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THE WAY TO MYSELF: IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF CONTEMPORARY HUMANITIES NARRATION*

INTRODUCTION

The event that has changed my life, twisted it upside down, through and through, was the therapy for the Adult Children of Alcoholics (ACOA) and the Adult Children from Dysfunctional Families (ACDF) in the Centre of Prevention and Addiction Problems Solving in the city of Chełmno. It was not even just the single appointment, consulting or meeting when Copernican revolution happened. It was the period of three years of monotonous, strenuous work and learning – first, during the individual and later, group therapy. The process, main task of which was not the removal of trauma from childhood – because you cannot erase it – but its transformation into the experience that you can gain benefits from and give them sense.

THE THERAPY FOR ACOA AND ACDF IN TERMS OF MODERN EDUCATION AND CULTURE PROBLEMS

Firstly, I got shocked, then I felt awakening and finally – a change. I experienced then the Triad of Hesse (Jaworska-Witkowska, Witkowski, 2010).

At first I faced the pathological copies of behaviours and habits that were inside me. I acquired them at home – the pathological home. No one taught me any normal behaviours there. It was surprising how much of that I had inside me. I was conscious of just a small number of them. I could see just the tip of the iceberg. I could not just believe it. That phase was destroying those habits, behavioural calques, routines and patterns. The desocialization process started.

* The title of this article has been created with the help of prof. Lech Witkowski.

The following stage of childhood therapy was the explosion and awakening. The wonderful therapist – Ms Teresa Śpiewakowska – conducted conversations and asked questions in such a way that they opened my eyes. I could see myself in a different way. The curtains came down. The door and gates opened in my mind. The melioration process began.

The last stage – and the most difficult one – concerned the transformation. The traumatic experiences from childhood will not disappear obviously but it is possible to change thinking about them. How to achieve it? By replacement of old, pathological habits and behavioural calques with the new correct behaviours. The changes started to occur during the exercises under the watchful eye of my therapist. Although, the therapy has finished, the changes have been still going on. This is, indeed, the power of group therapy.

The educational contents which I came across during the therapy were paradoxical. They were moving away from doctrines and habits as described by Richard Rorty. They were coming out to me. Me – a single man. I experienced the effect of Paideia a thorough transformation.

The question of prof. Maria Janion – *„Will you know what you experienced?“* took on a whole new meaning. During the therapy, I got the tools to understand, to search for the way to myself – like in *„Steppenwolf“* by Hermann Hesse.

Before the therapy, I was overgrown by the silent prejudgements which were transparent for me. I could not notice them because I was not aware of them. The guise was taking me in and tempting. Only during the therapy I could experience the emancipating function of education which means I could release myself and change.

Looking at the therapy in hindsight, I can say that the words cured me, so I experienced the healing power of speech therapy by Viennese psychiatrist and therapist, prof. Victor Emil Frankl. He – by the experience in the concentration camps described in the poignant book *„Man's search for meaning. The classic tribute to hope from the Holocaust“* (Frankl 2011). elaborated the method of suffering transformation and searching for its sense in words, questions asked in a different way which help to find and reveal the sense.

One of the effects of being reborn during the therapy was the thirst for knowledge. The therapy has arisen my curiosity enough so that I want to know well and in details not only its mechanisms by studying pedagogy but also to develop myself in the cultural sense (mainly the theatre and sports).

The group therapy is powerful. What does it mean? Taking it completely, I got involved into the meetings, the therapeutic classes. Such involvement

was described by Jacques Maritain. A man is immature, not ready to take the therapy without it. My group counted eight people. Each person joined with the luggage of own experiences, suffering and going through unbelievable pain. And that feeling of common experiences – with Hans-Georg Gadamer – the fact that each of us experienced similar things made us united, merged with the experience.

Was it allowed to cheat and lie during the therapy? Theoretically not because we applied the code of ethics where we wrote down that we would not lie. In practice, though, people suffering from ACOA and ACDF are perfect liars because they dealt with life in this way during the period of permanent fear in childhood. The task of overcoming this pathological habit was difficult but also liberating and purifying. Each of us was learning to take the floor and argue. We were learning the public expression. In a nutshell, we gained the tools to care for our humanity, i.e. our *empowerment*.

From the philosophical point of view, the therapy was also the recovery of the world's complexity. My own mauled life had been a pratfall which I changed by the modification of past habits, the way of thinking about myself and about the past. Over time, I noticed that I started to stand up – because the change of thinking about myself resulted in accepting the challenges which I have always been dreaming about – i.a. about studying.

THE THERAPY IN TERMS OF SOCIAL COMMUNICATION

The therapy for ACOA and ACDF falls perfectly into the Triad by Habermas. It takes care of criteria in approaching my problems before showing the obligation. As my therapist used to say – „*An adult doesn't have to do anything. One takes the responsibility for own's choices.*” And it reflects well the degree of rationale's justification. The rationale in the aforementioned statement – but not only. Also the one concerning every sphere of my life touched by the pathological perception. The third trail fitting in the therapy is anomie. Until now, I used to live according to the habits and patterns whose pathological character I was not aware of. Suddenly, I saw daylight during the therapy. I can live in a different way! But how to apply these new ways into my life? That is what I am still learning. The idea of Freud motivates me here – „*It's not important who wants to do with you what – the important thing is what you will do with it.*”

While attending the therapy, I realized how mean and perfidious my actions had been. These pathologic forms of communication. The forms which

I absorbed at home. I often tangled up in the situations with commitment when I gave something to someone and waited silently for the same, which was humiliating and objectifying. Well, I thought that person would guess that. Now, I think that some people cursed me for it, and I cursed them for the inability to guess what I wanted instead. The therapy allowed me to notice the problem. And it left for me an important task – the care of the situation loaded with meaning – following Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. I use in practice everything that I have learnt during the therapeutic meetings concerning i.a. the verbal and non-verbal language or thinking about the past and the future as not only something negative but also something positive. It was done not to fall into the whirl of reduction. The literature comes to help. The literature which Milan Kundera described as „laboratory of human existence”.

During the classes, the therapist used to balance between the past and the future in a constant and regular way. Among everything that happened, how all happened and how it is and will be. These oscillatory messages let me switch fluently without any problems from words to actions. The therapist showed us our world – and its mysterious image – in the same simple but effective way. She showed us its horizon and all spectrum. From behaviours, opinions, prejudices which I did not know about, to ones which were pinching me and which I detected in my view.

The concepts which the therapist discussed with me were put into words. More or less understood by me in the context. Here, the group comes to help. Everyone in the group was at different stage. Those who were faster were paving the way. They left their footprints and then everyone – following them – could gain more than from the therapist’s speech only. This is the benefit described by Charles Sanders Peirce.

Was the therapist ironist or metaphysician? Considering the features of ironist and metaphysician, to my mind, she was the second one – metaphysician. She had an access to better language – it was the power of group. She did not judge or revoke. Her language was – I think – a universal metanarration.

THERAPY AND HISTORY OF UPBRINGING AND PEDAGOGIC IDEA

The most important function of the therapy is to set in motion the processes of change, transformation and liberation. Before joining the therapy, I had been chained to the wall in the cave, staring at it. I did not know about

the different world's existence apart from that Plato's Cave. The therapist turned me towards the exit from the cave. She showed me the way. Then it depended only on me if I could remove my handcuffs or held my ground. The way was not easy. There was a forest full of temptations – following St. Augustine. That forest was the return to the old patterns because this is easier and more comfortable.

The therapist was like a midwife helping my own truths, goals and challenges to be born which completed Fromm's act of birth. The ritual pain always accompanies the act of birth. It was so strong that I felt it physically – headaches – after every therapeutic session. My „guide” was: open, close to me, caring and empathic. On the other hand, she was calm, steady, objective, always making things clear and was always brutally honest. She could find a balance between these two ends – affinity and distance, without imposing her will to me and not allowing me unlimited freedom.

I spent a lot of time on working on my past, looking at my own family tree – the chain of generations, dependencies and – often – illness of soul which had existed throughout centuries (my family tree reached until 1836). I could see here – at a glance – the first type of generation gap according to Margaret Mead. The postfigurative model. I was watching my generation carefully and from different perspectives – the generation of my cousins for whom wisdom neither is equal nor identical with the great number of years in this world. I am then the link of co-figurative model. There was the time for the youngest generation as well – the generation of my cousins' children; time for looking at the world through their eyes. For emphasizing with their position in the world changing in front of their eyes and under their thumbs. And that was the experience of prefigurative type.

It was surprising for me that my therapist and I entered into every type just to try to connect with the family and gain anything positive from it but also to let us see that we constitute a part, a link, a chain. A very important and precious link. Searching for the contact with the ancestors, who I had the most distant relationship with – without any contact or who I did not know anything about, was extraordinary. I was asking about them the relatives who are still alive I was searching in the archives for any information just to rebuilt the lost contact. Even the symbolic one. The similar task and challenge at the same time concerned my peers, the youngest members of the family and those unborn yet. Contacting those who I had no contact with and meeting with „others” were the forms of fulfilment of generation

dialogue. Here, I reach to the three types of dialogue which I experienced by meetings with my relatives. In the first one, the classic one, I was searching for understanding concerning the equity of my behaviour – contact with those who were the most distant to me. In the second one, I noticed a place for dialogue because I understood why I was that far, why I did not trust them and I kept distance. I gave the right to my relatives to be different which was purifying and liberating. The third type of dialogue helped me in understanding who I am by looking at my family tree. This process was the existentially important – following Mircea Eliade. It was the intentional experience. It was connected though with great pain. All that happened inside me was permanent. Irreversible. Due to this experience, the part of me, which is hard to be described here, died. Something that was bearing hard on me and was paradoxically great emptiness – died. This death was the beginning of new me. It was a kind of rebirth.

During the therapy, I was given a chance to verify my knowledge and thoughts about the authority figure. My therapist has been the greatest authority. I had a chance to see in front of my eyes working in four authority positions. In the position „from the top”, the therapist – although we were sitting in a circle – was always in the particular and privileged place, reserved only for her – she was sitting next to the blackboard where she was often writing things or placing the sheets with exercises. In „around the back” position, the therapist approached every person that was doing the exercise and stood behind(!), holding that person’s shoulder. She raised on spirit, reinforced the message and sense of security. She did not replace anyone in searching or taking steps or „jumps”. When she was explaining how to do the particular exercises, she often took the colourful markers, drew on the blackboard, pinned the sheets with precious information. She brought books which were to help us. She was in the position „in front of me”. She put the knowledge and tools in front of us, on the ground I could take all that she put and use. However, I could kick it and not bother with it. I could trample and ignore it. What did I do? I took them. The process of melioration took place. The empty places inside me filled in with the content of meetings. They started to grow. Then they grew above all, so I started to live fully with them.

Concerning 4 types of aesthetics, my therapist included all of them in a way. She was a kind of eccentric teacher according to Hesse’s models. She was realizing her passions, showing that they can be like liquor whose

lack would change life into unbearable according to Freud. As a teacher – she often faced resistance during the meetings. My resistance – as well as the struggle of other members of the group. The resistance which was an escape from the unacceptable situation. However paradoxical it may seem, she knew that this is how defence mechanisms work. She could make a conversation with me in such a way though to make me accept the challenge and face the demons from the past which occurred in their own time and rhythm. She highlighted that we must not be in a hurry. Time was a key. Some members of the group needed more of it, some – less.

During every meeting we had to take off our mask. The mask which often overgrew our faces. Consciously or not. The mask which I used every day to hide myself behind. Thus, I came across the 5 theses of Gombrowicz's thinking in his testament.

I was not aware that the mask which I used to wear everyday was so comfortable and that it practically overgrew my face. With time, I learnt how to take it off and show myself. Gombrowicz said: „The first duty of a man is to be oneself”. But how? I cannot be myself because the society demands from me something absolutely different. I have to comply with others because this is easier and more comfortable. I realized that in fact the environment – relatives, colleagues, friends – does not know me, or knows little about me. Not much means in fact nothing. What to do with it? Seek. At the very end of therapy, I realized that the reality of constant transformation but not camouflaging, is a form of prescription for dealing with the problem. They cannot be just comfortable and straight paths. If it is to be valuable, then it must change me, change my perspective. All of this is done not to enable moral atrophy, i.e. decline of moral behaviours..

Looking at my therapist through the prism of 4 personalities in culture by Bauman, I can clearly say that she is the pilgrim. She is also the pearl diver. Considering the strategy of behaviours, she took from everything and switched from conservative to liberal, socially radical to dialogic. She paid attention especially to the last one, highlighting its meaning.

HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY AND THE THERAPY FOR ACOA AND ACDF

The therapy of childhood, which can be undertaken only once per life (in comparison to other forms of therapies), closes the hermeneutic circle by taking from the past generations and the therapeutic knowledge included in

the literature. Because... „the theory is empty without the history. History is blind without the theory.” – as written by Friedrich Nietzsche.

During the therapy, I often faced the things that were unbelievable. I collided with the aporias. I cannot get rid of the past experiences, so how to deal with them? What to do with them? These were the paradoxical questions. I was on the brink of cognitive attitudes in the history of philosophy. The allegory with the lake came with help. In the first phase – I immersed in it – i.e. learnt the conditions of therapy, the ways of its functioning and requirements. Then, it was the time for highlighting the problems using the theory. Equipped with the nets, we could throw them into the water of our experience. In a nutshell, we switched from the theory into practice and tested it on our own. It is all about catching the moral rules inside us, then fishing them up and discovering. Accidentally, we caught other things into our net which turned out to be meaningless, useless and sometimes even ridiculous and bizarre. In some cases, our nets did not work. Then, the therapist reached to the invasive strategy. She reached for the exercises which required from you acting in a different role. They usually caused shock. Here, I can give an example of the exercises with the roles of victim and perpetrator. We were standing in front of each other looking deeply into each other's eyes. It was enough to show how weak the border between the victim and the torturer is and that each of us does it several or several dozen times per day.

Each exercise of this kind finished with the phase of purification. For example by burning the pages with the thoughts about myself or making a boat out of letters to my father or mother – alcoholics, and putting them on the water. It had a symbolic dimension of purification, liberation. The basics discussed above fit perfectly with the five ideas of cognitive realism. Starting the therapy, I was directed by the naive rationalism. I believed that I would face something simple, uncomplicated. Only during the meetings, when I got the appropriate tools, I could face the problems. Sometimes, I had to search for the new tools. As when I was searching for the way to get over my grandma's dying – who was one of the most important people in my life.

One of the hardest things was the realism of conceptual solidarity. Finding the group of concepts where I could see myself was not an easy task. We were determining the facts in the realism of conceptual openness. Starting from the most basic and primitive ones. And here – another paradox: many of them turned out to be completely different than we thought.

Anxiety was often not anxiety but fear. And vice versa. Emotions are not the same as feelings. And vice versa. To deal with it, I needed to enter into the realism of cognitive scattering. We often came across some myths transferred to us by previous generations. The myths such as: „if I come from the family where alcohol was present, I will create the same kind of family”; „there’s no way out of the vicious circle of alcoholic family”; „it’s impossible to get rid of the stigma of ACOA”. The question is – How to deal with them? The epistemological antipositivist vector appears quickly then: „to be active to know; to know how to correct the presumptions of action”. In a word – to learn by your own mistakes and draw conclusions. It was all done to notice the fact that we fall to pieces by following the myths. That we ourselves fall into the situations of self-fulfilling prophecy. Our attitudes are transparent and superstitions – silent. It is all about realizing – following Freud – that we constitute the obstacle for ourselves. The thing that can pull us out of this condition is literature which Milan Kundera described as the laboratory of human existence. This laboratory is like a trampoline to not become, among others, a „one-dimensional man” whom Herbert Marcuse wrote about.

During the therapy I used to deal with my childhood. I had to move back to that time to explore it. It is presented perfectly by Habermas and Kohlberg’s Triad. In the first phase, I moved back to the world of reduced effects, so the world of a child that I had been. I came back to the world of anomie, the world without norms, rules or common help. The next step was the dimension of norms and rules – heteronomy. The feeling of certainty did not exist here. The rules sometimes appeared, sometimes not. Chaos. I was accompanied by uncertainty, fear and anxiety because I did not know what to expect. This instability, fear and anxiety also accompanied me in the autonomy phase. The legalistic agreement had feet of clay. I did not know which rules and values are good and which are not. The mechanism of decentralization became useful here. I received a chance for development in the group where I met „others”. Now, I am going further – developing myself at the meetings with „others” during my studies.

SUMMARY

Looking back at the transformation, which occurred inside me, I can say that I livethanks to the therapy. Undertaking the challenge of that analysis,

I started to care about the quality of my humanity. I took care of myself. I raised myself in the truth. I can say with the head held high: „I am a child of alcoholics. I am a victim of physical, psychological, economic and social violence. I am breaking the chain of generational and family dependencies, of repetitiveness and patterns. I am breaking it because I am the stronger link. I am breaking it to live with dignity and to live well”

In my municipality: Świecie – as I checked – there are 80 Blue Cards given annually (it is given when there are incidents of violence or other abuse). 75% of such families have children. According to my calculations, there are approx. 120–150 of them. Within the last decade, these are from 1.2 to 1.5 thousand mature people suffering from the syndrome. Only few of this group take the challenge of ACOA and ACDF therapy.

Why is it so? Due to the lack of consciousness, the problems with access to the therapy (there are two centres in my town where you can get information about help; none of these conduct the therapy for ACOA and ACDF; you have to go to a different city to get help) and – to my mind this is the most important reason – due to serious cultural stereotypes (women usually participate in the therapy sessions; men are rarely seen).

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SUMMARY

The subject of considerations of this article is the transformation which occurred in the author after the participation in the therapy for the Adult Children of Alcoholics (ACOAs). The reflections concerning this significant, life-changing experience constitute the key of cognition and comprehension of the path that has been taken by the author to live with dignity and well. The content also indicates how significant the philosophical, communicative and pedagogic theories are. The statistical information enables to realize how many people are affected by the c ACOA ACDF syndrome and why only few of these people undertake the therapy. This allows us to notice the scale of the problem faced by pedagogy.

Key words: therapy for the Adult Children of Alcoholics (ACOA) and the Adult Children from Dysfunctional Families (ACDF), group therapy, impact, awakening, change, melioration, care, humanity.