



Tom Andersen in memoriam (1936 – 2007)

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Tom Andersen is maybe still listening, as he always did.

However, he was not fond of a focus like this on his person. But we have all felt how he had the ability to *see* us in a remarkable way, and to look into our words and our hearts. He wanted to help us reflect on the words and how they form us – to reflect with ourselves and with others – so that we can find ways to go on with our lives. So let him listen to our reflections.

Ludwig Wittgenstein wrote:

*„The light of work is a beautiful light,
which, however, only shines with real beauty if illuminated by yet another light.”*

In light of the work Tom did throughout the world, we will still go on with ours.

I highly appreciate to have this opportunity to invite us all to a moment of reflection and contemplation on the memories, words and images that come to us about Tom Andersen. It is indeed in his spirit to be together in the same room, sharing our thoughts and words, whether they are spoken or not.

When someone leaves us, we may feel that we are left with an empty space. There are many who have expressed exactly that, - the empty space after Tom. His voice gone silent, his breathing now stopped, has made us suddenly feel lonely, and I am one.

We feel at this congress too there is an empty space where he would have walked and talked.

But if Tom were to listen to these words about the empty space, it would not be surprising if he would have said:

“Empty space? – Hm. May I suggest another word? Could that other word be simply - ‘space’?”

Can you be comfortable with that word?”

Tom died Tuesday May 15th in the evening. He was out walking his dog Chico, a black King Poodle, by the ocean Skagerak nearby his cabin, which he had built with his own hands. He was found by some people who were fishing close by, alerted by the dog barking. He had severe injuries to his head, so he must have fallen, hitting his head against the rocks. A helicopter was called for, but he was already dead when they tried to help him back to life.

Tom often talked about the body and about breathing. “Follow the breathing” he said. “See it! It tells you where to go”. Inspiration and expiration is our entry to life, - and our last living function. Tom took his last breath of sea-air at the place he loved the most in the world, with

his beloved dog, hitting his head against something else he was a great admirer of, namely stones and rocks, - of which he even made tables - and his life was over. He would probably not have asked for any other or better way to leave this physical world.

But he left too early. Tom was still in the middle of so many projects, at 71, both in the north of Norway and in the south, in the Nordic countries and in the Baltic ones, in Europe, in Africa and in South America.

In the centre of the edge, that is where Tom Andersen moved, wherever he was.

Inside, but outside, looking for ways to find the unheard voices, ways to help us all go on. It is all about looking, he said, looking to move and get moved.

He moved people from all walks of life to come together, to listen to what others had to say and to collaborate. His humanistic and democratic vision was present in all of his projects and in all his attitudes. He had the capacity to 'act solidarity'. He said: "Kindness is not something we are, but we become kind by doing kind things."

Tom was a Norwegian maybe more famous all over the world than he was in Norway. When the Norwegian Family Therapy Association established a Page of Condolences on its website, this became overwhelmingly obvious. Hundreds of letters reflecting memories and gratitude for Tom were addressed to the page, many of them very poetic. Tom was honoured for his writings on "The Reflecting Team", translated into more than 10 languages, for his work as a teacher, a therapist, a supervisor and a councillor.

But more than anything, Tom was remembered for his voice, his eyes, his warm hands and for his presence.

To enter the universe of Tom Andersen is a journey into becoming more perceptive, more reflective and more present in oneself and in the encounter with The Other. With his mild, slow voice he brought us in contact with new sceneries, oscillating between reflection and observation, at large and into the details. Some times he was putting his points directly to us, at other times we might catch glimpses of the wisdom he was presenting. Like a Zen-master he directed us, by words, videos, music and pauses. A lot was never even said. Some times we were shaken, some times confused, some times we discovered new connections and understandings with or without using words to acknowledge.

Tom's personal way of being with others represents a new therapeutic perspective. In that sense he was an artist. Artists are often lonesome – and very vulnerable. Their way is never easy, but difficult and thorny. The artist must *see* and *perceive*, and train his or her abilities in this respect. Tom was able to see people in a way that made both parties moved by each other. He brought about encounters; his ability seemed simultaneously intuitive and conscious.

Eugene Epstein writes in The Page of Condolences:

"... I think about the long and intense discussions (at Harry Goolishian's house in Galveston) about therapy, ethics, philosophy, God and the world, Harry's chuckling at Tom's slow and carefully phrased dry snippets of irony and wit. ... He turned Harry's advisory "If you want therapy to proceed quickly, then you must slow down" into an art form, demonstrating that there are no limits to just how slow 'going slow' can be!"

We dream now of Tom and Harry and Gianfranco and all who have gone before us, - sharing conversations and drinks in another world, just as Tom used to dream of.

”Therapy is being with others”, Tom said, and further: ”We become what we become, when we express what we express.”

Through the many thoughts and words that we will continue to express about Tom, his impact on our development will continue to form our therapy, our clients and ourselves. The humanistic inspiration he has given us, will help us to go out there where we are needed.

Tom was the troubled wanderer, the torchbearer who raised the human heart high above the cold efficiency of diagnostic systems and reducing calculations, and showed us a path to move slowly, respectfully and with open hands to those who are in need.

Our thoughts go to Tom’s family, to his beloved wife Anne, their children Siri, Sjur, Simen and Sille, and to their grandchildren.

Let the final words show both Tom’s global awareness and concern, and his intense sensitivity for The Other, in the poem by his long time colleague Anna Margrete Flåm:

Living at 70 in 2006

Guantanamo

If you look into that word,
what do you see?

If that word had a face,
how would it look like?

If many faces...

If those faces could speak,
what sounds could you hear?

Would there be any voices to be heard?

If your body sensed these voices,
what could it tell?

Would it tell any words that you know?

If you look into these words,
what do you see?

Do you see any ways to go on?