite the many risks I took, I confessed openly to him that I haven't found a fulfilling relationship yet. At the time of our session I was also in crisis with my second wife. I told him that we both fell in love very intensely around ten years ago, but we came to the point of divorce. So I was very clear to him that I had not found a companion myself, but that I was still hoping that next time I will have more luck. Telling him about my experience, I tried to convey to him that I cannot be other than humble and that I can understand and accept him even if he does *not* choose to call. Because I used the destabilizing procedure, I thought it was important to give him this message of humbleness from my part in the sense of stabilization of our relationship. I wanted him to know that he will not disappoint me if he doesn't call.

Then I continued with another story, trying to energize him in the synergetic sense: "Do you know what Oscar Wilde said?" I asked him. "No," he replied. So I told him how Wilde was married, had children, but his most intense passion was oriented to men. And how unfortunate he was in his most important gay relationship: "For his love for a younger, attractive, eccentric nobleman, he paid the highest price: his family, his freedom and health, because he was incarcerated, and ultimately his life, because he got sick in jail. Namely, he had to sue the influential and vindictive nobleman's father, who filed a lawsuit against Wilde for homosexuality. After an unjust sentence of two years forced labor in prison, he became severely ill, he lost his property, and his wife also left him taking their children who were no longer allowed to have contact with him. Because of this, he had such severe feelings of guilt that he publicly renounced his relationship with the nobleman. And yet, after returning from prison before his death, he returned for a time to the spoiled and sadistic lover. Even when the lover knew that Wilde was dying he didn't change his reckless behavior. Their new episode was just another dose of suffering and disappointment for Wilde.

When I watched all this recently in a biographical movie about Wilde, I was most deeply moved by Wilde's concluding thought in the last frame of the movie:

"There are only two tragedies in life:
one is not getting what one wants,
and the other is getting it."

My idea behind telling John the biographical story of Wilde was, that there are no easy answers in love, no guarantee, no objective assessment of the adequacy of our love choices even when we think we got what we wanted. Love and life are chaotic and we can only make mistakes. "Life is one continuous mistake!" said Zen master Dogen. So after a short pause, I added:

"One thing is for sure in love,
and this I can guarantee you...: (I tried to utilize his endeavours to get
a guarantee)
There are no recipes,
no certainty
no right moves in love.
Love is beyond right and wrong.
We are faced with its mystery
over and over again.
And love is not a cat,
but a tiger.
We can't domesticate it.
It bites..."

After these remarks John suddenly twitched and replied energetically: "All right. I'll call her, but you must get out of the room. I'll call you after the conversation will finish."

I left the room with respect and waited in the hallway for about twenty minutes.

5.6. **Considering kairos, resonance and synchronization: Moments of meeting and a nonlinear, discontinued jump into a new pattern**

When he invited me back, he radiated satisfaction. He described to me that the conversation, to his great surprise, flew spontaneously, fluently, even with a lot of humor and playfulness. As soon as he heard Lisa, he felt very nice, he liked her voice and the feeling of her presence. Somehow naturally in the flow

of conversation came the moment when he declared without much effort: "I decided to invite you: Come live with me!"

Of course, she was pleasantly surprised and said yes immediately. They agreed to continue the conversation over the weekend when they will see each other. However, it was not just the verbal report that convinced me that a "quantum leap" has happened. The change of atmosphere was even more convincing: John had a clear face, he was naughty, playful, smiling, content and grateful.

As he was leaving, he spontaneously hugged me. I also felt alive, present and satisfied that we experienced a strong moment of meeting.

5.7. **Stabilization of new patterns**

Two months later, Lisa left the job in her town and moved to John's house. She found a new job. John came to me and they also came together to some sessions during next months. In the synergetic sense I helped them stabilize the new, solution pattern. Then we decided to end our sessions and we left open the possibility that they can come again if they would need. They never did.

6. **Follow up**

After a year and a half after our last meeting, they were still living together. After three years John sent a message and photo of their first child. I met them three times in town accidentally during last years, they now have two children. Once I met John accidentally at a concert and he said to me in a humorous way: "I am fine and so are Lisa and the children. I was lucky. I didn't get what I wanted!"

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