



Inga: We were just talking about the heart-throb we felt, each of us in their own way, when we heard that such a radical therapy concept once existed. And how we thought it belonged in the past. How was it for you to discover FORT?

Jess: I lived in a communal project back then. I was soon dealing with emotions, insecurities and feedback. For example, the question of how our socialization affects us differently. Why are some people more confident than others? Someone who was visiting us often back then introduced a few methods from Radical Therapy: Fantasies, Stamps and Strokes. We tried it and I was thrilled. Not long after I travelled to Feuerland with a friend. Feuerland is a commune in Brandenburg, founded on the basis of Radical Therapy. We talked about dealing with conflicts with them. I kept looking and eventually came across the FORT site.

Inga: For me there was this igniting moment. I read Hogie Wyckoff's book *Solving Women's Problems Through Awareness, Action, and Contact* and thought: this has to be possible in practice. But the step from reading to real life seemed impossible to me. During the Start weekend you then learn what FORT really feels like. You feel how it works.

When I tell others about FORT, I give the example of when I want to take off my sweater in a FORT session, I announce a disturbance and say, "I want to raise a disturbance, I need to take off my sweater." And everyone waits until I have taken off my sweater. Of course, this sounds incredibly dogmatic. But I want to make clear that the rules applicable in such a group are so important because they provide a reliable framework in which it is possible to work with each other while knowing at the same time that this work is protected. How do you experience this?

Jess: Dealing with "disturbances" is interesting to me against a systemic background. Announcing a disturbance is a therapeutic intervention. It breaks certain patterns. The pattern of the "victim", that indirectly seeks attention but can't clearly say, "I need time." But instead gets attention by taking off their sweater. Announcing a disturbance breaks the pattern "I may not take up space." You show yourself. You take up space. That is okay. Then we continue.

There is this insecurity in the Start weekend: What can I do, what can't I do? There are so many rules and therefore also mistakes; the fear of mistakes. That feels strange. And for a while it prevents you from following strong impulses. Instead of following such impulses without hesitation, you learn to take an attention time. This decelerates a lot. Then you can see and feel: What is actually going on with me? What is this doing to me? I have this impulse ... What is there actually? Do I know this? And that creates space to dissolve these patterns.

When the triggers are too strong, it still happens that we activate old patterns. But within Radical Therapy, people learn to work with these impulses. This deceleration gives me a lot of security.

Inga: What do you know about the roots of Radical Therapy? How did it come into being?

Jess: In the '60s, Eric Berne developed Transactional Analysis. One of his students was Claude Steiner. Claude Steiner came into contact with different activists, among others Hogie Wyckhoff. Together they developed this concept of Radical Therapy – Hogie Wyckhoff introduced feminist social criticism. It was about offering therapy and putting it in a political context. There was professional guidance – a person that always led the group. At some point the guidance was also paid, simply because they wouldn't have been able to afford doing it otherwise. There were a lot of Radical Therapy groups that established themselves in the US back then. They also regularly published the magazine *The Radical Therapist*.

Gino from our Start collective is a big fan of Hogie Wyckhoff and wanted to find out more about her. At some point he got in contact with Claude Steiner. A few years ago, they had this idea to organize a last meeting with people from Berlin and the US context, to learn more about the roots of Radical Therapy.

One and a half years ago we then travelled to San Francisco as a small Radical Therapy group to meet the founders of Radical Therapy. Claude Steiner was already very sick then. He died in 2017.

In San Francisco we sat in on a few groups. Unlike us, they don't work with these rigid structures. There are a lot of similarities: Fantasies, Stamps, Strokes, etc. But in San Francisco there is a group led by the wonderful Beth Roy, for example. There are six women present and each just takes 20 minutes working time. They listen to one another; all can ask questions. There is no support like we practice it; everyone works sitting down. When someone leaves the group, Beth checks her waiting list and invites someone new.

We also met Darca Lee Nicholson, who drew the illustrations in Hogie Wyckoff's *Solving Women's Problems* and in many issues of *The Radical Therapist*.

Inga: With the Feminist Health Care Research Group we often meet up with activists and feminists of a different generation. It is again and again about appreciation. To show that you still want to learn this; that you now want to learn from people is a form of appreciation after all. It is also a form of responsibility and work, to make this a part of my life now. Now this generation is still here. I want to ask you about this collective memory gap. How did FORT come here from the US? How did it change here?

Jess: A person named Gail Pheterson got in touch with Radical Therapy back then and was also active in the co-counseling movement. She got these two approaches together that didn't have anything to do with one another back then. Gail Pheterson travelled to the Netherlands and was in contact with feminists to whom she passed these methods on; to work with emotions – in a political context. It was about creating spaces of support for activists. As far as I know, she held three one-week training sessions for about 90 feminists in the Netherlands. They then continued to work in groups, and soon after, the first men's\* groups established themselves, who adapted this to their needs. Gail stayed in the Netherlands for a while longer and also worked on other topics, e.g., racism, then went to Paris.

Inga: Did she organise the first "Whore conferences" in the Netherlands?

Jess: She did a lot in the field of rights of prostitutes and sex workers. We searched for her. Gino from our Start collective tracked her down and met Gail. She was enthusiastic. She said she didn't even know that this practice was still alive and had made it to Germany. A lot of excitement on many sides!

## A conversation with Jess Ward



News and Goods Each 90 Sec.

I think that many who come to a FORT group for the first time don't know what it means to have such a safe space. There I am not confronted with certain issues that I know from male-socialized people. A heterosexual person isn't confronted with certain topics and scripts there, which is again different for lesbians.

To me it is very much about a safe space, about certain discrimination active in society not happening there. This means not having to explain to men what is sexist. I am rid of this obligation and can work on what empowers me. In order to then go back outside and encounter this sexism and have more room to manoeuvre.

The rules in FORT and in MRT differ slightly. They are based on certain assumptions on gender specific socialization. For some these assumptions still apply in part, for others they don't or they don't identify with this notion of woman\*hood for example. They require a different kind of safe space because in a FORT framework they could encounter transphobia.

With FORT the assumption is, generally speaking, that female-socialized people have troubles taking space for themselves. They have a hard time being in conflict. They generally have a hard time expressing moroseness and tension, or hearing that they triggered something. Many of the interventions in FORT go towards: Take yourself seriously. Take space. It is okay to trigger something. And to pause there.

In the Radical Therapy groups for men\*, something else is in the foreground. In male-socialized groups, such is the assumption, conflict often leads to breaking contact. In MRT, the main focus lies on staying in contact. Expressing desires in order to stay in contact; expressing desires in a relationship. Heterosexual men, cis men, often believe: I only get affection and tenderness from female-socialized people that I also have a sexual relationship with. MRT is also about this physical contact, about learning that this desire for being close can be shared with different people. The physical contact also plays a role in FORT, but MRT focusses more strongly on it.

When we did the first (or the first in years) queer instruction, we took all these assumptions apart and asked: How do we do this? In queer instructions we can't assume that there is this one gender specific socialization. Some will bring this and others that with them. So what do we want to pass on and how? Here we are still in the process. In the summer we will start a second queer group.

Aktionsposter FORT  
Feminist Health Care  
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Illustrations Joris Bas Backer 2018

Featured on the drawing:  
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Jess Ward was a member of the  
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2 min  
I need an  
attention time



At the same time, I perceive it as a great injustice that women\* are so strongly affected there.

Maybe I wouldn't even have decided for a gender specific group, particularly because of the exclusions of the category gender. Do I even want to make the woman\*ness so strong? But in the group, I notice that it is a very important part of the work. How do you see this?

Jess: It is in any case a turning point. With FORT in Berlin we are lucky to have a lot of people that are interested in Radical Therapy. We can start FORT groups, we can start MRT groups, there are queer groups. In the countryside there aren't that many people.