Ideas for a phenomenological interpretation and elaboration of personal construct theory

Part 3. Clinic, psychotherapy, research

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In this part of our work about a comparison between Kelly's personal construct theory and phenomenology, we enter the fields of psychotherapy and research. The topic of intersubjectivity, meant as original recognition of the other's subjectivity, provides a backdrop for both phenomenological clinic and Kellyan psychotherapy. Though Kelly never used the term "intersubjectivity", his theory and the corollary of sociality in particular, reveals a view of interpersonal relationships as intercorporeality, which is much closer to phenomenological ideas than to the cognitive ones. Depending on such commonality, in either cases clinical relationship is not viewed as an "aspecific factor" of psychotherapy, but as the essential tool for the care of other. Furthermore, the core role of intersubjectivity in scientific knowledge implies a radical revision of the criteria of research. Consistently with the intent of a science of experience, it is no more a matter of collecting data, as of accepting meanings. Psychological research has to refound itself in continuity with life and recognize the need for a real involvement and real interaction with the subjects, as far as to reverse the traditional relation between clinic and research. It is nonsense to conceive clinic as an applicative sector of a pure science because clinic, on the contrary, is the place where one can know, in first-person, those meaningful realities which take shape in the intersubjective exchange of ideas, in order to make them comprehensible and controllable.

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In the first part of our paper (Armezzani & Chiari, 2014a) we showed the similarities between Kelly's (1955) personal construct theory (PCT) and phenomenology. Such similarities appear clear to us notwithstanding the rejection of phenomenology that Kelly pointed up again and again, most likely due to his indirect and distorted knowledge of it. In a second paper (Armezzani & Chiari, 2014b) we went as far as to uphold the thesis that Kelly's theory represents an example of realization of the Husserlian project of a rigorous science of experience, alternative to naturalistic psychology. In this third and last part of our paper we show how even the application of PCT to the fields of clinic, psychotherapy and research can be compared with the contributions of phenomenological reflection, coming out enriched.

An elaboration of personal construct psychotherapy from a narrative and hermeneutic point of view was already proposed and named "hermeneutic constructivist psychotherapy" (Chiari, 2015; Chiari & Nuzzo, 2010). It is a perspective which highlights the interpretive and linguistic nature of knowledge, and which integrates within the original Kelly's proposal the contributions deriving from the theory of autopoiesis (Maturana & Varela, 1987), Bruner's (1990) narrative approach, and Gadamer's (1975, 2004) and Ricoeur's (2004) hermeneutics.

In the present paper we want to elaborate the topic of intersubjectivity in particular, showing how it appears in some central features of Kellyan theory as well as in phenomenological empathy, and pursuing its applications in the ambits of clinic, psychotherapy, and psychological research.

Intersubjectivity

To treat in a problematic way the topic of intersubjectivity is a task which for several reasons very soon reveals itself hard. The definitions one can find in the dictionaries, even the most credited, are not very helpful. The Italian Devoto-Oli (2014) defines *intersoggettività* as «Carattere di ciò che è intersoggettivo» (Characteristic of what is intersubjective), and *intersoggettivo* as «Di ciò che è comune a più soggetti o che riguarda la relazione tra di essi» (What is common to more subjects or concerns the relationship between them). The *Oxford English Dictionary* (Simpson & Weiner, 1989) defines *intersubjectivity* as «*the fact or state of being intersubjective*», and *intersubjective* as a philosophical term having the meaning of «*Existing between conscious minds*» (an entry dating back to the edition of 1933, and never revised). They are generic definitions which little or nothing can add to the etimological meaning of the term. So, we have to draw on the meanings the term acquires in the context of the domains of knowledge which utilize it.

The role of intersubjectivity in philosophy has been investigated mainly with reference to ontological questions, in particular by Husserl (1977), who utilizes it in an attempt to transcend the objectivity-subjectivity opposition.

Husserlian reflection digs the topic of intersubjectivity as far as disclosing its roots, revealing the inextricable braidings with other basic themes: the theme of "objectivity" and the theme of corporeity.

The analysis of the philosopher starts with a radical question: how does the experience of the other manifest itself originally? How does it happen that one can tell people from objects within the field of presence? The method of analysis is the phenomenological one which, through the e*pochè* – the suspension of any cognitive judgment – is aimed at reaching the original layer of experience. Then, Husserl asks himself, "If I bracket the others' reality, what remains?". What remains is the concrete subjectivity, the original bodily presence. But this original presence is connoted by a constitutive intentionality, by a structural correlation with the

world, which goes along with the presence of other subjects. Let us follow Husserl's reflection: "If I 'abstract' (in the usual sense) from others, I remain 'alone'. But such abstraction is not radical; such aloneness in no respect alters the natural world-sense, 'experienceable by everyone'" (Husserl, 1977, p. 93).

Since the origin of consciousness, objects constitute themselves as intersubjective, as realities existing not only for me, but also for others, because the very conditions of perception refer to other presences, to other views on "things". If I am in front of a house, I can see from my position only part of it. Due to its being inherent in a perspective, any thing exposes itself only "by signs and adumbrations" (Husserl, 2001, p. 308). And yet I am able to feel its wholeness, because from my position I can intend to other possible views about it, I can grasp its essential being-for-others too. In this sense, the datum, the known thing, is "a rule of possible appearances" and becomes "objective" only when it is "an intersubjective one" (Husserl, 1989, p. 86). The world, then, is neither outside my knowledge, nor a product of my consciousness, but it takes shape as common horizon of our perspectives.

The experience of one's own body is strictly connected to this evidence: the original presence, rediscovered after the *epoché*, is a presence heavily connoted by an ambiguous character, by a sort of "lived duality". The body reveals itself as an "object" of a particular kind, "a remarkably imperfectly constituted thing" (Husserl, 1989, p. 167):

> Hence the Body is originally constituted in a double way: first, it is a physical thing, *matter;* it has its extension, in which are included its real properties, its colour, smoothness, hardness, warmth, and whatever other material qualities of that kind there are. Secondly, I find on it, and I *sense* "on" it and "in" it: warmth on the back of the hand, coldness in the feet, sensations of touch in the fingertips. (Husserl, 1989, p. 153)

Here is the distinction between *Körper* and *Leib*, between object-body and lived-body: a distinction now assimilated as a common notion, and not only from phenomenologists. But, in experience, such conceptual distinction appears in a curious braiding: being in the world as a thing, and at the same time as experiencing subjectivity, reveals "the paradox of human subjectivity: being a subject for the world and at the same time being an object in the world" (Husserl, 1970, p. 178).

The experience of this twofold matrix reveals that what had been put out of frame – otherness in parentheses – is already in parentheses, within the experience of "my own", within the "original sphere" (Husserl, 1977, p. 104). The structural not-correspondence which lives in the experience of my body, this "my own otherness", is at the origin of the perception of the other as extraneous and analogous. If my own body can be simultaneously touching and touched, looking and looked, subjectivity and matter, the body of the other shows this same ambiguity and reveals the consciousness which gives life to it. I can therefore recognize it as a presence similar to mine, because I already have in myself the intentional structure of otherness, because I can conceive the possibility of an objectification also for my subjectivity.

The core importance of the ambiguity of the body in the recognition of Alter-ego is continually deepened in the work of Merleau-Ponty: "our body is a being of two leaves" (1968a, p. 137): its twofold belonging to the orders of subject and object constitutes itself as "reciprocal insertion" and natural concatenation. This adherence, "this circle which I do not form, which forms me, this coiling over of the visible upon the invisible, can traverse, animate other bodies as well as my own" (1968a, p. 140) and reveal itself as original *intercorporeality*.

In "pairing" (*Paarung*), the perception of otherness emerges then as perception of others as "ego-like living beings" (Husserl, 1977, p. 95), "existing for themselves precisely as I exist for myself" (*ibid.*, p. 128).

Every other-I is appresented as someone which participates in the universal form of structure of my own experience, as "ground zero" of his or her world, just as I am of mine. This is why I can "put myself in others' shoes": because the *structure* by which I picture myself, I imagine that experience, is the same structure which allows to recognize myself in my twofold belonging of *Körper* and *Leib*.

Empathy has its roots in this general structure which constitute human condition. Husserl's pupil, Edith Stein (1989), actually defines empathy as "the experience which an 'I' as such has of another 'I' as such" (p. 11); and this stress on generality is essential in order to understand that in phenomenology empathy does not show an emotional state, but the condition of possibility of any communication.

"Empathy" – as Costa (2010) mention – "is not a psychological, but a transcendental fact" (p. XLIII, trans. ours). It coincides with "the experience of foreign consciousness", with the originary way in which "human beings comprehend the psychic life of their fellows" (Stein, 1989, p. 11). This is why, when we perceive another person, we can tell immediately him or her from physical things and recognize the presence of an embodied subjectivity.

> We could proceed from the complete, concrete phenomenon before us in our experiential world, the phenomenon of psycho-physical individual which is clearly distinguished from a physical thing.
> This individual is not given as a physical body *(physiscer Körper),* but as a sensitive, living body *(Leib)* belonging to an "I", an "I" that senses, thinks, feels and will. The living body of this "I" not only fits into my phenomenal world but is itself the center of orientation of such a phenomenal world. It faces this world and communicates with me. (Stein, 1989, p. 4)

Then empathy, in the phenomenological perspective, consists neither in the ability of grasping a particular mood (joy, contentedness, sadness, sorrow) in the other's behaviour, nor it is a logical inference, but it places itself at a deeper level as structural possibility of recognition of another center of significance similar to mine and of the common belonging in the same world. "Empathy is a kind of act of perceiving *sui generis"* (Stein, 1989, p. 4), because it gives me live the extraneous experience, without that that experience becomes mine. Here is its transcendental nature: if I understand the other's feelings it is because I have in myself, as Merleau-Ponty (1968b) says, "the project of all possible being" (p. 417).

In a similar way Minkowski (1966) writes about the phenomenon of *echo* or *resonance*:

> This phenomenon is prior (not in the chronological meaning of the term) to the individual manifestations in which it might realize itself […]. The "psychical" has not as a unique origin some movements of the soul limited to the subject. On the contrary, it rests on "inter-human" phenomena in essence: they constitute the general ambit in which any individual life comes to become part. (Italian trans., p. 199, trans. ours)

Then empathy can be ideally represented not as a horizontal arrow linking two subjects, but as a direction depth, towards the original layer of experience, in which has its roots the possibility of the interhuman encounter.

The phenomenological view of intersubjectivity is nowadays significantly corroborated in several scientific ambits. Neurophenomenology puts it as the core of its research program in "second-person". As Varela (1996) writes:

> It is one of the most impressive discoveries of the phenomenological movement to have quickly realized that an investigation of the structure of human experience inevitably induces a shift towards considering several levels of my consciousness as inextricably linked to those of others and to the phenomenal world in an empathic mesh. (p. 340)

The contributions of the *Infant Research* put forward the hypothesis of an "innate intersubjectivity" (Trevarthen, 1998, p. 1). Meltzoff and Moore (1998) have empirically demonstrated that, soon after birth, an infant is able to imitate the movement of mouth opening which he or she sees performed in front of him or her, thanks to a phenomenon of "cross-modal correspondence": the body schema works as a proprioceptive self already coupled with the other (Gallagher & Meltzoff, 1996). The discovery of the mirror-neuron system corroborates this empirical evidence and seems to confirm the idea that "we-ness and intersubjectivity ontologically ground the human condition, in which reciprocity foundationally defines human existence" (Gallese, 2009a, p. 530). By stressing the pre-reflexive nature of intersubjectivity, Gallese refers explicitly to Husserl:

> As repeatedly claimed by the father of phenomenology, it is exactly the twofold nature of our body as sentient subject and object of our perception to allow us the constitution of other human beings as persons. The body, perceived simultaneously as external object and experiential subject, founds the experiential sense of personality which we attribute to others on the same embodied substrate. (Gallese, 2009b, trans. ours)

The recognition of the other as similar to me and as "legitimate other in coexistence with" myself (Maturana & Verden-Zöller, 1996) – and the resulting impossibility of regarding him or her as an object among objects – does not derive then from considerations unrelated to science (Armezzani, 2013), but it takes the characters of an evidence which goes along with equally clear ethical implications.

Actually, according to Husserl it is intersubjective experience to play a basic role in the constitution of ourselves as subjects objectively existing, of other subjects, and of the objective space-time world. In the light of a first-person perspective, intersubjectivity derives from acts of empathy: it is empathic experience. It happens in the course of our attribution of intentional acts to other subjects, when we put ourselves in the others' shoes. The phenomenological method allows Husserl to reveal the basic belief that a person looking and behaving in a way similar to mine will perceive things from an egocentric viewpoint similar to mine; and this belief allows me to attribute intentional acts to others in an immediate, "appresentative" (that is, not "presented" to consciousness but "copresent") way.

In the psychological literature – also the less marked by the naturalistic method and more addressed to the study of subjectivity and relationality – the utilization of the term "intersubjectivity" has head for a process of progressive deviation from the original Husserlian meaning: in part probably as a result of a superficial understanding of Husserl's thought, and partly as a consequence of the more specific interests of psychological inquiry. Among these, the role of the relationships in the construction of reality, the importance of sociality in the constitution of

personal identity, as far as to arrive to the more limited analysis of transferential and counter-transferential dynamics of the psychotherapeutic relationship. The psychologists who deal with these topics, also when quoting Husserl with reference to intersubjectivity, contributed to a trivialization of its meaning.

Bruner (1996) for example, though claiming that psychology should concern intersubjectivity, defines it as "how people come to know what others have in mind and how they adjust accordingly" (p. 161), thus turning to a notion of intersubjectivity as "shared" or "mutual understanding" (Duranti, 2010). And even the psychoanalysts – like Atwood and Stolorow (1994) – which put intersubjectivity (and sometimes the reference to Husserl) as the distinctive trademark of their approach are immune from this kind of vagueness. As highlighted from Benjamin (1999), another representative of the socalled "relational perspective" in psychoanalysis, Atwood and Stolorow reduce intersubjectivity to "all interplay between different subjective worlds" (p. 201), not distinguishing between interpersonal and intersubjective. By analyzing the therapeutic relationship and referring to Habermas and Hegel, Benjamin makes use of the term "intersubjectivity to refer not merely to the generalization that we operate in the presence of two persons in an interpersonal field, but to the specific matter of recognizing the other as an equivalent center of being" (p. 201). Even who, like Stern (2005) – an influential representative of relational psychoanalysis particularly interested in infant research – defines intersubjectivity as "the capacity to share, know, understand, emphatize with, feel, participate in, resonate with, and enter into the lived subjective experience of another" (p. 78), does not stray from a notion of it as shared understanding. Other authors (e.g. Safran & Segal, 1990) who also stress the importance of the relational dimension are right in writing of interpersonal rather than intersubjective processes.

As Zahavi (2001) explained well, "intersubjectivity cannot be reduced to the concrete encounter with another subject" because "the concrete encounter with another simply unfolds and articulates what was already there from the very start a priori" (p. 156). Interpersonal relationships are but the expression of that deep and constitutive *Mit-Dasein* (Heidegger, 1927) which makes the opening to the other possible and which is connoted in a hard sense by the term intersubjectivity.

And Kelly?

Of course Kelly never uses – neither in his major work of 1955, nor in his posthumous writings (Maher, 1969) – the terms "intersubjectivity" and "intersubjective", which became widespread only after his death. Nevertheless we can ask ourselves how PCT deals with the relational dimension: if in the ways which send to the interpersonal, or to those which take shape in terms of intersubjectivity.

The relational dimension in personal construct theory

A first generically relational feature appears in PCT in the second corollary, the *corollary of individuality*. "Persons differ from each other in their construction of events" (Kelly, 1955, p. 55), and not as a consequence of their having met different events. However, no two people can play precisely the same role in the same event because, in such an event, each experiences the other as an external figure, and each experiences a different person (that is, him or herself) as the central figure. At this point Kelly asks himself rethorically if this means that there can be no sharing of experience. His answer is an outright no, since each person may construe like-nesses and differences between the events in which is involved, together with those in which he or she sees that the other person is involved. "Thus, while there are individual differences in

the construction of events, persons can find common ground through construing the experiences of their neighboirs along with their own" (1955, p. 56).

We have to wait for the tenth corollary, the *corollary of commonality*, to again find a direct reference to the "field of interpersonal relationships": "To the extent that one person employs a construction of experience which is similar to that employed by another, his psychological processes are similar to those of the other person" (p. 90). Again, Kelly underlines that the similarity between the psychological processes of two people does not derive from their having experienced the same events – an assumption belonging to a stimulus-response psychology – but from the similarity between their present constructions of experience. And he does not omit to highlight how commonality is such in the eyes of an observer: "to the extent that we can construe the constructions of two other people as being similar, we may anticipate that their psychological processes may also be construed as similar" (p. 91). As for what he means for "construction of experience", Kelly stresses that it does not necessarily consist in interpretations well formulated by means of words nor on the other hand are verbally formulated interpretations necessarily similar only because words are similar: two people may employ essentially the same construction of experience though expressing themselves in very different terms.

In discussing the implications of the corollary of commonality, Kelly observes that certain groups of people (of the same age, for instance) in some aspects behave in a similar way. One of the more common and interesting approaches to individual similarities and differences put them in relation to culture. Again, however, if we group people according to cultural similarities in their upbringing and their environment we would remain within a stimulus-response perspective. Instead, if culture is taken to mean (as sociologists do) similarity in what members of the group expect of each other, then we would have two possibilities: to consider the expectations of others as stimuli to which each person is subjected (again, a stimulus-response perspective), or to understand cultural similarity between persons as essentially a similarity in what they perceive is expected of them. An approach, the latter, which throws the emphasis upon the outlook of the person, and which is in line with personal construct psychology. And, if we do not forget that according to the *fundamental postulate* of PCT, "a person's processes are psychologically channelized by the ways in which he anticipates events" (1955, p. 46), then we can understand cultural similarities not only in terms of personal outlooks, but more specifically in terms of what a person anticipates others will do and, in turn, what he or she thinks they are expecting him or her to do. Kelly depicts thereby a "spiraliform model. James anticipates what John will do. James also anticipates what John thinks he, James, will do. James further anticipates what John thinks James expects John will do. In addition, James anticipates what what John thinks James expects John to predict that James will do. And so on!" (1955, p. 94). To sum up, people belong to the same cultural group, not merely because they behave alike, nor because they expect the same things of others, but mainly because they construe their experience in a similar way.

The eleventh corollary, the *corollary of sociality*, completes the bases of PCT not so much because it occupies the last place, as especially because, with its definition of "role relationship", has been regarded as the target at which the whole theory aims, being the other aspects secondary to this (Hinkle, 1970). Kelly himself (1955) testifies this by making known to have at first called "role theory" (p. 179) his psychological construction, since the expression conveyed in the best possible way the course leading to understand the clients in psychotherapy by understanding the part they were seeking to enact. The term "role" was abandoned when "it began to appear in psychological literature in quite a different sense" (Kelly, 1969a, p. 271). The corollary of sociality says: "To the extent that one person construes the construction processes of another, he may play a role in a social process involving the other person" (Kelly, 1955, p. 95). Commonality alone does not guarantee the possibility of a social coexistence.

> In order to play a constructive role in relation to another person one must not only, in some measure, see eye to eye with him but must, in some measure, have an acceptance of him and of his way of seeing things. We say it in another way: the person who is to play a constructive role in a social process with another person need not so much construe things as the other person does as he must effectively construe the other person's outlook. (*ibid.*)

The possibility to anticipate what others will do allows to adjust ourselves to their behaviour, and others to adjust themselves to ours, to the extent that our construction system subsumes the construction systems of others and theirs, in part, subsume ours, being it a question of driving in the traffic, of the relationship between a couple, or of the therapist-client relationship – of course, with different levels of generality, depth, and reciprocity.

To make his definition of "role" very clear, Kelly provides three definitions: one in terms of PCT ("a psychological process based upon the role player's construction of aspects of the construction systems of those with whom he attempts to join in a social enterprise"), one in a more familiar language ("an ongoing pattern of behavior that follows from a person's understanding of how the others who are associated with him in his task think", and one in an idiomatic language ("a position that one can play on a certain team without even waiting for the signals" (1955, pp. 97-98). The last definition allows to understand the importance of the sense of team membership in Kelly's notion of role – of the participation, either in concert or in opposition, to a group movement.

Now maybe the difference between commonality and sociality is clearer. Commonality can exist between two people without either of them being able to understand the other well enough to engage in a social process with him or her. It is the case of the psychotherapists who identify themselves so closely with their clients' way of seeing things that they cannot subsume the clients' psychological processes, with the result of an impoverishment of the role they can play.

> In order for people to get along harmoniously with each other, each must have some understanding of the other. This is different from saying that each must understand things in the same way as the other, and this delicate point has profound implications in psychotherapy. (1955, p. 99)

Kelly makes also use of a metaphor in order to explain how he sees the role relationship between a psychologist and a client.

> A teacher examines her pupils' arithmetic papers. She may approach the task in either of two ways: she can look at the answers only, and mark them right or wrong, or she can look at the methods by which the individual pupil obtained his answrrs. In the former case she operates as a test-scoring machine and reflects only validating evidence for the pupil to make use of. In the latter case she undertakes a role relationship with each pupil and joins with the pupil in establishing a miniature society with mutual efforts and objectives. A similar possibility is open to the psychologist in his relations with his client. He can exhibit himself to his client as a stalwart representative of "Truth, Justice, and the American Way," or he can take a second look at his client's own personal outlook to see how the two of them might work together for a common purpose. (Kelly, 1955, p. 321)

To see the world with the other's eyes is "a precondition for the intentional adoption of role relationships" (Kelly, 1955, p. 373).

As Butt (1998a) observes, sociality as Kelly means it is at one end of a construct of relationship where the opposite pole involves treating others as behaving mannequins: which, according to Kelly (1969b, p. 221), characterizes psychopathy. However, Butt goes on, Kellyan definition of role – "whatever one does in the light of his understanding of another's outlook" (Kelly, 1969c, p. 178) – can give the image of "a person standing back and assessing the point of view of the other and then acting" (p. 106), according to a temporal sequence of (cognitive) assessment, decision, and action. By elaborating the notion of role in the light of Merleau-Ponty's (1964, 1968b) existential phenomenology, Butt (1998a) argues that construing the other's construction processes does not necessarily entail the recognition of another's point of view, and that "sociality can be seen as more primitive for humankind than individuality, when our status as body-subjects is appreciated and dualist ideas are abandoned" (p. 106). In other words, it is possible to conceive the relationship between two or more persons not in terms of "interacting" individuals, but of elements of an inseparable system in which the relationship precedes the individual psychologies.

A view, the above, which reminds the idea of *intersubjectivity* that Merleau-Ponty, elaborating Husserl, declines in terms of *intercorporeality*, but also the relationship of complementarity between "I" and "Thou", that *sphere of between* described by Buber (1937), which has been regarded as a metaphysical necessity within hermeneutic constructivism (Chiari & Nuzzo, 2006).

Psychotherapy

If in Kelly an explicit consideration of role relationships from an intersubjective viewpoint is missing, the importance he attaches to intersubjectivity and intercorporeality can be easily inferred from the value he gives to certain psychotherapeutic techniques having the structure of *role playing* – in particular, *fixed-role therapy* and *enactment*. The assumption for their utilization in psychotherapy beside the therapeutic conversation rests on the above consideration of the construction process as a social process, rather than as a mere individual and intellectual operation. Butt (1998b), in another phenomenological reading of PCT, refers to the notion of *joint action* which Shotter (1995) – a social constructionist – draws from Merleau-Ponty (1968b): a knowledge transcending the subject-object separation, and which cannot be traced back to the intentions of the single participants since deriving from a social context constituted by them and constituting them. In Butt words,

> From this perspective, construing takes place primarily in action […] Constructs do not precede or cause action; there are no constructs behind or beneath our behaviour. With the stress on action and interaction, construing is emphasized as something we do rather than constructs as entities we possess. (Butt, 1998b, p. 273)

How much Kelly follows a similar view appears palpable in his discussion of the relation between guilt and role. In this case, it is the *core role* to be in question: "a role is not always a superficial thing, a simple mask to be put on or taken off; rather, that there is a core role, a part one plays as if his life depended upon it. Finally, it is the loss of status within the core role constructions which is experienced as guilt" (Kelly, 1955, p. 503). Then, "we are dependent for life itself upon an understanding of the thoughts of certain other people" (*ibid.*).

The expression "understanding of the thoughts of certain other people" seems to refer to a cognitive, intellectual process, similar to the current theories of mind. But let us see how Kelly illustrates what has just written:

> A child construes himself as belonging to his family. He interprets his mother's behavior. He interprets his father's behavior. He enacts his presumed part in relation to this interpretation. He comes to identify himself in the practical terms of the enactment. Who is he? Who is he *really*? He is a child belonging to Mother and Father and he therefore does this and this and this. Some of the things he does are merely incidental or peripheral. He may mention them because they are easier to put into words. The more basic features of his role may exist for him in terms of preverbal constructs. When asked who he is he may be unable to put them into words.
> Now let us suppose that the child discovers that he has not been acting as his parent's child. Let us suppose that the discovery goes deep. His identity is affected. He really is not cast in the core role. The maintenance of his identity rests, he finds, not upon the filial part he thought he was playing, but upon some other, possibly more obscure, ground. It is at this point that he feels guilt! (Kelly, 1955, pp. 503-504)

There is very little of cognitive or intellectual in the above. There is a *joint action* between child and parents, based upon the mutual construction of expectations, in an attempt to recognize oneself (personally) and being recognized (socially) in a role which can give a sense to one's own existence and allow its conservation, psychologically and biologically. There is *embodied knowledge*. In Kelly's words,

> What would happen if we took the general view that what people *do* is a feature of what they *are*; that the extent to which a person *behaves* in a certain way is a measure of the extent to which he *is* that kind of person? (1955, p. 363, italics in the original).

It is such understanding of "role relationships", and "core role" in particular, to explain the therapeutic efficacy of the techniques we quoted. Acting the role of another person, in the case of *enactment*, with the bodily involvement and the interactions implied by such a task, favours an understanding of the other independently from the possibility of communicating it verbally: "enactment of a role is more than merely an outcome of one's understanding of others; it is also a way to arrive at a further understanding of them" (Kelly, 1955, pp. 1141-1142). To act for a few days the part of another person on the basis of a fixed sketch, in the case of *fixed-role therapy*, favours the establishment of new role relationships, as well as the exploration and experimentation of possible alternative core roles, behind the protective mask of make-believe.

After all, beyond these specific techniques, the way personal construct psychotherapy understands the therapeutic relationship rests on similar assumptions. The psychotherapeutic relationship is not an impersonal place where the techniques aimed at favouring a change in the client can be utilized, but the social environment in which and thanks to which a personal change can occur. For this reason the psychotherapists, on the basis of their understanding of the clients, try to extricate themselves from the kind of role relationship which the clients seek to play by reproposing the dimensions used in their relationship with other people; and they can do it either relating with them by assuming an orthogonal position (Chiari & Nuzzo, 2005),

or even enacting "a series of carefully chosen parts and [seeking] to have the client develop adequate role relationships to the figures portrayed" (Kelly, 1955, p. 664).

The efficacy of such experiences is evident in the training in hermeneutic constructivist psychotherapy. During the period given to supervision, the students are asked to enact the part of their clients. Such *enactment* can allow for a psychotherapy session with the supervisor in the role of the therapist, or for a group therapy session with all the students enacting the part of their clients. The experience reveals itself extremely useful both for the supervisor, who has the possibility to understand the clients not through a verbal report or an audio recording of the sessions, but by observing them in action; and for the students who through the enactment arrive not only to a further understanding of their clients, but have also the possibility to experiment alternative role relationships. Maybe it is also as a result of this kind of experiences that the students, at the end of their training, often refer to have achieved significant personal changes; as well as keep achieving changes those psychotherapists which make really experience of the relationships with their clients.

The hermeneutic dimension implies such mutual transformation, such "fusion of horizons", as Gadamer (1975) calls it. But it is not "only" understanding. The enactive efficacy of hermeneutic dialogue rests on the enactment of new possibilities which become lived, without distinction between cognition, emotion, and corporeity. Actually, according to an enactivist perspective, it is the process itself of interaction to create new realities (De Jaegher, Di Paolo & Gallagher, 2010), both through language and through implicit and bodily experiences.

In this sense intersubjective encounter is already therapeutic. As Barison (1990), a Heideggerian-inspired psychiatrist, writes:

> In hermeneutic dialogue there are not a subject and an object, but there is the encounter of two horizons, which combine with each other in a new horizon, formed by a change of both of them in the moment of interpretation: as Gadamer says, an "increase of being" comes about. This happens [...] when a creation of meanings realizes between patient and therapist, in the atmosphere of understanding. It is clear, according to me, that this event equalizes a proper clinical test and a first psychotherapeutic act. (p. 31, trans. ours)

The similarity between Kellyan and phenomenological clinic derives from the commonality of their epistemological matrixes (Armezzani, 2010): the rejection of both naturalism and the prejudice of an objective reality inevitably leads to consider the intersubjective construction of meanings and therefore, the possibility of their reconstruction within a favourable social ambit in the atmosphere of understanding. It is thanks to these epistemological matrixes that one can consistently claim that the relationship in psychotherapy is not one (though important) of the "aspecific factors" affecting the outcome, but the essential instrument of the care of the other.

The phenomenological formulation shows all its radicality by rejecting every codified technique; what has often been reason of criticism and depreciation. However, such criticism does not take into account that this apparent lack is coherent with the choice of not making concessions to the realistic and objectivist remains which are implicit in the request for practical tools and rules. Actually, the application of pre-arranged and anonymous registers ends up in cancelling the consideration of the person as "similar to me", and in reproducing a subject-object relationship. The technical devices, in fact, are expression of those relational modes which, according to Binswanger (1942), compel us to look for "a grip" to seize and control the other; those modes which he defines, not by chance, as "modes of aggressiveness". Within the dimension of the phenomenological care which Di Petta (2003) calls "clinic of being" or "clinic of presence", it is the clinician him or herself to become the therapeutic instrument: "The setting

of phenomenological care (of this care) becomes the very dispositional attitude in which the psychotherapist puts him or herself" (Di Petta, 2013, p. 15, trans. ours).

On the contrary, constructivist psychotherapy has access to diagnostic instruments and therapeutic techniques but – how it is possible to understand from the above description of fixed-role therapy – the sense and aim of these procedures are very distant from those employed by naturalistic psychology. The use of the instruments is aimed at the free expression of the person's meanings and included in a relational frame oriented to understanding (Chiari & Nuzzo, 2010; Armezzani, Grimaldi & Pezzullo, 2003). One could say that the "dispositional attitude" with which those instruments have been conceived by Kelly is the one demanded by the phenomenological care and, as a consequence, that they can favour a similar attitude even in the psychotherapists who make use of them.

In Kellyan psychotherapy the primary goal is the understanding of the other's system of meanings in order to promote the natural movement of being when this has come to a halt, beyond any diagnostic classification. In a similar way in *Daseinanalyse* (literally, "analysis of Being-there") proposed by Binswanger (1955) the understanding is directed to the *modes* with which being declines and plans itself, by means of a deep analysis of the structures (temporal, spatial, coexistentive) thus giving meaning to its experience. It is not so much an understanding by affective identification, as a clarification of the inner rule of that specific world project, beyond the healthy/ill distinction. Even in this case, it is a question of seeing where that existence suffered a setback and of reopening the field of possibilities.

When one succeeds in preparing towards the other according to these directions of sense, a new space reveals itself between people, a space we could define "sacred", in the sense that it is separated from the one trivial of the world of "they" and "idle talk" (Heidegger, 1927); a space in which the prejudices and certainties by which we are usually looked and measured are no more valid, but in which realizes itself that *Mit-Sein*, that being together with the other, which is often absent in suffering people. It is just the *Mit-Dasein*, this constitutive condition of being human, which allows the creation of a new event, the project of a going out of the trivial, out of the roles, of the heaviness of the everyday realism:

> Any psychotherapy can be seen as the creation of a completely new situation which interrupts the course of life of two people – therapist and therapeutized –; such a «new» space (which often presents itself with aspects of «irreality») favours the beginning of a «being together» implying ways of being there completely new for both. And which are «therapeutic» since they constitute occasion of authentic modes of being. (Barison, 1990, p. 1, trans. ours)

Of course, the therapeutic value of the relationship does not exhaust itself in the concrete exchange between the two protagonists, but is realized by offering a paradigmatic example of intersubjectivity able to transform the whole social life of the person. Kelly (1955) regards the ability to understand others as condition of harmony between people, and its failure as the "greater tragedy" (p. 100). A similar consideration leads Binswanger to rethink what we call "symptoms" as "disorders of communication", as "distortions of human communication, but also and above all anthropogical distortions of the encounter" (Callieri, 2007, p. 146, trans. ours). However, any psychotherapist could testify that most of human misery is closely related to unhappy relational experiences connoted by objectification of the other, dependency, and loss of a deep sense of otherness. The lack of role relationships and the inability to see others as centres of one's "field of signification", prevents an authentic intersubjective exchange of ideas and, therefore, the very possibility of imagining alternatives to one's own costruction of events. For this reason, the experience of being understood as a subject by another subject can

be the start of deep personal transformations. For this reason, the relationship can be therapeutic in itself and become the decisive and "specific factor" of therapy.

Given these bases, the training of clinicians should not take shape only as indoctrination about theories and techniques of the model one belongs to, but as the putting in professional form of a cognitive and relational attitude which finds in phenomenology and constructivism its theoretical base, besides appealing to a particular personal inclination.

Research

We conclude our comparison with some consideration about the topic of psychological research. Constructivism and phenomenology developed a view of research alternative to the traditional one. It not being any more possible to rely on "correct" representations of reality, knowledge is conceived as a dynamic and self-organized process taking shape in reciprocal agreements. Intersubjective validation is recognized by all the constructivist authors and conceived as not only cognitive, but also "enactive" interaction (Morganti, Carassa & Riva, 2008).

Husserlian criticism to naturalistic science seems to find corroboration in many current positions no more willing to support the pragmatic and operational standards of correctness in the usual research models, by considering that they have not their validity in themselves, but have received it by the agreement of scientific communities.

"Action-research", "partecipative", "narrative", "dialogical" "co-operative", "contextual", "situationist", "prospectivist", "phenomenological", "cultural", "hermeneutic", "critical" research, are ways by which one can name this way of conceiving psychological research as activity addressed to the understanding of experience, and in which it is difficult to tell the cognitive from the applicative aspect. As *Grounded theory* (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) suggests, rather than to pigeonhole data collection into the schemata of the theory, it is the theory to take increasingly shape by the knowledge of recurrences, similarities and differences found in the interaction with people and groups. The research techniques have therefore to give complete freedom of expression to the involved people: life stories, diaries, not-structured interview, narrative reports, conversations, and focus groups replace standardized questionnaires and observational grids. The researcher's neutrality turns into an active involvement in interaction which disrupts the old rules. In Steier's (1995) words, it is a matter of "challenging the traditional objectivist and rationalist views of inquiry, which keep the world, both physical and social, at a distance, as an independently existing *uni*verse, and which hold knowledge as reflecting, or even corresponding, to *the* world" (p. 1, italics in the original).

The main reason of such challenge and revolution of methods, strategies and attitudes is that, when a phenomenological or constructivist perspective is adopted, it is no more a question of *collecting* data, but of *accepting* meanings.

Hence the prime choice of qualitative methods. It is not possible however to directly equate constructivist and phenomenological research with qualitative research, nor it is an a priori rejection of statistical procedures necessary. "Qualitative" and "quantitative" are adjectives more suitable for the techniques than the research as a whole. The latter defines itself mainly for the forms of thought which it expresses and for its ends; a science of experience, as we presented it in these pages, is aimed at researching meanings and the typical forms they take in intersubjective relationships, and for this reason it has to undergo a radical reconsideration of its procedures of inquiry.

Kelly anticipates such reconsideration in an article of 1964 which attacks that type of psychological research whose assumption is that people "have variables in their insides and that we should go looking for them" (p. 122). When a researcher

> is merely applying an instrument he did not devise or derive from an intimate study of persons, I wonder if he has any first-hand familiarity with the problem he proposes to investigate and if he is not interposing the instrument between himself and the persons he would rather not know too well. Is he merely playing games with data? If so, it is what I call "slot machine psychology" or "Las Vegas humanism". (Kelly, 1964, p. 121)

If the object of the research is a greater understanding of the human and its forms of expression, then one has to associate with the human and not limit oneself to a rational knowledge which keeps at a distance its objects of investigation. Kelly writes again:

> Research involves all the levels of experience that man is capable of having. This is especially true of psychological research. It is an orchestration of all the talents of man, just as psychotherapy is such an orchestration, not the implementation of some talents and the denial of others. (Kelly, 1964, p. 127)

Before him, from the phenomenological front, Jaspers (1963) remarked: "The investigator, however, is more than a vessel into which knowledge can be poured. He is a living being and as such an indispensable instrument of his own research." (p. 21).

As also Maturana often writes, "to live is to know" (Maturana & Varela, 1987, p. 174) and "living systems are cognitive systems, and living as a process is a process of cognition" (Maturana, 1980, p. 13). For this reason, constructivism and phenomenology believe that psychological research should refound itself in continuity with real life and recognize the need of a real interaction with the subjects met in its course.

The implications of this perspective end up by reversing the traditional relation between clinic and research. It makes no more sense to conceive clinic as the applicative sector of a pure science, as the place in which the general principles obtained elsewhere (in laboratories, or in statistical stations) are put into practice; instead, clinic is the place in which one can know in first person those meaningful realities which take shape in the intersubjective exchange of ideas, thus making them accessible and "controllable".

The naturalistic scientist expects a knowledge "in third person" and, in order to obtain it, must abandon the personal and social dimension, not only when he or she is a chemist or a physicist, but also when interacting with his or her fellows. Methodological requirements which call for a treatment of subjects as reacting mechanisms and a degradation of meanings into unambiguous data, prevent to see how in real life the passage from the discourses in "first person" to those in "third person" goes through the natural mediation of the "second person" (Thompson, 2001). The pretension of a technical and objective knowledge makes the figure of the naturalistic psychologist similar to that of the geographer described in *The Little Prince* (St. Exupery, 1943): "It is not the geographer who goes out to count the towns, the rivers, the mountains, the seas, the oceans, and the deserts. The geographer is much too important to go loafing about. He does not leave his desk" (p. 64).

The age-old attempt to empirically verify the efficacy of psychotherapies is an example of the cognitive attitude as "geographer". The history of such attempts leads to a paradoxical outcome: the more one strives to apply quantitative methods, the more the evidence emerges that

it is the quality of the interaction to settle the success of the interventions, up to conclude that "[therapist] effects greatly exceed treatment effects" (Wampold, 2001, p. 200). Another not encouraging result is the fact that the impersonal methods utilized in research can give no indication about "what to do" in clinical work, when one faces real and always different people, as well as nothing can say about how subjects "feel" before, during, and after therapy. Although everyday life constantly confirms that what is of importance is our "to feel well" in situations and relationships, psychological research keeps regarding statistical significance more important than clinical significance. The members themselves of the APA (*American Psychological Association*) commissions admit that the EST (*Empirically Supported Therapies*) lists published so far ignore that "it is frequently more important to know what kind of patient has the disorder than what kind of disorder the person has", "depict disembodied therapists", and "underscore that the therapeutic relationship accounts for as much as the outcome variance as particular treatments" (Norcross, 2001, *passim*). In short, the map of the empirically supported therapies cannot consider the meanings involved in clinical situation because the methodological choice implies their exclusion from the beginning, regarding clients as "owners of variables" or interchangeable elements of a statistical sample.

Therefore, even the research which uses quantitative methods must take experience into account: therapy depends on persons and on the quality of their interactions. But then one must admit that only a professionally oriented experience is able to show us how and when a therapy "works". The professional, and the subject which turns to him or her, face each other in the clinical process, and this exchange of ideas includes a continuous and reciprocal "monitoring" of the ongoing course, taking into consideration that the two are not the only observers: the whole life context is a witness to the outcome. Anyway, the clinician's scientific glance is not "somewhere else" compared to the glance involved in the process: it is the same trained glance to recognize passages, obstacles, resistances, and – at the same time – recurrences and invariances crossing the variety of human manifestations. The endless "equipped" raids in the territories of meanings are the very research allowing to understand the structural forms with which they manifest themselves, and the ways in which they can transform themselves.

The inquiry which tries to give voice to the subjects involved in the clinical intervention in order to "measure" its efficacy (Petry, Tennen & Affleck, 2000; Gordon, 2000), to analyze the course of single cases (Anderson & Kim, 2003; Elliott, 2000; Kazdin, 2003), and to single out its salient moments (Barkham, 1990), is moving in this direction. This last methodology, known as *Event paradigm*, demands that both the protagonists of interaction compare their impressions as to the moments of intervention, regarded as crucial.

In short, the shifting from data to meanings implies a series of transformations which show the clinical ambit as the privileged ground of research. Here actually the centrality of experience and intersubjectivity shows itself in an unequivocal way, and only a real intersubjective involvement can transform deep intuitions in unambiguous rational forms, as Husserl wished.

Of course, all the above does not imply the refusal of other research strategies, but invites to take into consideration that there are other domains of experience for which naturalistic methods are not suitable. In these domains the clinical psychologists live all the time: the practice of intersubjectivity, of looking for ever new ways of understanding, of considering their own active and concrete presence in their field of work, of facing the complexity of phenomena, are the conditions requested to found that "science of experience" that constructivism and phenomenology set forth. The most immediate consequence is that in order to realize this science one must reverse a century-old trend: they are not the methods of naturalistic research which should be transferred to the clinical ambit, but the clinical methods, born to understand meanings, which should be "applied" to psychological research.

This is not a provocative conclusion, but the logical outcome of a science of experience: "Humanistic science is science in the grasp of men, not men in the grasp of science" (Kelly, 1969d, p. 145).

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