

Images for Psyche

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Abstract

In Greek mythology Psyche was a very beautiful young woman. At the suggestion of an ancient oracle, her parents abandoned her on the top of a mountain for she supposed to become the wife of a monster. But Eros, Aphrodite's son, saw Psyche and with Zephyr's help, he kidnapped her. Psyche never saw who carried her away. Eros brought her to a mesmerizing palace where she lived a wonderful life. She never saw his face. But after some time curiosity overcame her and while Eros was sleeping she looked at him.

What if Psyche would have not seen beauty and love?

This article would like to present the advantages of using one of the visual arts, photography, as a method in strengthening the therapeutic relation, as a catalyst in accessing a client's content and potential.

Keywords: *psychotherapy, photography, perception, Psyche, feeling, perceiving reality.*

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I. PSYCHE AND PERCEPTION

Since its beginning, the human being it's in a continuous pursue for defining its reality, assisted by its whole bio-sensory luggage (Eldridge, 1994). The human psyche is considered one of the most complex phenomena of the known universe (Alexander, Mellars, & Stringer, 1989). Its complexity derives from its contradictory nature. The psyche is objective, but also subjective; it's material but also ideal; it's manifest but latent; it is given, but also free (Zlate, 2000).

Endowed with cognition, sensitivity, creativity and conscience, we are still incapable of answering essential questions about our existence. We look for new experiences; we change our behavior, hoping we'll eventually find a meaning for our lives. We become confused, frustrated, we find more questions than answers (Snow, 2001).

Our ways of reaching to the environment depends on our sensations and perceptions, on our whole sensory apparatus which allows us to gather information for understanding and manage the world. Therefore, we have an incomplete way of perceiving reality. We do not perceive the infrared or the ultraviolet light, we hear only some frequencies, and we have biological limits (Lindsay, & Norman, 2013).

If our senses are the first links to the reality that surrounds us, we may imply that we should be more prepared to answer the world and to behave if we gather as much as sensory information is possible.

“The reality of any event lies in the ability of the perceiver to perceive it as an event and to integrate it into his/her schema for being in the world”. “These perceptions are determined by our biology, our social-cultural indoctrination, and our individual experience in the world” (Fryrear, & Krauss, 1983).

Organizing the immense sensorial information we receive each moment means the reduction and transformation of the object, persons, situation to symbols. This process occurs at a both conscious and unconscious level. The symbols we use have a universal nature, but also personal characteristic.

II. PERCEPTION AND PHOTOGRAPHY

Photography was invented in the early decades of the 19th century as a method of gathering more details than the traditional arts. Essentially, photography means “drawing with light” (Sontag, 1977). Since then, it has developed as an art, a profession, a way of communicating experience (Karlsson, 2001; Albertson, & Davidson, 2007).

The photographs recompose real life (Krauss, 1979). They capture situations, persons or symbols we often use for understanding the world. They show a certain light, a different shadow,

moments we sometimes forget. They reconnect us with our past as a reminder of what we were. Maybe they could also help us discovering what we would like to become.

Looking at a photograph might help a client in projecting more easily his/her feelings and ideas, in verbalizing the way he/she perceives reality (Martin, 2009). The images combine with any sort of information we have, giving those multiple significances depending on our life experience. For example the image of a wall may symbolize an obstacle, a shelter, an ending to a situation, curiosity, cohesion.

While viewing for the first time a photo, we may unconsciously answer Ansel Adams's question: "Forget what it looks. How does it feel?" (Adams, 1927; Booth, 1983).

In photography, each element carries an emotional load. We use our personal filters to perceive the colors, the lines, the framing, and a person's posture. Our way of viewing the image will never be modified by the age of that photograph; it may have 100 years old or just two weeks, it is real for us.

In painting we first seek to understand the creator's point of view, what he wanted to share, to communicate us.

But photography is more personal. We focus less on the photographer's concepts and we emphasize more on what we feel and think while viewing an image. The photograph, as a final product of an artistic process, has the ability to transpose us almost instantaneously in a moment of existence (Kopytin, 2004; DeCoster, & Dickerson, 2014). The objects, persons, symbols we see in one image are easily perceived as we involuntarily associate those with our personal experience.

Looking at a random image we will first notice the elements that have a special meaning for us. We unconsciously start searching our place in that photo. We observe the setting, the person(s), the colors, the lights and shadows; we begin imagining the behavior and the inner life of the person/those persons portrayed there. In that moment we know for sure if what we saw in that photograph resembles with our way of perceiving reality; thus, we either accept the image or we try modifying it regarding our beliefs and feelings so we could integrate it. We recompose it by adding or deleting persons, changing colors and objects with ones we would like to see.

"Photos can be used as resources in the true sense of the word: resourcing the good times, pleasant feelings, and client strengths and abilities, especially in time of stress or crisis where those memories may not seem as accessible, where they can be used to offer hope, perspective of time past the crisis, of continuity from the past to the future where one might again re-access those feelings and accomplishment. Similarly, they can be used to help correct distortions and misrepresentations, as they are an undeniable record of the past that no account of verbal filtering can cover up." (Weiser, 1984; Weiser, 1999).

III. PHOTOGRAPHY AND THERAPY

The idea of using photography in the therapeutic process was supported and promoted from 1856 by Hugh Diamond, followed then by Judy Weiser, David Krauss and John Suler.

In therapy, photography shows its utility in different ways. Judy Weiser, psychologist and art therapist, the Founder and Director of the Center for Photo Therapy – Vancouver/Canada included in her studies five methods in which photography may assist the therapeutic process (Weiser, 1999):

- Working with the client's photographs;
- Working with photographs shoot by somebody else to the client;
- Working with self-portraits of the client;
- Working with the family albums;
- Projecting upon viewing any type of photograph.

Each of these methods has the wonderful ability of easily suppressing one's resistance, of rapidly accessing in a comfortable and secure way a person's content. Using self-portraits of the client might show us his/her perception about him/herself (Riley, 1999). Working with the family albums might help us discover behavioral patterns; it might reconnect more easily a client to his/her past. The client's photographs and his/her projection upon a random photo might rapidly access his/her perspective and potential (Grotstein, 1979).

As therapists, we should use the client's potential for guiding him/her during the therapeutic process. So why not using the client's ways of perceiving the reality as a method of accessing the experience needed in behavioral change? The visual perception might facilitate the client's symbols decrypting (Wheeler, 2013).

As a visual art, photography might support the exploring of client content. When the verbal language fails in expressing a person's experience, photography might function as a catalyst for the therapeutic relation, bringing to surface substantial information about a person's way of thinking, of seeing reality.

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1. Scattered, 2010, Raluca Caragea

2. The Soul of a Tree, 2010, Raluca Caragea



3. A Distant Future, 2010, Raluca Caragea

