

## **ART AS A THERAPY AND A COMMUNICATION METHOD THE DIALOGICAL SELF**

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### ABSTRACT

It will be our concern to link the concept of hermeneutics to the dialogic process of self-discovery. The role art plays in people's life span. We shall focus on the connection between two discourses: the discourse of the text, the work of art, and the discourse of interpretation and the kind of worlds they disclose. The hermeneutical idea of subjectivity as a dialectic between the self and mediated social meanings will be pointed out as well as an ethic of the word that language opens up. We shall regard the self-understanding of man, his self-development, dependent on this dimension of language as a disclosure of possibility. It is by an understanding of the worlds, opened by language and its symbols that we may arrive at a better understanding of ourselves as human beings. Art is the most important human expression; Hermeneutics is an instrument of self-interpretation and self-evaluation that crosses the dialogical process; which means it is an instrument to psychology as a subjective science.

KEYWORDS: human, symbol, art, psychology, hermeneutics, therapy, communication, words, dialogue, narratives.

Art is a human expression which enable us to communicate through symbols. And as Carl Jung said: our life is made of symbols. It is important to remember that each symbol has a double function: an archeological one and a teleological one. The first leads us into our past and the second shows us the future. Why does this happen ?

Because each symbol asks to be interpreted. So, an hermeneutical method is required to achieve the key message of any symbol.

Hermeneutics allows us to go deeper into a dialogical relationship between therapist and patient. Why? Because to interpret is to understand, is to evaluate and to acknowledge what is really important to us, meaningful to our own lives. Facing any work of art we are invited to disclosure it, to guess its message, to imagine its author and by doing so we are speaking about ourselves, our own fears and desires, our own problems and anxieties, our dreams and nightmares.

Whenever the patient dialogues with a piece of art he is discovering a new world and a new world of his own as well. The self becomes part of the hermeneutical process; a meaning-making process; a self-interpretation and evaluation process. A meaning making process has started...as well as a self-development.

Being so, patients are invited to give their meaning to each and every other's people inner words. This is an active role, for they do not only receive information about the piece of art in question but also make an attempt to get out of their own words and establish a connection with other people's worlds. This is the true meaning of communication itself: sharing secrets.

As far as books are concerned, stories reveal the most deep feelings, dilemmas, sensations and fears human kind goes throughout the centuries. Therefore, stories tell a lot about ourselves, our conflicts, our procedures, our ideas. They are like a mirror we can look at and see more than we expected. Why ? Because one can identified himself with the character, with its own problems and dreams and so on in such a way that one can find out a solution for its own trouble or question one own values and moral system.

Anyway, stories are really usefull in terms of " put yourself into other people shoes"!

And if we can do that we can learn more about the others and about ourselves. We can improve our moral development.

For instance, let us speak about *Alice in Wonderland* of Lewis Carroll. Alice alone is a character which invites us to hate or love. Either I like changes, to change the world and make it my way or I do hate things up side down and I do not like strange surprises to cross my way. Alice alone is a pretext to speak and to interpret oneself: likes and dislikes and specially why is this being so?

Another example is the magnificent dialogue between Alice and the caterpillar.

Identity is put in question for Alice does not know any more who she is; she is changing all the time. What about ourselves in our life; how many changes, body changes ? values changes ? What has changed my life ? Choices, people ? Trips, places ? Books, films ?

How can a painting of Magritte change our life completely ?

How can a film like Patch Adams change my values ? my priorities ?

How can a musician like Beethoven make me feel the rain ?

Everyone has a beautiful garden; all you have got to do is to find the right one to open your own gates. To do so, we need to ask ourselves what is art; What is my definition of art ? Is it a form, a behaviour, a frame of mind ? What ? a conversation ? a story of somebody's life ?

What are the things that make me happy ? The little precious things that make me feel enthusiastic about ?

Of course these questions are particularly important because they have to do with another major concept, which is misunderstood most of the times, that is "Ethics".

Ethics is another name for conviction, my beliefs, what contributes to my fulfilment, my happiness. But ethics is also another way to put our own moral in question, hermeneutically speaking! In a way ethics becomes hermeneutics of moral itself! Therefore, if we are aware of this, we know that through art we can put our world and other's people world's in question and have the extraordinary desire to change our world and someone's else world as well!

Art is a means to exorcise my thoughts, my fears and my dreams, my prejudices, my crazy ideas...So, art is therapy for my own equilibrium, for my contradictions, for my insecurity. In this sense art is, metaphorically speaking, a mask I can put on and put off whenever I please; whenever I need.

Art is myself as another. Art is a unified plural. Art is a way to express myself in a plural form. Art enables to go deeper in our search of diagnosis; in our search of identity; in our search of caring. Why? Because we do want to reach other people, we do want to share our happiness; we do want to love somebody and we do want to reach life and its precious treasures. This is our destiny.

Art becomes a campus when I sail overseas; dangerously into the unknown. Hermeneutics is the method to go deeper into the self hidden in our own shelves allowing our spiritual development.

I use to say that in art therapy we awake up memories. We help to develop a dialogical self. We help people to build their own mandala; that magic circle which makes a connection between the inner self with the cosmos forces. To be able to do this, the patient travels into a dreamy voyage and connects his own memories and desires and thus begins the mandala way and his own path.

My experience in this field is that the two procedures: oniric imagination and the built of mandalas are a meaning-making process in which hermeneutics and ethics are involved as well as imagination and creativity.

Of course the knowledge of symbols is required to interpret the cryptic messages that cross one's mind. So, hermeneutics makes possible another insight, an exchange of experiences; an open space for other dialogues in a different language.

Psychology, as the science of subjectivity, has to deal with this feature of language and has to understand that is by an understanding of the worlds, actual and possible, opened by language, that we may arrive at a better understanding of ourselves.

According to Ricoeur, as in *Oneself as the Other*, as long as we interpret we are doing our own self-interpretation. It is as close as this. So, as long as we evaluate we are just proceeding to our own self evaluation as well. It is an hermeneutical circle but arch as well because we achieve to bridge our world of conflicts, desires, feelings with the other people's worlds. And words are the main tool.

We live and die for words! Notice the film, the Classic Casablanca- listen: "Play it again Sam!", remembers Ingrid Bergman who insists with the player: "Sing it one more time, just one more time!": Words, words, words! And yet, what Ingrid Bergman does is to ask herself questions as long "as time goes by"! Why? Because, explains Gadamer, "a person who thinks must ask himself questions" (Gadamer, 1989, p.375) and more than that, "questioning opens up possibilities of meaning" (Gadamer, 1989, p.375). As a conclusion we could say with Gadamer that "to understand a question means to ask it. To understand meaning is to understand it as the answer to a question" (Gadamer, 1989, p.375). Of course this is, in fact, the structure of an hermeneutical experience.

Words are an empire; an absolute key to the most precious treasures: "Open up Sesame!". And yet, the most precious treasure is knowledge, wisdom; this is the golden fruit of the Hesperides garden." (Gadamer, 1989, p.377).

- But, can we grab it? Can we anticipate answers?

However, to reach an understanding in a dialogue is a matter of metamorphosis in which we do not remain what we were, we became another self and sometimes what really arises it's a kind of "hermeneutical conversation" as Gadamer refers to when he speaks about the interpreter (Gadamer, 1989, p.388). I interpret myself as another being which has arise during the phenomenon called "hermeneutical" because I became aware, conscious of understanding! That is why Gadamer makes this statement "Understanding occurs in interpreting" (Gadamer, 1989, p.389). And to interpret is to explain what has not yet been said.

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Gadamer insists on the fact that "interpretation always involves a relation to the question that is asked of the interpreter. To understand a text means to understand this question" (Gadamer, 1989, p.370). The philosopher calls it the *horizon of the question*, so a person who wants to understand must question what "**lies**" behind what is said!

Perhaps all mankind's History is a dialogue of masks. Most of the speeches are written to convince, to persuade, to lead millions of people to do whatever one man or woman wants them to be doing! But this implies, confirms Gadamer, "that its meaning necessarily exceeds what is said in it" (Gadamer, 1989, p.370).

People follow masks and do not argue! People follow fake hearts and souls without a discussion. Why ? Is the power of language so great ? Ultimately people follow a question! Like Gadamer shows us, we come face to face to “ the openness of the question”(Gadamer,1989,p.374), and therefore the meaning of what is being said is understood as an answer to our own questioning! Gadamer calls it “ the fusion of horizons”(Gadamer,1989,p.374).

The interpretation of another speaker and his speech, of a writer and his text, is just a special aspect of the progress of human life as a whole. We can even say that Plato was right in saying that thinking is at best a dialogue with oneself. An hermeneutical way.

A Ricoeur’s way. Of course, this way goes beyond “ the fusion of horizons” of Gadamer because it calls for a third world one may disclosure and intercept from the fusion of two interpretations. As Ricoeur explains it ( dialogue with Gadamer), there is not so much a conflict between interpretations as a movement of many interpretations, a movement between phases of understanding, explanation and phases of appropriation.

Why is that?

Ricoeur explains it when he does speak about the *pre-narrative quality of human experience*. Thanks to it, we have the right to speak of life as an activity and a desire in search of a narrative. So, we learn that fiction, particularly narrative fiction, is a dimension of the understanding self. That is why we can say altogether with Ricoeur and Aristotle that a life examined is a life narrated.

The structure of narrativity demonstrates that it is by trying to put order on our past, by retelling and recounting what has been, that we acquire an identity. Therefore, the retrospective aspect of narration is linked to the prospective horizon of future.

Anyway we are dealing with subjectivity. And there is an hermeneutical idea of subjectivity as a dialectic between the self and mediated social meanings, wich has a deep moral and political implication. It shows, according to Ricoeur, that there is a *ethic of the word*. We shall say that there is a new concept of language as an hermeneutical/ethical meaning-making process.

Whenever we dialogue, we not only dialogue with other people, but also dialogue with the several elements Mother Earth possess! We reflect them , one by one! Many times in our lives we became one of the elements. We are icy, speaking frozen words, meaningless...We are fire when we fall in love. We are trees when we want to raise a family and have some roots for a change. We are stones when we decide to build something...we print those types of energy upon the words we choose to speak up!

We choose light words when we feel like birds going with the wind! We choose heavy words when our heart is full of anger and bitter. We choose sweet words when we feel generous and happy with ourselves.

It was easy if it were so simple as that! However, let alone the masks, every word has a double face, just like a coin! We can be all that we have mentioned before, the point is with what purpose?

Do we really mean it?

Do we think before we speak ?  
Do we feel what is being spoken ?  
What is in charge here ? Our own will? Our ability of reasoning ? our capacity to be emotional ?  
How do we choose what we are going to say next ?  
How do words pull out other words ?  
Why is this chain so powerful to unchain us or to frame us ? Why ? Because of the LAW!

Our freedom has to do with the laws we have. Rights and Duties of the citizens. Human`s Rights Declaration. And those are clearly made of words; words that we interpret; we judge, we connect, we charge, we absolve, we condemn and so on...

All our History as human beings is a trial, a trial made of words:

- Accusations " She`s a Witch! "
- "He is a false prophet!"
- "He calls himself the son of God!"

So we are asked to remember this: "words will set you free!"

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