

ДИАЛЕКТИКА И СИСТЕМНОСТ В АРТТЕРАПИЯТА

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В темата са разгледани основните принципи на диалектиката и тяхното интегриране и приложение в арттерапевтичните процеси. Последователно са анализирани диалектичният и системен подход по реда на включване и протичане в терапевтичния формат. Изведени са основанията за взаимовръзка между базисните принципи и психосоциалните интеракции в релацията *арттерапевт – клиент*. Обобщени са конструктивните промени на личността при контакта и въздействието на изобразителното изкуство.

Ключови думи: диалектичен подход, системен подход, атрактор, синергия, теза, антитеза.

DIALECTIC AND SYSTEMATICITY IN ART THERAPY

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Abstract: The topic deals with the basic principles of dialectic and their integration and application in art therapy processes. The dialectic and the system approaches are analysed sequentially in the order of inclusion and progression in the therapeutic format. The reasons are outlined for the interrelationship between the basic principles and psychosocial interactions in the *art therapist-client* relation. The constructive changes of the personality during the contact and the impact with fine art are summarized.

Keywords: dialectic approach, system approach, attractor, synergy, thesis, antithesis.

1. Need to Establish Dialectic and System Approaches in Art Therapy

When it boils down to art therapy (as well as to other therapeutic methods), the first expectation that arises is for a practical process aimed at overcoming specific problems facing the individual. There is good reason for such a view, since any therapeutic activity is primarily aimed at helping those in need.

Along with this, it is necessary to emphasize that the client expects highly qualified help, which in turn implies that the therapist has good knowledge of the specifics as well as a clear idea of the path the therapeutic practice should take. In order for this *movement* to be effective and for the art therapist to be able to find himself around at any given moment with the results achieved or the failures borne, he should possess basic competencies of the grounds for his activity and on this basis choose certain therapeutic approaches and pass on the relevant information to the client.

This requires an in-depth analysis of the underlying (philosophical directions and the resulting psychological concepts) grounds that are intertwined into the choice of art therapy processes and provide a higher level of expertise, success and correct evaluation of practical experience.

The dialectic approach enables psychotherapy and art therapy in particular to take into account the whole range of features of the human psyche, both in the norm and in pathology.

The system approach, in turn, allows the entire diversity and contradictions of the human personality to be organized in a specific way that allows the recovery of the client's comfortable mental state¹.

2. Dialectic Approach in Art Therapy

Dialectic is a logical philosophical method of reflexive theoretical thinking whose object of study is emerging processes or phenomena. Dialectic is concerned with the analysis of two basic concepts: identity and difference, which are found in all phenomena and objects (Hegelian dialectic). Identity is an intrinsic characteristic that makes the object or phenomenon recognizable, and difference (dissimilarity) is an internal quality that tends to go beyond it. Contradiction in interactions creates the dynamics of development.

Dialectical contradiction is the unity of contradictory characteristics which, on the one hand, are mutually exclusive and, on the other, are mutually necessary and supposable. In

¹ Shankar Dwivedi Prabha (ed.). *Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art: Comparative Perspectives*. Routledge, 2021.

most cases, it is precisely this necessity and contradiction that ensures the gradual development of individual objects and processes in nature, thought and social life².

Nowadays dialectic is seen not only as an important mechanism for understanding natural phenomena, but also as a significant element in understanding human psyche and behaviour.

Contemporary dialectic is based on several fundamental principles: of movement and change, of interaction, of contradiction as a constructive force; gradual transition to qualitative changes following quantitative accumulations; and ontological negation of the negation. Each of these finds its specific expression in the objects that are subject to dialectical analysis³.

Dialectic also finds its application in the study of human mental processes, including states that can be defined as *deviant*.

In its application to art therapy, as one of the approaches to the human psyche and consciousness, the didactical principles take on a specific meaning.

The principle of movement and change in art therapy finds its analogue in manifestations such as instability of the emotional and cognitive spheres, as well as in the impact of various *factors* having specific effects on the conscious and unconscious components of the psyche.

Methodologies in art therapy accept the need to introduce visual media with the understanding and creation of artistic products as part of the change that makes positive transformations to the negative episodes in the human psyche. The effect must be gradual and adapted to the individual dynamics in the client's psyche.

Art therapy also uses the principle of interaction as fundamental not only for itself but also for other therapeutic practices.

Accordingly, the newly created *structures* from the social interactions with art reduce the destructive effects on the personality, and subsequently provide *supportive experiences* for establishing harmony in the human psyche⁴.

² Rescher, Nicholas. *Dialectics. A Classical Approach to Inquiry*. Frankfurt: Ontos Verlag, 2007.

³ Jameson, F. *Valences of the Dialectic*. New York: Verso, 2010.

⁴ Gaskell, Ivan. *Paintings and the Past: Philosophy, History, Art*. Routledge, 2019.

It is the task of the therapist, and in particular the art therapist, to competently and flexibly adapt the visual and psychological tools to the peculiarities of the individual resources of the personality, which are subject to episodic correction.

The principle pointing to *contradiction* as a constructive force, applied to the practice of art therapy, suggests that the identification of the internal conflict opens the way to self-improvement, either alone or with the help of the therapist, in finding new ways of resolving the relevant provocative situations.

The art therapy sessions stimulate the understanding of inner conflicts and contradictions not only as a negative phenomenon, but also as a way to discover new, more adequate means of adapting to the external environment and/or to the inner experiences. Each formulation of the new approaches involves a dialectical composition of emotional charge and rational action. Following this principle generally conforms to the pattern of the human psyche.

According to research on development of personality, it is the search for a solution to the contradictions that arise that is the connecting element, which underlies the creative process and respectively the development of both the individual psyche and knowledge of humanity as a whole.

The basis of the planning of art therapy practice is the principle of the transition from *systemical accumulations* to *substantive changes* in the mental processes (perception, thinking, memory, imagination).

In particular, this means that achieving one or another positive change in the mental state requires the holding of a corresponding number of therapy sessions until the *desired* and *agreed* changes are achieved.

The planning of therapeutic activity should be done in compliance with this principle, where the therapist *predicts* the number of sessions that meet the client's particular needs. No other arguments have the merit that the adherence to this principle has.

Specific, yet significant, is the use of the basic law of negation of the negation in art therapy, following the *thesis - antithesis - synthesis* algorithm.

In practice, the mental dysfunction relevant to the client is considered as a *thesis*.

The antithesis involves the creative process and the *involvement* with diverse art forms, which are part of the art therapy process.

The change in the *manner* the client *perceives* the interactions between the creative activities and his experiences determines the reflexive generalization or synthesis. The degree to which the client accepts change is sometimes minimal, but is nevertheless an indication of reformatting the personal reactions. As a result of the *synthesis*, the change runs according to the practical algorithm of *problem - means of art - processing and overcoming the problem*⁵.

3. *The System Approach in Art Therapy*

Often in philosophical research dialectic and systematicity are seen as two opposing paradigms. However, practice shows that both approaches find application in the therapeutic methods, and in art therapy in particular. In doing so, they manage to combine, with the preservation of both elements ensuring productivity in the therapeutic intervention. The theory of systems organization is a significantly *new* scientific subject compared to dialectics.

The first version of the general systems theory was developed by Ludwig von Bertalanffy, and his main idea consisted in the recognition and analysis of the principle of isomorphism, i.e. the laws governing the functioning of system objects.

Today, the systems theory is a scientific and methodological concept aimed at the study of objects that inherently represent a certain kind of system.

Within the general systems theory, one can distinguish: cybernetics, systems analysis, the study of logical operations and synergetics⁶.

Each object of analysis *uses* one of these sections of the general systems theory depending on what type of system is to be analysed. Therefore, it is necessary when using the system approach in art therapy, to determine the type of system the art therapy practice represents.

⁵ Almagor, Moshe. *The Functional Dialectic System Approach to Therapy for Individuals, Couples, and Families*. University of Minnesota Press, 2011.

⁶ Skyttner, L. *General systems theory: Problems, Perspectives, Practice*. New Jersey, London: World Scientific, 2006.

The substantive analysis of art therapy gives grounds to define it as an *open* (due to the multifaceted inclusion of the problem areas and the methods used), *self-organizing* (due to the possibility of using different approaches and ways of working with clients) system, which has the ability to orient itself towards certain *attractor* (centre of attraction for achieving improvement in the client's psychological state).

Thus, well-reasoned, the art therapy system should be oriented towards the application of synergetic methods.

Synergetics is an interdisciplinary field explaining the formation and self-evolution of the patterns and structures in the open systems.

The application of synergetics to art therapy presupposes the construction of a particular structure, which in its dynamics is oriented towards the achievement of a specific result⁷. As synergetic structures in art therapy the following should be considered:

- *the problem area* identified by the client and the therapist as a result of analysis of data provided by the client and therapist observations. The problem area (e.g., *emotional tension, professional burnout*, etc.) should be structured and clearly stated by the participants in the therapeutic process.

- *the organizing factor*, seeking to build self-replicating structures (fractals), serving as an integrated set of data for self-organization of the client's mental system in order to reduce or completely overcome the negative impact of the problem area.

The attractor structures (various activities of artistic creativity can be considered as such) cause fluctuations in the mental system, and as a result of the impact of fractal segments, a transition of the *system* to a new level is achieved.

- the creation of *new structures of the system* (and in particular new psychosocial skills and habits) is important to *the process of self-organization*, which will harmonization the system, and the factors causing the unwanted fluctuations should be reduced to a significant

⁷ Müller, S., Plath, P., Radons, G., Fuchs, A. (eds.). *Complexity and Synergetics*. Springer International Publishing, 2018.

extent. A *new* quality is selected within the client's mental system, which is more resistant to the impact of external factors (traumatizing elements of the environment).

- during each of the stages of self-organization there should be a *positive* feedback (in the case of art therapy, this is the client's conviction and confidence in passing to the various stages of the therapeutic work). As a result of *situational* accumulations of such feedbacks, the system passes into a state of *homeostasis* (the ability of the mental system to maintain its stability through coordinated responses to external influences aimed at maintaining dynamic equilibrium).

- the systematical organization achieved as a result of the impact on it (i.e. as a result of conducting the art therapy activity) must allow the perception and receipt of new information from the external environment, together with its orientation toward *the techniques of the relevant phase transitions* (if it refers to the possibility that the practice of art therapy creates conditions in which the client will be able to perceive other negative impacts of the external environment and overcome them with the help of worked out reactions);

- в качеството на *атрактор* (център на ориентация на системата) следва да се разглежда подобряването на баланса в психиката на клиента, неговата способност да противостои на неблагоприятните фактори на средата чрез дейности от изобразителното творчество и заедно с това постоянно обогатява себе си.

- in the capacity of an *attractor* (centre of orientation of the system), the improvement of the client's mental balance should be considered, his ability to resist the unfavourable environmental factors through activities of fine art and together with this constantly enrich himself.

Despite the sufficiently complex apparatus of synergetics, considering art therapy in the context of the terms of the systems theory enables the therapist to take into account all the peculiarities of the process, to orient himself in the results achieved at a certain point of time and to set adequate goals for the art therapy process.

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