

***A meeting with oneself:***  
***videotherapy in counselling***

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**Abstract**

Video and phototherapy represent new tools of intervention in psychology, and find their application in diverse contexts: therapy, counselling and art-therapy. In this paper the author analyses and describes these methods as theoretical and practical evolution of the foundations and techniques of Gestalt Psychotherapy. The work with images (whether static or moving) represents a privileged way in to someone's narratives, and it allows for a direct encounter with one's personal image. Such confrontation gives rise to a dialogue between the person and the self/image (represented in the photo or video), which facilitates the development of one's own personal resources. The article includes the different uses of these techniques and it focuses, predominantly, on two different applications: the video-drama and the photo-drama.

**Key words:** Gestalt psychotherapy, videotherapy, phototherapy, photodrama, storytelling

*...I have long meditated on this meeting, which I haven't told anyone about. I think I have found its key. The meeting was real, but the other talked to me in a dream and could thus forget me; I spoke to him in wakefulness and that is why it still haunts me. The other dreamt of me, but didn't dream rigorously. J. L. Borges*

**1. Gestalt therapy: some principles and techniques**

«The most important and interesting quality of a form lies in its dynamics, the its impelling need that drives it to open and complete itself. Everyday we experiment with this dynamics. Sometimes the best name we could give to an incomplete form is to simply call it an uncompleted situation» (Perls, 1969, p. 131).

Fritz Perls, starting from studies on the psychology of the form, elaborated a psychodynamic theory where the importance lies in the experience of the subject, the point of view of the perceiver. In this view reality is no longer objective, rather the result of an active operation by the perceiver; thus, focus and subject of study is the relation existing between reality as the individual perceives it, and the reactions of the environment in which the person is included.. If between someone's perceptive world and environment there rises a discrepancy in intentions, motivations, personal drives and environmental responses, a conflict rises, a maladjustment which requires an intervention. Gestalt considers someone's experience as a succession of figure-background relations, where the specific needs of the moment rise against the context and then once satisfied vanish again, to be substituted by other configurations. Within this frame, the psychic conflict is born the moment when the need is not satisfied, and therefore the Gestalt is not completed. Wellbeing instead is the fruit of someone's awareness of the continuous process of building-up, dissolution and rearrangement of the form which one's existence is subject to, depending on the context where it expresses itself, and the different configurations which the latter takes on in different situations.

On the basis of these principles, Gestalt Therapy elaborated a new theory of neurosis, starting from the existing relation between the individual and his environment. In the frame of this relation the individual needs

a continuous modification of the adaptation techniques he possesses, in order to survive and satisfy his needs. In order to do this, he should avoid every kind of stiffening, so as to escape neurosis.

The contact zone between an organism and its environment produces an interaction, which Gestalt defines as *self function*. In this sense, it is impossible to refer to the individual outside of his interaction with the environment.

Gestalt therapy is an existential phenomenological therapy; thus its praxis cannot do without operating in a process aimed at the development of *responsibility*, *consciousness* and *presence*. To this aim, Gestalt has developed diverse tools of intervention, which are now used also in other therapy modes.

It is important to underline that such techniques and exercises are used in Gestalt not as therapy tools meant only for people suffering from psychic disorders; they cannot be compared to psychotherapeutical practices aimed at treating symptoms and psychological conditions (together with drugs and other medical remedies). The techniques used in Gestalt are also meant for the normal functioning of the person.

The techniques can be a useful tool of intervention but cannot substitute the "I-You" of the therapeutical relationship.

Some of the best known techniques are:

- **Empty chair (or hot chair)**

This technique springs from psychodrama: the person lives the experience of impersonating another person or role and improvising a dialogue with a significant character or with one's own psychic parts, which have been separated or denied. These separated parts are sometimes projections, but more often inner images (imago); even without taking the form of real projections, they sustain and shape the relation of the patient with the environment. Pushing this process to the extreme, by making these "imagos" present on an empty chair, this technique tends to establish a contact and promote a dialogue among different parts. This direct, explicit and responsible communication is possible thanks to imaginative dramatization.

- **Amplification**

Someone is simply asked to accentuate what one is already doing, following the principle of organismic self-regulation, according to which an unbalance in one sense tends to be compensated in the other. If a person is not in contact with that specific experience, or with that part of oneself, the amplification of a gesture, a sound, a sentence and so on, allows the contact with the emotional unaware life enclosed in that behaviour.

- **Reversal of the relation figure/background**

It is the application of the Gestaltic dynamism figure/background; with the aid of imagination we explore the possibility of experiences different from the usual ones. It is also useful to identify the dynamic polarities of one's personality and to promote their meeting (e.g. using the "empty chair") and possible integration (Simkin, 1978).

- **Completing unfinished Gestalts**

Gestalt Psychotherapy focuses on what is lacking in the experience of the self: it is important to suggest modes which can favour the re-integration of conscience in the part that's missing, omitted, denied or blocked. Through the exploration of the omitted experience, using imagination or *role playing*, the person becomes able to understand what is lacking in them or the situation they are living. This mode of intervention is at the basis of the process which allows to go from the superficial desire (apparent as it is insatiable) to the denied "real need". In a similar way we can contact the "underlying" emotion, hidden by a spreading emotional life, "fixed" or arbitrary.

- **Self Responsabilization**

It is a mode of intervention which facilitates the taking on of responsibility for one's own existence, through the experimentation of an attitude which highlights the right and the possibilities of choice available to the individual in the moment when he stops giving to others the responsibility for his own actions. The existential situations which can be expressed verbally as a must, are rearranged in formulations which transform "I must..." to "I choose...". The verbal formulation is the support for the emotional life promoted by the therapeutical experience.

#### · **Emotional bridge**

By this introspective technique the person keeps the attention steady on one emotion believed to be important to explore, and lets the images of memories connected to that emotion flow. It allows to "relocate" projections, recapturing the original character to whom a certain emotion was addressed, before being directed to something or someone else.

#### · **Re-deciding one's life script**

Introspection can lead to determine that we are performing a kind of choices, in relationships or profession or other, in a more or less recurrent and stereotyped way, which lead to no good (the classical example is that of the person who always finds the wrong partner or who always ends up quarrelling with the boss). In these situations we are facing a script which is no longer in contact with the evolution of existence, but still answers to archaic decisions taken when a certain state of need and immaturity made them necessary for our physical and emotional survival. The technique entails: initially the identification of the emotional experience felt as inadequate (excessive in intensity, in duration) which colours the problematic situation; a progressive regression, through the technique of the "emotional bridge", to the most ancient memory connected to the appearance of the event; separation of the state of the I in Parent/Adult/Child; and finally – in the frame of an imaginative re-acting of the archaic situation – allowing the patient to review the existential decision taken at the time but now re-discussable with the tools of the Adult, as he "relives" that experience.

#### · **Re-viewing one's life script**

It is possible to redefine one's life script not only via a verbal technique, but also through the use of images which help remembering, re-describing, re-acting. The images can be photos, drawings, or videos, films; in any case they can be a very effective means. Seeing my image in fact allows me to immediately focus something which normally is in the background and to be more aware and responsible for my own actions. Starting from this technique, we can talk about video or photo-therapy: in a certain sense video- and photo-therapy are therapy tools which proceed parallel to the method of intervention, the vision of the world and the Gestalt application in the therapy relation. And at the same time they also become tools in themselves.

From a theoretical point of view, the method of video and photo-therapy rests on the phenomenological and existential asset of Gestalt, but in the application it increases the typical Gestaltic modes of intervention to amplify them, almost to twist them, reaching a modulation of therapeutical relations which is totally original.

What more do these techniques allow? They allow for a polarity which other means didn't allow for: the polarity between the becoming and the eternal present. The work with images gives the possibility to work with the representation of the present in the here and now of Gestalt. The time when the moment becomes a representation has nothing more to do with the becoming in time, it becomes like a dream or a memory. Video and photo add the representation of the subject allowing his I in becoming to play with the polarities of the eternally present Me.

What more the work with images can still give us compared to other methods, is the work with the bodily traits and with what any bodily trait hosts.

The very theatre performance is a tool, a tool of the epoch, of different epochs, used in various ways; but cinema and television are tools with a brief history, extremely lived today. Just like theatre has been widely included in the therapeutical practice (of psychodrama and dramatherapy), thanks to its resources (of representation, of metaphorical play, intervention on the life script, on beliefs, on narrative identity), why not use an all the same efficient and topical means, such as the video cinematographic language?

## 2. Videotherapy

Videotherapy, in the view I propose, is the peek of a process of growth which carries and supports the person in the meeting with and in the *re-vision* of himself. Videotherapy gives rise to an interaction of the *I* with the *Me*: the image becomes the interlocutor of the subject in a process of facilitation of the meeting with oneself.

It is important to distinguish it from filmed therapy, from a filmed experience or from group discussions following the viewing of a film (film-therapy). The interaction with the video tool is different, and the images reveal the way one relates to oneself and the world.

It also differs from looking at oneself in the mirror, especially with regards to self-perceptive sensations: by looking in the mirror these are directly connected to the image I see (when I move my hand I perceive the physical sensation of the hand moving and, at the same time, I see its image); while in videotherapy there is a discrepancy between physical sensations and the image I observe: the videotherapeutical work in fact develops once the image has become autonomous and it facilitates a confrontational operation with oneself. This is possible thanks to a process of distance/disidentification with the image itself.

The image becomes “autonomous”, somehow detached from the characteristics confirming one’s sense of identity, the moment when the client starts noticing *discrepancies*:

1. time ones, due to the time difference between the moment of shooting and the moment of viewing the recorded material;
2. between the self mental image and the self visible image and one’s conduct<sup>[1]</sup> in the recording (what I can recognize and what amazes me of the self I see acting on the screen; what is that me doing, there on the screen, which I can see and hear and recognize as my own);

### · Time discrepancy

In the recorded videoconfrontation there is a *time discrepancy* which lays the foundations for the birth of a dialogue in which the client and the image-self, mobilize personal resources and self-support abilities, exchange observations and advice. This polarization is carried out by introducing, next to the development of the psychotherapeutical group, a work of image shooting: events are recorded, which are left to be “deposited” and confronted with the day after (or a few minutes later). Later the work of videotherapy proper starts and it is based on re-seeing what happened earlier. There is a re-seeing, in the sense of seeing oneself again, and a re-seeing in the sense of re-examining and correcting oneself. In this phase, the group becomes the spectator; beside observing, as it happens at the cinema or at the theatre for instance, it interacts with what is happening on the screen or on the stage. The client in his turn, finds himself inserted in a paradoxical role play: he is author of the story he is telling the group and, at the same time, he is subject of the therapeutical work about him, he is actor and director of the film and finally an audience to himself.

This last aspect is particularly important. Lingering over the fact of being an audience to himself means lingering over observing and reflecting on what we put into play every time we introduce ourselves to others: whether we are more or less fluid, constructed or natural; what we choose to show of ourselves; which expressions we select, which tone or inflection in the voice we use, depending on the public we are facing. More or less consciously, we operate an activity of monitoring ourselves in relation to others and this makes us contemporarily actors and audience of the social performance we give life to.

Lingering over the “choice” which is behind every act of presentation means highlighting the importance of the concept of “responsibility”, dear to Gestalt Therapy. In the work with videotherapy, the projected image becomes the evident and readable recording of the choices I make every moment, of the responsibility of being me in the world: I choose to come in relation with others, to be visible, to enter the dialogue, to express something, whether it be word silence or gesture. Even the moment I am not expressing, I am still expressing something. It is impossible not to express: even all that is void, the nothingness, once it is made visible it is nonetheless an expression – of void, of nothingness –, as it is part of a relation and belongs to a dialogue. Here the concept of responsibility comes into play: I cannot not be in relation with the world, with others, with objects, with myself.

The phase of re-seeing comprises a change in the setting: from the group circle there is a shift to a semicircle in front of a TV set. This shift in attention from the *physical subject* to the *image subject* allows the client to have that intimately elastic space between the distance and the identification which all those who watch films know very well about; to all this we add the active confrontation with the projected episode.

The therapist stands between the TV set and the group; he holds a remote control which is used to go back and forth with the images. His function is that of filtering the dialogue which comes to creation between the person and the projected image, focusing on a trail in his conduct. It is possible to go back, go forward, ask for what is the effect of seeing and re-seeing oneself again, how the sense of the heard or reheard words changes. The videotherapist has the task of favouring the play of infinite tales. This does not only mean moving about in a fantasy narrative relativism, rather conducting the operations of narrative construction on a field marked by shadings of reality (among the various dynamisms figure-background), as if every image was a dynamic field where the movements figure-background operate. Here lies the ability of the videotherapist.

The client, as he sees himself, can assume the responsibility to be the person he sees on the screen or in any case accept to have been that person. This also means: it is possible for me to take on the responsibility that the *image me* couldn't/wouldn't take on.

Videotherapy can be considered in this case as an evolution of psychodrama. In psychodrama the dramatization offers occasions for insight which are exhausted the moment they are produced<sup>[2]</sup>; in videotherapy, the moment we record the segments of the patient's behaviour (e.g. filming a psychodramatic action or something else), we can work on the life script. The latter becomes some sort of drama-film in which I can see and re-see and review myself, by inserting changes and new possibilities. I can change the sign to a behaviour, a gesture or a tale which has already been seen and heard, and create something new never seen or heard before: a new story which is born from a creative re-elaboration performed by the person involved. The work does not simply entail giving importance to those elements which have been denied, removed, placed in the background by the person, as incoherent with the official story he tells about his existence. The re-opening of the awareness of this incoherent, forgotten, unseen elements, somehow allows to rewrite one's life script; to come into contact with those possibilities which I continually deny to myself, thinking they have been denied to me, and which I repeatedly don't see in my present. The individual work lies in opening narrative possibilities.

After some time it can happen that we feel a liking for our own image, the same one which months earlier had caused unpleasant sensations in us. The deposited image of me somehow decants and allows my re-seeing myself to be that of a person who is more expert in life and therefore able of greater tenderness: the process of growth leads to acceptance and forgiveness, of oneself and of others.

### · Discrepancy of images

The duty of the therapist is that of facilitating the emergence of such discrepancies through operations of *slow motion*. Such operations allow the person to notice unconscious micro-expressions which are hidden within one's habitual expressive patterns and which are difficult for him to notice as they are incoherent with the mental image he has of himself.

In this way, the "official" sequences of the image-subject's behaviour recorded in the audiovisual aid, are twisted<sup>[3]</sup> and give rise to a "self narration". This self narration is based on physiognomic, phonetic or behavioural details functioning as *narrative subtext*, which can be worked with therapeutically with the aim of promoting the emotional and cognitive reorganization of the client's life script. The self image takes on its own narrative life and thus evokes differences and promotes the possibility for the person who produced it to confront it. For this to happen, it is in any case necessary to create a situation in which the image is lived by the client as a part of himself and, at the same time, bearing diversity; that is, a situation in which a dialogue meeting with the recorded image of himself is possible.<sup>[4]</sup> The possibility for the new opens up, where in the initial moment what I live as void and confusion comes up. This void is the space created by the *discrepancy*, that is by the distance between the *I-spectator* and the *me-image*; this distance becomes similar to what Perls meant by *fertile void*, however transposed from the area of awareness to that of *interaction*. It is the difference between the myself of one minute ago proposed by the video and that of now: "it's not myself...or better, it is not me now, but certainly it was me".

All discrepancies between the "mental" image we have of ourselves and the "real" image we see in the video are important. If the image was completely extraneous ("it is not me"), we wouldn't recognize ourselves and

the work would have no therapeutical effect. What crates the dialogical therapeutical possibility is the similarity which hosts diversities, as it allows to take into consideration different existential possibilities, once they are accepted. Every time we take on something new, we also put in motion something fixed (beliefs, stereotypes, life scripts...) and this makes it easier for us, as it makes the news somehow less extraneous, less "hostile". By accepting the contact with what I *was/believed I was, am/could be*, by playing with the different possibilities for existence, new emotional/cognitive opportunities for leading one's life rise up.

#### · **Work with the life script**

Videotherapy works both with the *life script*, at the level of video-relational interaction, and with the *postural script*<sup>[5]</sup> at the level of video-bodily experience interaction.

Even if within the psychotherapeutical setting we work with the life script, there is the further possibility to transform the latter in a staging proper. This staging comes from the person's life, more or less thanks to a process of improvisation (on the one hand we have a kind of "operating" staging, in which actions are improvised during takes and give rise to an in progress script; on the other, we have the possibility to write the script before the takes). In any case, videotherapy allows to see and review the script. The segments, the takes, the scenes, the sequences can be edited, cut and re-edited, giving access to a continuous observation, analysis ad experimentation of new modes of conduct, both individual and relational.

The work with the postural script and with the parts of the face offers the possibility to contemporarily work on primary learning. The person's expressions and attitudes represent the fruit of an emotional learning: working with the viewing of one's face by staring at its traits from different filming angles means working with that learning the face reveals; it can make evident something familiar, which with time has become a way of communication, a language shared in an intimate circle. If the pupil is enlarged or restricted is an innate response to the quantity of light which hits it, but the way of frowning one's eyebrows, beyond being an innate response, can also host something learned. The face hosts the relational-emotional ways of a person. By looking at oneself one regains memories contained in the memory of the bodily experience. Maybe a certain expression was born as a functional protection, and it could no longer be needed; in any case, it is impossible to work with one's image without working with the environment where it was created.

Important in the work with videotherapy is also the direct and explicit interaction created with the eye of the videocamera. The latter is an integral part of the therapeutical situation as it represents an extension of the eye of the person shooting;<sup>[6]</sup> it represents a partner who has the possibility to make his voice heard. "you who are filming, what are you looking at of the person, what strikes you of her?" With this interlocutor the client can weave a dialogue, by confronting another point of view.

If in a psychotherapy session, the therapist verbally puts some details in the foreplay (for example by drawing the attention to a word, a gesture or a sensation), during the videotherapeutical work this result is reached through the images: the therapist selects the images and creates a relation mediated by film takes.

### **3. Methods of intervention in gestaltic videotherapy**

The video aid can be used with different individual or group methods, in a therapeutical or counselling context. These methods find their direct origin in the techniques dealt with in the introduction to the present article. Every intervention in videotherapy in fact modulates through operations of amplification, reversal of the relation figure-background, completion of open *Gestalts* and remodulation of one's life script, with the aim of promoting self-Responsabilization for one's existence. Let's see in detail how the video techniques are integrated in the traditional techniques of gestaltic psychotherapy.

1. *The videoconfrontation and the technique of the empty chair*: the videoconfrontation can be *live* or *recorded*. In both methods the presence of a videocamera is needed (it could even be two or more) and of a TV set. The client positions himself inside the field of the videocamera and the therapist (sometimes an external operator) films what is happening. In the case of a live confrontation, the client is given the possibility to see himself during the time of recording, either through the camera display or through a TV set connected to the camera. In the recorded confrontation, the client sees himself again after the shooting (sometimes after few minutes, other times after longer). In the moment of the confrontation the attention can focus on different aspects: in some cases it is drawn on a specific behaviour or action of

the client which the videotherapist wants to underline (e.g., a behaviour the client performs without being aware of it); in other cases, the therapist can make beforehand a selection of images that he wants to show to the person in a secondary moment. Whichever aspect one focuses on, the therapeutical efficacy of this method lies in the polarization created, favoured by the discrepancy both between the memory of the experience and what the video shows (time discrepancy), and between the mental image that the person has of himself and the image of his own behaviour visible in the recording (image discrepancy). The connections with the technique of the empty chair conceived by Perls are evident. In fact if the empty chair is born as a possibility to create a dialogue with one part of the self or with the non present other than the self, in an alternation of identifications and projections, the use of the video aid allows to make this polarity ever more evident. The difference lies in the fact that in videotherapy the projection is not something which only happens at a given moment inside the person, in his imagination, but it's something that has acquired objective consistency, it exists outside of him, it moves on the screen. Instead of a chair, there is a screen which continues to place the person in front of the repeating of his script, of his sentences, intonations and expressions until when he comes to terms with them, he takes back what he threw away and he recognizes something different emerging from his consciousness.

2. *Audiovisual Counselling*: it is used within situations of structured groups (work, school, small communities). The intervention focuses on the metaphor of the building and realization of an audiovisual aid. The creative process becomes the artistic interface which allows to elaborate the group dynamics, the interaction, the acquisition of relational skills functional to the attainment of a common goal. The plot and the dramatization become metaphor for the life script of the participants; the construction of the characters becomes a possibility to work on the life of the character, with connections to the internal dynamics of the participants, without touching them directly. The phase of the actual realization (production and post-production) offers wide possibilities in the here and now of the creative process for a development of social, relational and collaborative skills (Rossi et al., 2003)

3. *Filmtherapy*: in this case the mode of intervention focuses on the use of some films, or film sequences, to be shown. It can happen both in the context of a group and in an individual context. The therapist chooses the film, or as above said some sequences, which he believes could be significant in the work he is doing. It is often used within institutions such as the school, for instance, especially for prevention with didactic aims. It is important that at the end of the viewing, there is a discussion of what has been seen so as to allow the emergence of opinions, sensations and emotions. In a therapeutical situation, single film images can be inserted, within the process, in relation to a single clinical case, using filmtherapy as an instrument of crystallization for the therapeutical contents, difficult to be conveyed in a conventional therapeutical context (Mastronardi, 2005).

4. *Biographical path*: images that can evoke in the subject his own story (or even abstract images) give rise to an evocation of emotions and episodes of life. In a first phase, the subject is interviewed in front of the videocamera on his emotional process. Later, the significant images chosen by him are shown and "edited" in a sequence in front of the group. The editing of a photo sequence in a "biographical" story is then shown to the author of the story by the members of the group. All this is filmed. At the end of the performance, the author of the story enters a videoconfrontation phase with the recorded material. The videoconfrontation focuses on a dialogue with himself before the experience and with the parts of his story represented by the group (Rossi, 2004, vol.3).

5. *Psycho-videoclip*: it is normally realized in group, in a space where there is a fixed videocamera which limits the visual space in which the shooting happens. Within this space, the components of the group improvise a small play, based on a rather flexible structure created in advance. In this kind of intervention, it is important for the therapist to remain out of the shooting area. After the recording of the plays, the group gathers to see the films and to give feedback on what has happened. Differently from the videoconfrontation, where what is happening is directed to the image of the self, in the psycho-videoclip it is the action and interaction of the participants which is in the foreplay. A variation to this kind of technique is the psycho-videoclip 1-2-3 in which the client realizes three sequences of images. In the first sequence he introduces himself to his own image which is being filmed by the video. This first phase represents an important metaphor of the person alone in his own space, in absence of the other. In the next sequence, the client chooses a second person who will be given orders to by the client himself. This second person will not take part in the scene if not asked by the client. The last sequence requires the choice by the client of two or more people (at least one therapist and another client). The possibilities for interaction are numberless: symbiosis, competition, triangulation (Giusti, 1995).

6. *Videocreations*: the participants are invited to shoot a video of their own room and house. It is possible during to shooting to comment upon what the videocamera films. In order to carry out this type of work, it is necessary to give the videocamera to the patients so that they might take it home and use it. Precise methods of transportation are discussed with the therapist. Furthermore each member of the group is asked to interview his family members (the questions are decided during the sessions), and this will further enlarge the field of observation (Manghi, 2003).

7. *Videodrama*: in this type of technique the main aim is to facilitate the client in the expression of his own experience connected to a theme which directly involves him. During the action, the videotherapist moves the camera following the action of the person. It comes near to the videoconfrontation for the fact that the client can see himself acting in the moment of action or later. It is often realized in the context of a group and it springs from the drama action of the subjects. They are invited to create a dramatization which is filmed by the videotherapist. Once the video is created, the group watches what has been filmed and from it creates a second dramatization, which is born from the evocation of the first one. At that point, the filmed material becomes a bridge for the following in-depth interventions on the problems emerged and the experiences which resound from what is evoked by the perception of the filmed material. This type of intervention is an evolution of the psychodrama in which the insight is produced by the interaction through psychodrama or drama/theatretherapy; to this we here add the possibility of insight through the vision and re-vision of the life script. This is allowed by the possibility to view the film which reproduces the segments of conduct and the interactions during the psychodramatic phase of image capturing. The interactions can be long and articulated, for instance filmed in an audiovisual aid structured by the group on a subject, *storyboard*, script, shooting and editing, or realized in short videoclips which film small improvisations and give rise to an operation of videoconfrontation (Rossi, 2004).

8. *Video-genealogy*: each participant of the group brings some pictures, significant to him, which are part of his story. The intervention is about showing the chosen pictures to the videocamera and commenting them in front of the group. It is important that the choice of the pictures happens in total freedom (the initial instructions are: "bring 5-6 pictures of your life which seem important to you"). During the session the snapshots are filmed from near, shown to all the participants through the display and described by the owner. The work consists primarily in a presentation of oneself, one's own family, one's own emotional world, if it exists, through important steps in one's personal history. This type of intervention allows for the meeting, favoured by one's own video image, between the idealized dimension of the self (the past) and the real one (the present) (Manghi, 2003).

9. *Video-microanalysis*: it is a type of intervention realized in an evolutionary context, from infancy to late adolescence (from 0 to 18 years of age), when the parents ask for help about the problems emerged in the process of growth of their own child or children. After a first anamnesis, the parents are asked to film their own house. Particularly, they are asked to film the interaction between parent and child/children (it is important that the film shows both the bodies and the faces of the participants in the interaction). Later, the film is given to the therapist who analyzes it separately. In a second moment, it is viewed with the parents. During the viewing, the attention focuses on the interaction, both in its verbal and non verbal aspects; particular observation is given to the resources present in the family and they are helped in exploring those areas which result dysfunctional to the development of the child. During the session then, the focus of the attention moves to the interaction in the here and now of the parent couple, on the experience and on the actions generated, as well as on the role of imagination in the construction of relational and parental skills (Vigevani, Waldekranz, 2004).

10. *Participative video*: it is an instrument focused on the group, it encourages collaboration by generating interaction and discussion. The videocamera can be used substantially in two ways: in the first, the videocamera is used to film some games which are happening inside the group (for instance the games present in dramatherapy). The person filming is one member of the group. In the second way, the aim is to realize a good video by filming the members of the group and/or external people in different settings (even outside the room of the group) (Giusti, 1995).

#### **4. An example of application for videotherapy: artistic mediated counselling at school**

For a number of years a project has been implemented in school, using videotherapy as the main method in a counselling intervention.

The project is born as an application of the reflections on the causes for school dispersion. Among the main reasons, at the individual level, we can certainly name the lack of motivation for success at school, difficulties in socialization, incapacity to express one's needs and emotional-affective lacks in the process of learning, due to the excessive distance which is often found between what is being taught and what pertains to life and to the student's interests.

Youngsters are continually subject to an enormous amount of stimuli. This "bombardment" puts them in the condition to constantly reorganizing their own affective and cognitive reference patterns, also due to the "threatening" aspect that this information can take on in their emotional universe. The main aim in the creation of the project was that of realizing a context in which the teens could elaborate their background.

It is important to work both on the development of the resources of the individual and on those of the entire class group, so as to at the same time use and favour the integration of the plurality of backgrounds and points of view of the group. Within the class in fact the problematic student expresses not only a personal uneasiness but also the uneasiness of the entire group.

The aim then becomes both that of recollecting the affection to school life, and the reorganization of the interaction within the class group and between the class group and the teachers..

### · Creative Lab

The creative lab represents the cornerstone of the project and is based on a fundamental premise: expressive freedom.

The youngsters are encouraged to «the use of creativity and fantasy, generally sacrificed to the development of logic thinking [...] Our fantasy in fact atrophies very easily along more or less stereotyped patterns of thought which, just like fantasy, have the capacity to take us away from the present but, unlike fantasy, cannot provide us with a new creative or innovative element [...] Boredom, disaffection, school drop out can fade in face of the possibility to introduce in the school routine a concrete training in creativity » (Rossi, 2003). To this aim, the intervention develops during the school core time (and it comprises the collaboration of some teachers).

Starting point is the creation of a story, by the teens, which is developed during the first months of work and transformed in a script for the realization of a short film. During the whole school year they will be the ones to create, film, edit the product. It is important that the story hosts the contributions of all the youngsters so that each one of them can recognize it as his own. To this aim, some techniques of intervention are used to give skills on the use of *brainstorming* and of creative methods of work. Creativity is the step following the contact with fantasy, from which it is distinguished because it tends to manifest in a concrete product.

In this sense we can talk of "professionalizing pedagogy": elements pertaining to the professional world are made into elements of play, and at the same time necessary to the creation of a product. What is professional changes sign and becomes pedagogical. "Let's play professional!". The youngsters are shown how what they learn daily on the school desks can become instrument and skill for the realization of their own story. The main aim is that of promoting an education to *creative narration*, of stimulating the youngsters to tell about themselves using an expressive artistic language and to translate their emotions in the chosen language. The artistic-creative language is particularly fit to the communication of the emotions of the teen engaged in the construction of his own identity. The products deriving from this, the story and later the short film, are used by the psychologists as an "*interface*" which allows to work indirectly on personal and interpersonal dynamics, remaining within the limits of a distance mediated by the youngsters' "artistic" work. We act on the product but in reality we are acting on their discomfort. In order to do this, the teens are asked to transform their fantasies in something concrete. This operation of transformation turns the audiovisual aid into a metaphor of what they are really living every day. In this sense we can talk about a "videotherapy mediated intervention".

The task of the psychologists is to facilitate the emotional communication of the class group and to avoid the formation of emarginating coalitions. This process of facilitation moves through different *strategies*, such as active listening, the absence of judgement, the active welcoming of all that happens in class, which is always given back to the youngsters under a positive aspect. For example when during the work on the creation of a story we happened to notice a silent kid, perhaps distracted or shy, his silence was proposed as possible element for the growth of the story. The silence, from mere connotation of lack of participation in any case

negative, has become the cue to reflect on the importance of a silent character in a too noisy narrative situation. The pedagogical proposition is that of transmitting to the youngsters themselves such facilitation process, so that each one of them could become a facilitator for another.

Our facilitating action represents the real *start* (the clapperboard) for the scenic action. We could talk about a “creative interface for action”, that is an interface which becomes the *relational movement* able to welcome and convey the creative work of the youngsters.

The relationship with the youngsters is favoured by the *artistic mediator*; through the narration of the story of the adolescent, engaged in the process of building his own identity, it not only communicates his emotions, but «it favours the reconciliation of fragmented parts of the self; naming and defining them produces an acquisition of awareness, a starting point for an evolution which involves the whole self system through a re-orientation [...]. Through the narrative organization of the experience we gain the unity of a story and the coherent sense of our identity, starting from scattered events and episodes » (Cavallo, 2001, p. 5).

The work is then to welcome with interest and attention all that is being proposed by the youngsters, “changing its sign”, reorganizing it within an original creative production which needs the contribution of the class mates to be realized. What in the beginning is mocked, opposed or got rid of, is welcomed instead of being left out (Rossi, 2003).

At the moment of the creative production what is interesting is not the aesthetic result of the product rather the process, which offers the possibility to see one’s own unconscious and stereotyped behaviours and to open then new relations with oneself and with the others. Through the artistic experience the process of socialization is activated or empowered by group sharing and involvement, giving space to the needs for belonging and affiliation.

The presence of an aim which the whole group shares – the creation of a short film – becomes an engine for change in the social relations within the class. The process moves from a phase in which the composition of the group doesn’t allow any type of shared constructive activity, to a phase in which everyone finds his place within the team working for a common goal. It is almost impossible for a subject to remain totally outside of the group dynamics if something constructive is happening around him. Then, if the individual story is meant as a means through which to shape one’s emotions, the story told by the youngsters becomes a container for being in group and for the dynamics running within it.

“By helping youngsters to write a script, we help them understand their way of relating to each other” (Rossi, 2003). It is on this level that the parts missing in the telling of a story acquire particular significance. Often the plot of the subjects presented by the youngsters presents *voids* charged with meaning. The so called missing areas we have mentioned above are nothing but spaces of their uncertain emerging individualities which are still compressed or concealed. Here too the facilitating role of the psychologists comes into play to give visibility and value to these voids, to give them back to the youngsters dense with meaning. As soon as a story is sketched, every young person is involved in a small workshop of theatre improvisation with the aim of creating the script and giving depth to the characters. This phase, in which the youngsters are asked to “wear” the different characters, involves the whole class in a play of dramatization and role-playing. Through these role-plays the youngsters are given the possibility to experiment in roles different from the ones which have structured in the class among themselves and with the teachers, allowing them to come close to and know each other. In this phase the class becomes a real “empathy lab”, first of all towards one’s classmates, and then also towards the teachers (once we manage to involve them) and even the psychologists (which in the eyes of the youngsters are scary figures). In this way, the character of the different (often the emarginated classmate) comes to take part in the narration, becomes unique part of a collective identity and is not only integrated but also recognized as a fundamental element in the narration (Rossi, 2003).

Dramatization and *role-playing* represent, in an art-therapy path, instruments able to promote awareness, empathy and capacity to cooperate, through which the youngsters, but also the teachers, can experiment and redefine their respective roles. Also the phase of the *shooting* represents a very important moment in the creative process. At this point of the work in fact, the youngsters have the possibility to tap their artistic skills. At the moment of choosing the best scenes, the adolescents interact with their own images projected by the video, have the possibility to re-see themselves, to be spectators of themselves, to criticise or praise themselves. And most importantly to feel themselves “masters” of the message they are giving. In front of the camera, the way the youngsters perceive themselves is amplified: they have to “introduce themselves”, they have to taste the risk/pleasure of telling about themselves. At the same time the video becomes an

instrument to experience themselves in a way different from the daily one, to allow themselves to be different, and in any case completely and visibly *subjects* of the shared script.

With the *editing* the youngsters shape their message, underlining the most important elements of the short film. Often it is precisely at this level of the work that the youngsters have to come to terms with the *aesthetic distance* which raises between the character and the person. Now they have the possibility to see *themselves* from above and to see their own passions from a different angle; they can comprehend them or even re-elaborate them in a different way. As for the reactions of the youngsters to the final product, we have often noticed in some of them an annoyance for their own extremized or exaggerated *interpretation* or even the opposite, for their excessive shyness or for their visible clumsiness. The aesthetic experience generates a distance which allows to understand and review their way to present themselves to others.

### **5. Photography as narrative instrument**

Narrative operations can be realized through different communication channels and find expression through different languages. Apart from the video, there are other types of intervention which allow to work with images and to give shape and action to the narrative content that the client brings to therapy. Among these, photography certainly represents a privileged access to the client's narrations because it is able to be at the same time an expressive means and a specific language endowed with its own code.

Pictures are always the result of a perceptive moment; in fact they are not a faithful reproduction of reality, but a metaphor of the way the person who is taking the pictures perceives the world. They are the product of a subjective interpretation of the observer, of his way of being, of relating, of seeing what surround him (what he believes the world expects from him, what he thinks he can offer, he has the right to obtain or must do ...).

This perceptive visual process happens both in the case it is the client who takes the picture and in pictures in which the client is portrayed, both working on pictures chosen by him to describe himself or his family, relatives, friends ...

The picture, as it is used in the therapeutical setting, has no value in itself as it is not the reality but the narration of what I as observer am looking at of the event from the viewfinder. What is important is the criteria by which the client chooses the images to bring or to take within the setting.

Even if defined and limited, it has no limits as for the symbolic potential it can have for the client. In the end every picture represents an image charged or chargeable with an existential meaning and an important mark of what is perceived by the person who comes to therapy. This mark of the perceived offers the possibility to operate a work of awareness, of manifestation of the relations figure-background among the elements in the picture. The therapist enters the rational universe of the client's tale and highlights its incongruences by giving stress and asking questions. These operations lead to a partial break-up or a re-dimensioning of the rational structure of the tale as they elicit the emotional subtext of what is being verbalized. In so doing, various processes are absorbed and we get directly to a narrative explosion. Within this path, the therapist performs an operation which facilitates the autobiographical narration. All he does is to give attention, to collect, to get curious, to ask, to linger over, to invite to linger longer over some detail or to let the story flow.

What interests is what the picture evokes in the patient. The subject portrayed is not necessarily relevant, rather that something which it reminds in him. The picture becomes like a diary which is read and verbalized by the person.

The work develops in different phases: in a first moment, the person is asked to place the pictures on the floor in a casual way. This kind of disposition allows for a greater plasticity, both because the floor represents a wide area which offers the possibility to place images beyond the restricted limits of a table, and also because it allows the client to create paths, to move among the pictures giving rise to forms.

Once the pictures are placed, the client and the therapist start an operation of reconstruction of meaning, going through a series of questions which somehow explicit the reasons why the pictures have been placed in that particular position and what they evoke in him.

There are various levels which possess therapeutical value in the work with pictures. For example, the subject in the picture can have its importance because it can remind of certain events. The picture is just a moment but around that moment there certainly was an event, a happening, a relational process. Another method of work could be that of reconstructing the movement which is no longer in the picture, the one before and after the snapshot. These are clearly associations, fantasies as we do not know what happened really in the historical reality, however this playing with one's story is very likely to move the client and bring him to take into consideration new things, some of which are even disconfirming what the images represent (me and dad in the picture, for example, are smiling but in the story preceding and following the picture there is nothing funny). Looking at a picture in fact creates a discrepancy, as it often means seeing a myself which does not at all look like me because it is two-dimensional; a myself which is very similar to the memory I have of me but which is different from how I am now. This discrepancy between me looking and me telling moves the emotional activation of creative fantasies, of a new tale.

It is important for a new story to be born, giving dramatic, narrative movement to snapshots which by themselves no longer have sounds, voices, smells...

In the moment for example we look at a picture from the point of view of the subject taking it, this offers us the possibility to draw an interview to the subject; he talks to us of his operation of selection, of choice of point of view (what he put in frame, what he focused on, what he put out of focus...). Practically, he makes explicit the operation of selection of attention he operated to frame and take the images he shot.

In the same way, they offer interesting working elements in cases in which the patient selects some pictures to take to therapy where he himself is being portrayed. Every picture in fact represents an image of himself, it refers to an image. Selecting some pictures to take to therapy means then selecting different images of oneself, with which to work and relate to and therefore to give content to the chosen material. It is essential for this to always respect the fact that the patient wants to work precisely with those images he has chosen.

In some cases, it is not the subject of the picture to be relevant rather a detail present in the image. For example in a picture we find the meeting of two hands in the foreground; this detail gives rise to a narration which can be disconnected from the subjects represented (it wasn't a simple hand holding; in reality my hand was taken and this leads me to think of a bond which I was never able to cut, of an obtained freedom...).

In still other cases, what is important is not the two characters, me and my father holding hands for example, but me and my father in front of my mother taking the picture. Or it could be important that that picture is upside down or shown before or after the other pictures.

Small things which may seem marginal but which really indicate many things: who framed the pictures? Who put them in albums? How were they kept? To bring them to therapy, did I have to ask my relatives, or do I keep them myself?...

It is possible then to move away from one single image and come near to the whole set of pictures brought to therapy. Their arrangement certainly generates stories, narrations or in any case more or less logical, historical, emotional connections: the pictures of gaiety, the pictures of sadness or the alternation of the two...

In a certain sense, we are talking about the various levels of a therapeutical relation, mediated by the use of photography, which work on what is the subtext of the images and of the narration.

The first motor, in a relation mediated by photography, is the act of will of the person with whom we as therapists are working, as this allows us to come into contact with all that's unintentional, all that's intentional, what moves to a choice and hinders others. If the will is lacking (and its first act is to call and ask for counselling) then it is impossible to give rise to any kind of work. In the same way, it is not enough to find a picture; it is necessary to go back or to re-attribute somehow the responsibility for the choice of that image and therefore also the ownership of the image. When the picture was taken I probably never thought of taking it to therapy; the moment I do however, it is charged with an act of will, an existential meaning which is perhaps to be manifested in the setting. If this contact is missing, then it is difficult for the work with images to yield any results.

- **The work with the picture story**

When we're working with photography, we can talk of a level of work which starts from a more "passive" phase, in which there is no production of pictures (simply images already taken are brought to the setting), and of a more "active" level in which snapshots are being produced. In this last case, we directly enter the field of what could be a creative intervention of the client.

An epilogue of the creative polarity expressive of photography is the *picture story*, a work in which the production of images is left to the client and in which there is an entire operation of narration we have talked about above. The picture story in fact is in itself a story which integrates different narrative modes: photography, acting, writing ...

The picture story is a story, precisely a story in pictures, in which the event lies in taking pictures of things, in the pictures of a story. What interests us is that this story is created by the client, or the group. The productive procedure can vary depending on the type of work one intends to do. One can for example focus or not on the artistic construction of the product: that is one can make an improvised picture story in which there is no preceding work other than an idea, a thread, an emotion or a dream on which the picture story is improvised through few shots which can represent that idea, that emotion which the subject wants to tell about. Or one could play on a much more articulated level in which there is real process of construction. In this case, one needs a subject, a small script, a *casting*... This type of operational procedure certainly requires more time: the time for artistic construction, for working on oneself mediating and moving the stress on the expressive creative product and therefore also on the aesthetic value of the work. The client can play different roles in the work: he can be the director, or the photographer; sometimes he can be the director and at the same time be in the scene; or else he can represent himself asking somebody else to play his part. This depends on the distance that the person or the therapist feels is right in the work which is being done.

What is most important in this type of work is the *constellation* which the pictures taken by the person come to represent. The moment when I arrange a shot, in which I define the action with the people in the picture, managing the figurative spaces which will then make the picture, what I am really doing is drawing my emotional, affective, relational constellation. Each single one of those shots is nothing but the graphical representation of my moving about in the universe, that is in my constellation. Even gestures and postures, as they are lived in the moment of the production of the shot, and therefore of the acting, offer something by their being performed consciously. They offer something different the moment they are seen again as represented in the picture, as disconnected from the self-perceptive sensations lived during the shot. There is no more experience but the evocation of the experience, of an emotion, of a self-perceptive sensation, of a relational dynamic. The picture evokes but does not contain anything of what has allowed to photograph those actions, as it is only colours or shades of grey, it is two-dimensional, without smells or tastes. However, when we look at it, we have a sensation of colour, of smell, of taste...of many things which in reality are only being evoked; not by the picture obviously, but by my relation to it. There is then something else which has a great evocative value: it is not the single pictures but the text, the captions, in that space between one frame and the next, between one photo and the next, which contains the story. There is a text, a sequence of pictures and captions, and there is a subtext, which is made by the void, by the pictures which haven't been shot, by the lines which haven't been said; this subtext, in reality, is filled space, we could say "lived" by he who is mirrored in the images. The void is a fertile void, it is an evoking space. For this reason the picture story can be highly emotional, as part of its charm lies in the possibility to make up what is not there. The work can be facilitated by a later interview or by other processes. The Gestalt closes also in the completion of this creative operation, that is in the realization of the picture story.

In a group in which the work was centred on the picture story for example, every one of the participants was asked to bring some sort of personal biography of about ten, fifteen pictures. The entire group was divided in some creative subgroups and each one of them created a picture story using the personal pictures of everyone: these, put together and connected by a small narrative plot, became then a picture story. The instructions given were that for each picture story there should be at least one picture per participant. Later each subgroup was given the possibility to take and print (with a digital printer) some pictures. And so a second picture story was created; this time though not with the historical pictures taken from home, but with new pictures managed by every single subgroup so as to form a new story starting from the earlier one. What was then created was a tale-picture story, half made by historical pictures, half by new pictures. There was then a further work: the pictures were made up on big sheets of paper with cartoons and captions. Every person was asked to observe what had been done and to take contact, individually, with what was missing between the first and the second part of the story; with what was missing emotionally or at any other level (cognitive, relational, historical...). What they lived as missing from the first two stories gave rise to a third picture story in which the initial group work became an individual work; every one used the other members to

work on himself, to represent a crux of their existence, hosted by the void existing between one part and the other of the initial picture story.

This process made very explicit the work with the background, with the missing zone; with those narrative, emotional, cognitive contents which almost need to be dragged, led by what is in the foreground in order to emerge. A work on awareness was applied to the narrative; in this the pictures, extremely personal and historical gave rise to a common story of the group within which it was possible for each one to recognize himself in the other and especially in what is very intimate, private: their own story which became and hosted the story of all the others, their scripts. The metaphor is that of the gift: life traces, forms which are impregnated with biographical elements are given in gift and the moment they are given they no longer belong to the one who offered them, but to the one who receives them and the latter founds his narration on them. As this operation is performed in group, the whole group participates to the re-arrangement of the biographical material, building a new picture story which offers the starting point to new a narrative operation which again exists in something very individual and personal. Like a game of mirrors, which sends back from one polarity to another: from the relationship to what is strictly individual, from what is strictly individual it transforms and evolves in the common, to then again gets back to the personal. In this game of mirrors lies the possibility to identify, disidentify and see some aspects of oneself in a new, creative way.

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