

"Craftsmanship of contexts": An as yet unfinished story of my connection with CMM

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ABSTRACT

These notes relate how a theoretical/instrumental body of work has become, professionally and conceptually, part of the life of the person living it. The author relates how theories and social practices are inseparable from ways of being and the worlds they construct. In this personal testimony, CMM has come to play a role of articulating the transition from the kind of knowledge produced in modernity to the complexity of social constructionism. This paper shows how harmonizing the relationship between "knowing" and "knowing how" in "the way of being" gives rise to generative value. This is what the author intends to illustrate through relating his own experience both in the field of teaching and in the field of psychotherapy and community practice.

ABSTRACT

En estas notas se narra como un cuerpo teorico/instrumental se incorpora a la vida (profesional y conceptual) de quien la vive. En el relato del autor, las teorias y practicas sociales son inseparables de los modos de existencia y los mundos que construyen, en este testimonio singular, el CMM vino a jugar un papel de articulaci3n en la transici3n desde los saberes de la modernidad a la complejidad del construccionismo social. En este escrito, se da cuenta de como, cuando la coherencia entre el "saber" y el "saber-hacer" se armoniza, "en el modo de existir" estas dimensiones adquieren despliegan su valor generativo, esto es lo que el autor intenta ilustrar a traves del relato de su propia experiencia tanto en el campo de la enseanza, como en el de la psicoterapia y las pr3cticas comunitarias.

Introduction

"Nada puede encomendar las historias a la memoria con mayor insistencia, que la continente concisi3n que las sustrae del an3lisis psicol3gico. Y cuanto m3s natural sea esa renuncia a matizaciones psicol3gicas por parte del narrador, tanto mayor la expectativa de aqu3lla de encontrar un lugar en la memoria del oyente, y con mayor gusto, tarde o temprano, 3ste la volver3, a su vez, a narrar. Este proceso de asimilaci3n que ocurre en las profundidades, requiere un estado de distensi3n cada vez menos frecuente. As3 como el sueo es el punto 3lgido de la relajaci3n corporal, el aburrimiento lo es de la relajaci3n espiritual. El aburrimiento es el p3jaro de sueo que incuba el huevo de la experiencia. Basta el susurro de las hojas del bosque para ahuyentarlo. Sus nidos —las actividades 3ntimamente ligadas al aburrimiento—, se han extinguido en las ciudades y descompuesto tambi3n en el campo. Con ello se pierde el don de estar a la escucha, y desaparece la comunidad de los que tienen el o3do atento. Narrar historias siempre ha sido el arte de seguir cont3ndolas, y este arte se pierde si ya no hay capacidad de retenerlas. Y se pierde porque ya no se teje ni se hila mientras se les presta o3do. Cuanto m3s olvidado de s3 mismo est3 el escucha, tanto m3s profundamente se impregna su

memoria de lo oído. Cuando está poseído por el ritmo de su trabajo, registra las historias de tal manera, que es sin más agraciado con el don de narrarlas. Así se constituye, por tanto, la red que sostiene al don de narrar. Y así también se deshace hoy por todos sus cabos, después de que durante milenios se anudara en el entorno de las formas más antiguas de artesanía.” Walter Benjamín, El narrador, 1936

Weaving social network

Although I came across CMM in 1990 through an article by Pearce and Cronen translated by Fundacion Interfas (in Buenos Aires) where I was working at the time, it was only some years later, in meetings with Barnett Pearce, Stephen Littlejohn and Kathy Domenici that I could ‘live it’ and incorporate it into my life. From the beginning, I was captivated by the aesthetic quality of a model that at the same time could offer a theoretical system of great complexity and also permit the development of instruments and means for the reflective ‘knowing how to do’.

At that time I was trying to find ways of describing a ‘positioning’ (Davies and Harré, n.d.) which - for me - broke away from the limits of Psychotherapy and navigated in the processes of transformation, passing through different contexts (Fuks, 1993, 1994, 1995, 1998, 2000, 2003). I called this ‘positioning’ *craftsmanship of contexts*, since it appeared in experience as a space between the instrumental and the aesthetic, and the craftsmanship metaphor referred both to a mode of being in conversation and at the same time to ‘mechanisms’ for facilitating creative contexts.

When I came across CMM, the hierarchical model that described the complex working of interconnected contexts impressed me. This model went deeper into Bateson's and Goffman's notions of ‘framework’ and ‘context, expanding them towards reverberations of recursivity. That was when I found a way of ‘relating’ (to myself) a set of practices into which I could incorporate conceptual and theoretical quality. The major impact was that it allowed me to ‘imagine’ ways in which conversational contexts constructed/deconstructed worlds of relationships: a ‘matrix’ woven ‘from logical force’ and ‘moral orders’ (Pearce & Littlejohn, 1997).

In spite of having spent 30 years going through the world of suffering which serves as a framework to psychotherapy, I never lost the ability to be surprised by the aesthetic character of relational scenarios. The dramas related in Psychiatric hospitals or in situations of enormous pain, opened up – at the same time – possibilities of creativity difficult to imagine. Perhaps that inexhaustible surprise allowed me to tread the border between ‘madness’ and ‘creativity’ without having to feel obliged to choose one narrative at the expense of the other; but when I found these processes of my ‘stories that had been lived’ narrated as ‘strange loops’, I found a ‘tool’ which was both conceptual and practical at the same time.

Argentine culture (especially Buenos Aires’ middle class way of life) makes a cult out of paradox; a language full of semantic ambiguities permeates relationships between people. Among other things, this has given us a literature and art of great complexity. But, the special pleasure of living in worlds that take us to the limit of imaginable capacity for abstraction also generates complications at those times when consensus for action is needed. In ‘The Garden of the Diverging Paths’, written in 1941, Borges said, “in all works of fiction, every time a man

comes across different alternatives, he opts for one and eliminates the others ... so different futures, different times (are born), which also proliferate and diverge" (page 106) and "that correlation of times which come closer, diverge, get cut off or are ignored secularly, covers all possibilities. We do not exist in the majority of those times..." (page 109).

In our Latin-American cultures, which are passionate about 'meaning', 'non-meaning' and polysemy, the possibility of describing worlds of interlocked and entangled meanings, which might clear the path for 'action,' is converted into an alternative that is rich in possibilities and that prevents simplification and impoverishment. This leads to the question of *how to denaturalise stories (lived) as constituent elements of 'social identities' without threatening the 'reality' of our interlocutors?*

This is not a valid question for those who have a way of considering realities as 'REALITY', since this is a world of 'people who are certain and people who are mistaken'; a world of truths and errors. But for those for whom the 'world' is a product of the relational dance that we call conversations, this question implies an ethical position; it implies respect for the complex ecology of 'worlds' that co-exist – although not without tensions. The contributions of the LUUUTT and serpentine models opened up for me alternatives that did not exist before. For example, the games that I have developed are designs of conversations that expand dimensions for different focuses (formation, participatory planning, therapy). They have a flow; they circulate from contexts of survival towards contexts of games and, through producing imaginary 'scenarios', they permit the exploration of relational dimensions normally closed off or hidden. When I then came across the "daisy model," some of my reflective games took on a 'framework of meaning'.

In the remainder of this paper, I'll illustrate craftsmanship of contexts by describing –as an example- one of the games that I use; reporting an event in the work done in a community organisation and looking at a powerful metaphor.

'Games': conversational designs to expand worlds

Games (of simulation, representation, production) belong to an old tradition in Psychology and Education. The variety of objectives accompanies the multiplicity of dimensions to which they are directed. At the 'macro' level, the [games] created by Jacobo Moreno when he invented the "Sociodrame and Psychodrame" (1933, 1937, 1961) or those developed in order to mobilise great sectors of the population in tasks of participatory planning or in the treatment of conflicting themes, are set against those almost intimate ones constructed in psychotherapy or mediation. However, the more important differences are not always related to the number of people involved but to the actual design of the activity, to the sequences of situations, the aesthetics thereof and above all to the type of context (or interlocked contexts) which they construct (Fuks, 2004).

In the reflective designs that I use, there is a sequence which functions as the pentagram in musical writing: it is the structure/flow that sustains the huge complexity and turbulence that it stimulates. This 'sequence' is the flow that takes place between 'intimate conversations' (effected through the notes written in a "notebook" or an intimate diary), 'private conversations' (in the exchanges with another person) to 'public conversations' (which take place in large groups or situations where neither closeness nor intimacy is possible).

An example of this is the reflective game called "meeting between dreams and possibilities" (see below). In this game, intimate, private, and public conversations are designed in which dialogues are opened which play with time (present/past, or present/future) tensing the relationship between dreams/utopias and realities, thus promoting the recovery of the dreams as a source of new futures.

One of the 'keys' of these games is the creation of contexts. This defining moment occurs at the beginning of the game (even though it sets in motion a permanent process on which one has to keep an eye) when the facilitator gives the work instructions or proposals (the content of the game). While these instructions or proposals provide an order to the sequence of events, it is the narrative(s) constructed in the production of game contexts¹ that creates expanding and creative 'frameworks of meaning'.

The game "from dreams to possibilities"

Instructions

Through the invitation to create a "Travel Notebook" a report is organized, in which the possibility of "navigating" in one's own life is evoked, using as a vehicle recording and imagination. In this trip, the "Notebook" is at the same time map and compass (Aczel, 2001). There is an invitation for the travellers to create and organize their notebooks in "sections" (different spaces where each one registers different types of descriptions) As an example, one of the sections, proposed by the game's facilitator is the "intimate diary", oriented to create a space for an intimate dialogue with oneself, in which the participants can place reflections, emotions and those experiences which they don't want to share or do not know how to act out. The facilitator assumes a clear position about his/her responsibility for the design he/she promotes and – as the process caretaker – assures the protection of the right of privacy about these "intimate spaces". Also, people are invited to create "ideas", commentaries, registrations, observations sections (as in an anthropologist's field notes) that can be shared with others.

The notebook's co-construction process itself is a way of creating "possible worlds" (Fuks, 1998), since the conjoint reflection about which could be the private sections (the ones of the personal trip) and which could be shared with all the participants, allows each person both to pay attention to the level of the experience complexity but also to join in a conjoint construction process of the "context of meaning" for the trip itself. "Worlds" from which daily experience meanings can be explored are produced from the constructive process, also the experience of

1 Benjamin, W. (1936) *El Narrador*. Taurus Ed., Madrid 1991. "La experiencia que se transmite de boca en boca es la fuente de la que se han servido todos los narradores. Y los grandes de entre los que registraron historias por escrito, son aquellos que menos se apartan en sus textos, del contar de los numerosos narradores anónimos. Por lo pronto, estos últimos conforman dos grupos múltiplemente compenetrados. Es así que la figura de narrador adquiere su plena corporeidad sólo en aquel que encarne a ambas. «Cuando alguien realiza un viaje, puede contar algo», reza el dicho popular, imaginando al narrador como alguien que viene de lejos. Pero con no menos placer se escucha al, que honestamente se ganó su sustento, sin abandonar la tierra de origen y conoce sus tradiciones e historias. Si queremos que estos, grupos se nos hagan presentes a través de sus representantes arcaicos, diríase que uno está encarnado, por el marino mercante y el otro por el campesino sedentario. De hecho, ambos estilos de vida han, en cierta medida, generado respectivas estirpes de narradores. Cada una de estas estirpes salvaguarda, hasta bien entrados los siglos, algunas de sus características distintivas.... Pero, como ya se dijo, estas estirpes sólo constituyen tipos fundamentales. La extensión real del dominio de la narración, en toda su amplitud histórica, no es concebible sin reconocer la íntima compenetración de ambos tipos arcaicos. La Edad Media, muy particularmente, instauró una compenetración en la constitución corporativa artesanal. El maestro sedentario y los aprendices migrantes trabajaban juntos en el mismo taller, y todo maestro había sido trabajador migrantes antes de establecerse en su lugar de origen o lejos de allí. ...En ella se aunaba la noticia de la lejanía, tal como la refería el que mucho ha viajado de retorno a casa, con la noticia del pasado que prefiere confiarse al sedentario".

living and the experience of sharing the workshop or beginning formation. These worlds, once unfolded, both expand and disturb existent "reality", and this disturbance conspires against possibilities of playing, as it questions the known world and the "official" identities that provide the illusion of continuity and stability which we need to feel safe.

The flow – many times turbulent – which leads from a context organized as threatening to another that can be lived as an adventure/exploration, is a complex process that must be "facilitated" and also designed through craftsmanship.

Invitations

Go over in your mind your whole life until you can locate:

Those moments in which you were most full of dreams, utopian ideas and illusions;

The moment in your life in which the future appears like something that could be transformed by the strengths or believed; and,

The stage of your life in which the above passions directed your life and conditioned all your actions.

- Describe to yourselves (by writing in your "intimate diary") what you most recall from that period.
- Find a scene, a moment of that stage which represents those dynamics vividly.
- What types of dreams did you have? What were the 'official dreams' (those which you could share with other people) and the 'secret' dreams (those which only you or very intimate people knew)?
- How old were you, what was your most marked personal characteristic at that time, .. what was the nickname you used to 'call yourself'?
- What was –at that time- your situation (personal, social), your environment, your circumstances?
- Have you got any photos of the time, videos or visual elements, music, objects to which you can resort in order to relive the 'spirit of the time'?
- What was your 'face' (how did you dress, speak, your likes, what did you reject)?
 - What did you like most of all?
 - What annoyed you most of all?
 - What were your most secret desires and dreams at that time?
- What was your 'image' what do you think about?
 - What did your closest relatives (parents, brothers and sisters, etc) think about you?
 - What image did your friends have of you, the person closest to you, people you didn't know?

When you've relived that stage and you've recalled the person(s) you were at that time:

- Can you imagine a meeting between the person you were (at that time) and the person you think you are these days?
- Imagine the scene, the place, the environment, the climate...(where would you meet up?)

- If you started to talk, to exchange questions, and if the one from the past had some questions... what would you (the one from today) reply? If he asked you:
 - What happened to my dreams?
 - What did you do with them?

What would you reply? What explanations/descriptions would you use? What justifications?

- Taking into account time and the experiences you've gone through in your life, how would you try to find out what kinds of passions lived in those dreams in the past, what questions would you pose?
- What would be the possible areas of tension between those characters of today and yesterday, would they argue, and about what?
- What would be the possible mutual complaining and reconciliation?
- Describe (written in order to share with some one else) those scenes as if it were a theatre script.

Design option for a public construction

The participants move on to holding private conversations with other members of the group, where they share their experiences but not a description of what happened. That is, they use images, metaphors, analogies which allow them to concentrate more on the process than on the contents.

Together they decide what they are going to share with others... in a sequence of 2/4/8 people, etc., until they get to what is 'public' depending of the amount of people in the room.

Design option for expansion in time

- Imagine that you (the one of today) meet the person you will be in twenty years time.
 - What questions do you think you would have for him?
 - What things would you ask him in relation to your present dreams?
 - How would you try to make him understand your present utopias?
 - How would you try to make him understand the connection between your present dreams and those you had when you were younger?
- Join up with others in a fishbowl discussion in order to talk about the experience without mentioning intimate details but talking about what that type of reflection about your own life produces.
- Share in the design of a public conversation.

CMM and Social Worlds

The Community Health Programme of the Ce.A.C. (Centre for Assistance to the Community) of the National University of Rosario was constructed as a participatory organization including officials, neighbours and professionals. The participation is made concrete in the political and operational features of the Programme. The participatory process takes place in complex *social spaces* in which the 'meaning' of the shared world (the objectives of the Centre, the action plans

and the performance indicators) is socially co-ordinated. These social contexts are constructed by means of a 'design' of exchanges that harness a complex, multi-dimensional process in order to produce consensus. The generic design starts from respect for differences (of conception, of interest, of personal styles, etc) like 'meta-values' and, as it develops, provides many sites for contextual craftsmanship.

An institutional design of this type, in which hierarchical structures (such as the University, or the Health System) co-exists with a flow of exchanges based on non-hierarchical criteria, tends to produce frequent turbulence. During the 18 years in which the Programme has existed, a number of deep crises have arisen. It became necessary to generate organizational 'devices' (in Foucault's use of the term; see Deleuze, 1987) such as the CeAC Assembly, which would produce frameworks of contention for turbulence and generate creative alternatives to the crises. In order to be effective, these 'devices' must be able to perform in diverse circumstances: when there is a need to harmonize different belief systems and/or complicated group dynamics; and when taking action and making decisions are the recognized focus of oscillation.

Social scenarios of exchange of knowledge

Within the CeAC Programme, 'workshops' are types of activities in which neighbours (voluntarily and without payment) contribute their knowledge by teaching other members of the community such skills as confectionery, weaving, toy-making, hairdressing, manicure, horticulture, sewing, etc., and are spaces of empowerment and authorship. Each one of the workshops has a teacher or co-ordinator that leads the activity in accordance with the general plans but following his or her personal style and the characteristics of the group.

An event occurred in a 'theatre workshop' directed by a teacher who had recently joined the CeAC. The group of neighbours had worked together for a few months, with an average of 6 members meeting weekly. About a week before the event that is related below, one of the female members invited another woman to attend, with the idea of her joining the workshop. She did not tell the rest of the group about her invitation. The person invited was a 40-year old who had suffered a cerebral-vascular accident and as a result had a stroke. She was undergoing physical treatment at a specialist medical centre and had undergone psychological treatment at the CeAC.

When they arrived at the theatre workshop, some members had a strong emotional reaction of rejecting the inclusion of the new member. The internal meeting of the theatre group gave rise to a fierce argument, with verbal aggression among members of the workshop and – at the suggestion of the teacher – the question of her joining the group was postponed to be dealt with at the general meeting (the Assembly) of the CeAC.

The segment of conversation below occurred during the Assembly, attended by some members (neighbours) of the theatre workshop, the teacher, the Chairman of the Neighbours Committee, some psychotherapists, doctors and social workers who had been involved in helping the person in question, and other members (professionals and neighbours) who did not know about the matter in question. At the Assembly, one neighbour proposed that they discuss the "problem of the theatre workshop".

Co-ordinator: Who is going to tell us how this subject came to be proposed here?

Juana: Well, I think Dolores is wrong, she should not have brought Nancy to the workshop because it places her in a very difficult situation.

Co-ordinator: In what way do you suppose it places her in a difficult situation? Difficult in relation to what?

María: Because she, poor thing, cannot speak like the others, and cannot move in the same way and that's going to make her feel bad...me, I also think she did wrong...

Co-ordinator: Does anyone else think the same? Or have a different opinion? ...or have anything to contribute?

Dolores: I think they are leaving her to one side because she's semi-invalid, and all the rest are excuses, they can't bear to be with anyone who's handicapped...

Juana: (interrupting)... you speak like that because you have your paralytic husband and you don't realize that sometimes one can do bad trying to do good.. besides you didn't ask the other people in the group if they agreed or not...

Dolores: (interrupting) the group wasn't closed, We'd spoken about accepting extra members...

Rosa: (interrupting) Yes, but not an invalid.. maybe she ought to go to a theatre group for the handicapped, then she wouldn't feel so bad...

Psychologist: I would like to speak... nobody thought that they should ask the team who had attended her whether Nancy was in a condition or not to join..?

Theatre Teacher: Of course the teacher also has a right to state an opinion...

Margarita (Workshops Co-ordinator): and not the workshops co-ordinator...?

Florencia: Shouldn't someone ask Nancy what she thinks?

Several neighbours together:No, poor thing, how can we say that to her.....!!

María: It's like inviting a paralytic to dance so he can enjoy himself.....

At this point some people laugh, others stop still unable to carry on speaking, the co-ordinator waits for the turbulence to die down in order to carry on the conversation.

Co-ordinator: Several people said on different occasions during this conversation that Nancy was a 'poor thing' or 'poor little thing'. What do you think that means?

Alejandra: Well, You know... she had that misfortune.. that of having that illness, why are we not going to feel pity for her?

Co-ordinator: What I don't seem to be able to grasp is what that means, in what sense, in what aspect, in what situations, ... Nancy is 'a poor little thing'... or, is she more of a poor little thing than any other person in this group?

Juana: Well, what that means is that she's not the same as the others, she's not normal, she can't do what the others do, she's missing things which the rest of us have got... do you see what I mean?

Co-ordinator: I understood what you say but there's something I still don't understand...the fact that she might not be able to do certain things or might not be able to control her body like the others; in what sense does that make her different and a poor thing...?

Juana: and...well she must surely feel different from the rest... how could she not feel resentful

and annoyed when they don't treat her like any other person? But you can't...

Co-ordinator: one can't, because of her? or because of something that happens to you all when you are with her?

María: Well, ...both things, one can't treat her like anyone else, she can't do the same jokes, one can't get angry with her like one can with the others...wouldn't it be better for her to be with people like her? that way she wouldn't suffer so much...

A context of work with the 'community' can be considered as a field of construction of meaning in relation to the actions that are programmed (Fuks 1994). The creation of a framework like this requires as a condition the prior or concomitant transformation of the 'natural' relationships between the team and the community. This is where the contextual craftsmanship can be usefully engaged. In this case, the craftsmanship consists in the way of creating conditions for a *conversational exploration*: the process through which one or several participants in an exchange of speech organize their social space, their location within it and, by the way in which they construct their questions, produce an effect of exploration and emergence of the parameters which organize the conversation (its design).

The opportunity for crafting contexts comes from the complexity of communication. Key terms in this and other social scenarios, such as 'health', 'community', 'participation', 'neighbour', 'member', 'equal', 'different,' can be considered as constructions; products of the social co-ordination which, once installed, become implicit organizers of the actions of those involved and also as opportunities for reconstructing naturalized relationships. Conversational exploration as demonstrated here can be seen as a deconstructive/reconstructive instrument permitting the deployment of both the fundamental scheme of the narrative and the discursive structures used (Derrida, 1989). Contexts, frameworks of meaning, logic, the syntax of the interlocutors, the identities and practices condensed into the metaphorical figure, are in this way deployed as if they were 'windows' of a hyper textual reality. In 'S/Z' Barthes (1988) refers to a text composed of a block of words and images joined in multiple trajectories. This special correlation permits multiple paths, it is an unfinished text. In this ideal text, networks abound which act among themselves without any one of them being able to impose itself on the rest. This text is a galaxy of significant and not a structure of meanings. It has no beginning but does have diverse means of access, none of which could qualify as the main one.

In *exploration*, key words (highlighted in conversation by means of surprise) are deployed as a way of 'navigating' through virtual 'realities' of the relational scenario. This form of approach includes at the same time an ingredient of game play and adventure which tends to reduce the risks of generating 'contexts of survival' in which the participants might feel their existence threatened. The process of exploring the articulations and consistencies of these 'key words', the deconstructing of their 'strengths' (meanings and implications), the investigation of the distinctions which sustain them, enable the deployment of the 'realities' on which they are based. Questions and reflective explorations have the potential to open different perspectives on subjects that, on a daily basis, seem to have only one possible (natural) interpretation.

The condition required for these questions to generate fertile turbulence, is that the situation in which this takes place, should allow the participants to deploy their ‘certainties’. In order for this process, that of questioning ‘truths and ‘certainties’, to be able to come about, it requires contexts in which it *might be possible* to reflect on the conceptual, methodological and action frameworks themselves without this becoming threatening. These contexts of ‘curiosity’ have ingredients that produce a framework of security and contention in such a way that people can take risks, explore the new feature playfully and dare to imagine a different ‘reality’ for their lives.

In the account of the conversational situation to which we are referring, the micro processes of joint construction of shared visions (between neighbours and professionals) about social life, the relationships of co-existence, health (and the ways to reach it) and methods of co-operation and care, were deployed.

- What contextual frameworks offer greater possibilities for the generation of a dialogue that might be enriched by the differences?
- What types of intersections (conversations) between teams and communities generate fields of possibility for that dialogue?
- What types of certainties interfere with the dialogue?
- What types of questions open ‘flexible zones’ in the beliefs and make them permeable?

These are questions that invite us to reflect on the possible (and impossible) ‘fitting together/co-ordinations’ (Pearce, 1989, 1994) between the professional teams and the communities and groups with which they work (Fuks, 1995).

Poverty as a metaphor

Another example of contextual craftsmanship has to do with denaturalising the concept of poverty, a topic frequently encountered in our work in Ce.A.C. The mention of poverty, expressed here as something ‘naturalized’, does not refer to a socio-economic category, but rather appears as a metaphorical construction from which the inter-relationships and distinctions, which organize the conversation, are arranged (Ibáñez Gracia, 1989). The metaphor of poverty can become so ‘transparent’ in day-to-day language that it is no longer perceived as a metaphorical reference; that is, one in which there is a “tension between two terms in one ... expression’...or more precisely...’between two opposing interpretations of the same’. (Ricoeur 1976).

The ability to ‘denaturalize’ taken-for-granted metaphors like ‘poverty’ increases the alternatives of exploring the complex representations which are weaved into the metaphor. Conversational exploration that exposes the tension created by different and opposing interpretations, deconstructs normal discursive strategies, and provides room for creativity. For example:

Co-ordinator: What makes you think that she especially suffers from having those limitations? ... Did she say something to you...?

Juana: No, no, she is nice...poor thing, ...she doesn't say anything... but, if I were in her place I would hate everybody...

Co-ordinator: Then, ... if I understood correctly, are you saying that one would not only have to care for her, but also you...for what you all feel when you are in contact with her?

The logic which sustains the metaphor of poverty offers a means of access to the fundamental scheme of the narration and - in this situation – to the idea one has of what is the ‘group’ (its rules, its conditions of incorporation, its conditions of exclusion, the systems of loyalties, etc); to the processes of exclusion and marginalization, the representations about ‘people who are different’ and the possible relationships with them, and the representations about invalidity.

A personal summary

A way of “positioning” oneself so that words are considered as “toys” and not as actual objects connects with the “semiotic density” of our world of meaning. Very dense key-words act like “black holes”; they absorb all the energy that circulates around them. Powerful expressions like these contain more meanings than a dictionary can explain. They call for both curiosity and exploration, as well as dogma; on the one hand, the adventure of not knowing, on the other hand, the unquestionable truth.

In their playful, adventurous dimension, they invite us to build conversations that permit explorations of complex, local and relational meanings. For that “trip” we need (as in all adventures) the cooperation of all participants, each one offering the best resources he or she has.

In my own “world of adventure” some words are a part of networks of meaning that operate – for me - like maps/territories/compasses. One of these words is “humour”.

No dogma allows us to question the solemnity that surrounds its own truths, and humour is the most powerful anti-dogma vaccine that I know.

As Rorty (1987) proposed in his ideas about irony, in humour there is something that destabilizes certainty and this destabilization, linked to the unconditional respect and valuation of the “other”, produces transformative effects.

Humour may help dilute the solemnity with which we deal with the sacred words of psychotherapy and social sciences, like essence, defence, resistance, pathology, cure, identity, therapist, conflict, rights, theory, ideology, change...

The Zen wisdom (as Bateson said!) shows the transformative power of the absurd, of humour, of playing with contexts.

Humour takes part of a tissue of meaning that – for me – is linked to “playing” (in its multiple forms), from games with rules to other amusements which serve no other purpose than the pleasure of playing... in child’s play or in erotic play, the purpose of the play is the pleasure which playing produces!

Besides, it is possible to think about “playful contexts” as landmarks of meaning (Bateson, 1972), where what happens is strongly signified as “play”; the playful contexts represent, for me, an invitation to come out of the solemnity inherent in modern rationality and constructs a place for relational interchanges (even the most difficult) supported by creativity.

This is another word-in-net. Play, humour, creativity are dense words that are weaved as part of a world vision, in which the “word” that articulates them – for me – is “pleasure”.

The old tension between pain and pleasure, present in Jewish-Christian therapy and philosophy (Foucault 1975), aimed at sin (lack, error, failure), and directed the vision to guilt, to punishment, to control, to duty. This vision was useful in the beginning of modern therapy as a great cultural reflection/ritual and has accomplished its mission of cultural transformation. However, it separated the body from pleasure and biology from religion.

Today this vision that impregnated psychology and therapy with control serves as an old landmark to new questions.

Today we ask ourselves less about accomplishing duty and guilt for transgressions and more about developing meaning for what we are doing and taking responsibility for what we construct. This new perspective (that returns to the Dionysian dimension) is a blueprint for an increasing interest in generative power.

This paradigmatic movement contains the tension between a “chronicler” and a “narrator” position as a way of being positioned in relation to stories people tell.

For those who work in situations marked by suffering, the challenge we faced – at any moment – was that of resisting becoming “suffering chroniclers? The challenge is to transform ourselves into “narrative facilitators? As facilitators, our narratives – unlike chronicles – are always co-constructed with the listener!

I suppose that, as Walter Benjamin (1965) reflected about Nicolai Leskov, we are trying to re-create the craftsmanship sense of narration as a social space of encounter. This tissue of keywords is part of what I call in my work “craftsmanship of contexts.”²

CMM as a model has demonstrated the possibilities accompanying the fresh winds that post-modern theories brought to the field of communication, previously too mechanistic and over-simplified. These post-modern concepts rescued what was most creative in the Batesonian and Goffman traditions, which were ahead of their time in focusing on “conversation” as the nucleus of social life and on the “frames” or “contexts” in which they occurred. The contribution of CMM to the generation of more creative social worlds emerged from the cohesion between the ‘model’ and the ‘instruments’ to which they gave place, which continues to contribute possibilities for describing the world in which we live.

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