

# The World of the Text and Existential-Phenomenological Psychotherapy

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## Abstract

Hermeneutical phenomenology as put forward by Paul Ricoeur is subject to analysis, mainly when it comes to its Heideggerian roots and the notion of the world of text. The therapist is therefore confronted with two problems: moving away from the dialogue model and refusal of hermeneutics to accept a psychology of the subject. The textual paradigm is then compared with human action thus encompassing a response to the problem posed by explanation versus understanding. The author's contributions are compared against Jerome Brunner's cultural psychology and psychotherapy, namely against existential-phenomenological approaches.

## Key-words

phenomenology, hermeneutics, Ricoeur, psychotherapy, existential phenomenology.

## Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics has Greek roots - *ἑρμηνεία*

*Ermeneia* refers to interpretation. According to Greek semantics, "to say something about something means saying something else, i.e. to interpret".

Greek logic is based on the univocity of assertions and drives away from the diversity of meanings. That is why comedy is despised, for it is ironical and deceitful and tragedy is favoured for it means a search for purification in *κάθαρσις*. The catharsis of passions is so clearly expressed that it enables to imitate the truth. Sophocles against Aristofanes. The *λόγος* against the *μῦθος*. Aristoteles introduces the issue in his *Peri Ermeneias* (*Περί ἑρμηνείας*) without solving the contradiction.

Modern hermeneutics runs in the wake of Wilhelm Dilthey and Edmund Husserl. The former suggests a valid methodology for the human and social sciences by stressing an historical awareness, whereas the latter translates that which has been lived into the object of phenomenological research. By making a contribution to hermeneutics he pinpoints the multiplicity of meanings by expressing the need to confront interpretations.

While searching for the basis of metaphysics, Martin Heidegger poses the question of the being within the framework of the distinction with all the existing. From the Dilthey' epistemological concern, we move on to the ontological field.

In more recent times, G.H.Gadamer is to be remembered as is Paul Ricoeur for whom "il n'y a pas d'hermeneutique générale, pas de Canon universel pour l'exégèse, mais des theories séparées et opposes concernant les règles de l'interprétation" (Ricoeur, 1969).

Hermeneutic reflection points therefore towards overcoming the divergence between hermeneutics.

## Hermeneutics and Psychology

Psychology was influenced by hermeneutic trends and as a result fostered interdisciplinary debates between both fields of study (Messer, Sass & Woolfolk, 1990; Packer & Addison, 1989). Today's controversies still carry out the signs of those issues by expressing issues related to ontology, epistemology, and methodology. Therefore, Messer, Sass & Woolfolk (1990) published a work divided up into three main areas: methodological issues; ontological hermeneutics, and critical hermeneutics. The first part deals mainly with theoretical explorations on the hermeneutic method when applied to psychology and psychoanalysis; the ontological hermeneutics rather focuses on the constitution of human existence in itself than on the role played interpretation as a method; finally, critical hermeneutics is meant to be an open space for discussion on the fundamentals of both the construction of intellectual practices and social institutions (Messer, Sass & Woolfolk, 1990).

Packer and Adisson (1989), propose a number of hermeneutic studies on psychology ranging from social to educational and clinical fields. A debate is herein contemplated on the purport of the study, the origin of knowledge, the explanatory nature and the methods used, and therefore the discussion on rationalism, positivism, empirics and the opposite along with a hermeneutic perspective in psychology.

At this stage, one must ask: what unites all these psychologists throughout these works? What is the spur behind the interminable controversies on the origin of knowledge, and the discussion on the basis and the presuppositions of psychology since it became an autonomous field of study resorting to scientific rationality as a model? Ultimately, what is at stake, one might say, is the way man constitutes itself and the way he constitutes the world he lives in. In the wake of events, I cannot but feel somewhat disappointed by the course followed by psychology. It is not a matter of questioning the variety of research paths psychology deals with, but the fact that they all discard man and subjectivity. By resorting to the

experimental method, as an exclusive, totalitarian way of knowledge, set aside basic aspects such as: meaning, intention, desire and context.

It is imperative, for that matter, to remember another psychologist for a number of reasons. Indeed, Jerome Bruner (1986, 1990) in his work *Actual Minds, Possible Words* (1986), differentiates two types of knowledge: paradigmatic knowledge and narrative knowledge. The former follows a mathematical logic proper to scientific thinking, the aim of which is to try and establish, as far as it is possible, a reductionism making it possible to devise causal explanations and foresee events. Narrative knowledge, on the contrary, focuses the "vicissitudes of human intentions" (Bruner, 1986). Paradigmatic knowledge deals with empirical proof and universal truth, whereas narrative knowledge is moved by verisimilitude and events of human life. In "Acts of Meaning" (Bruner, 1990) explains from the very beginning his dismay as to the ambiguities of a certain cognitive revolution by the end of the 50s: "the focus shifted from "meaning" to "information" , from the *construction of meaning* to the *processing of information*", whereas the initial objective was to "discover and formally describe the meanings human beings create on the basis of their relationships with the world, and then to suggest hypotheses on the way processes of meaning construction act" (Bruner, 1990, p. 17). This is all about standing for a culture psychology based on symbolic activities that subsist in the creation of meaning built upon by man on himself and his action in the world.

Yet, as we have already said, Bruner must be remembered for a number of reasons. Two aspects have been clearly set out: criticism towards developments occurred during the cognitive revolution spanning to the current stages of psychology, and the focus on a culture psychology within which interpretation and meaning are the cynosure not so much as to behaviour but as to the "situated action". Bruner also helps us clarifying other aspects. First of all, the boundaries of our study. Although we claim hermeneutics as a fellow traveller, the matter of the fact is that we are faced with a debate on psychology and psychotherapy. This building block shall become more significant as we move forward to issues more directly linked to hermeneutics and its internal debate. Psychology remains our concern, and mediation of the latter is all the more so important since epistemological grounds of hermeneutics are at stake, that in the eyes of psychology, they intend to be submitted to psychotherapy. Psychology must remain the key vector of debate. Finally, the works referred to translate the importance of hermeneutics in today's psychology and times ahead.

As an example, one should recall the special issue of the *Psychological Bulletin* edited by the American Psychological Association in November 2000. Editors Eisenberg, Robertson, Sher (2000) devised an ambitious title: *Psychology in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. The papers cover a wide range of

issues within psychology, from emotion to decision making, from interpersonal relations to psychotherapy, among others. Yet their common background is the concern to establish stronger and stronger links with the neurosciences, with biology, genetics and neurology; in other words, psychology breaks through the 21<sup>st</sup> century with a clearly defined goal: to strengthen the scientific rationality nature adapted to the above mentioned leading fields. When writing about psychotherapy, those authors say: "The issues surrounding the next generation of psychotherapy research must find a way to maintain high scientific standards (...)". Generically, the postulate is equally clear: "Whereas much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was a period of division and segregation of intellectual interests, the 21<sup>st</sup> century promises to be one convergence and integration" (Eisenberg, Robertson & Sher, 2000). We assume that the integration and convergence the authors refer to are directly linked to future issues pointing towards psychology: biology, genetics, and neuroscience, for these are fields that move within a scientifically accepted modernity. As the authors contend, the selection of topics dealt with in this *Psychological Bulletin* expresses their own choices and understandings on the subject. Yet, they also reflect the issues favoured by psychology both in present and future times within the framework of an acknowledged institution – the American Psychological Association (APA).

It seems now clearer to us why the concerns expressed by Bruner on the cognitive revolution must be recalled. The context remains unchanged an the proof is that the mainstream psychology seems prepared to embark on a journey away from man as the cardinal point to build himself and his world. Instead, we are dealing with a psychology which has technological weapons to meet the demands imposed by the search for verification and certainty. These, so it seems, can only come forward under the aegis of a psychology scientifically combined with the above mentioned leading fields. The Subject builder of a meaning, the man moving intentionally in association with his context is relegated to the edge of the arch of subjectivity.

That has driven us far away from our intended purpose. We don not aim at disproving the guiding lines of the 21<sup>st</sup> century psychology, nor to discard the significant research made in the fields of neurosciences or genetics. What is a stake is to explicit the current context of our subject along with the underlying epistemological thinking. The authors referred have striven within the present situation to combine psychology and hermeneutics. Our aim is neither to review the 21<sup>st</sup> century psychology, nor to depict a history of ideas and relations between hermeneutics and psychology. We simply aim at focusing on a number of issues of Paul Ricoeur's works, for he was one of the authors who contributed most to set a link between hermeneutics and the social sciences.

We can come across Ricoeur's hermeneutics through a number of ways. For reasons of space, we have to make choices and undoubtedly risky ones. We shall briefly approach some aspects mainly developed in *Du texte à l'Action – Essai d'herméneutique II* (1986). Why then focusing on some issues put forward in these texts? First of all, we shall follow the author's line of reasoning to anchor a hermeneutic phenomenology which is far way from the idealist perspective sustained by Husserl. We shall follow Ricoeur's thinking on Heidegger's ontology. Based on a hermeneutic phenomenology and ontology of understanding we shall pinpoint some fundamental notions of Ricoeur's works: the *discourse*; the *world*; the *text*; the *action*. These topics will make it possible for us to approach a number of controversial aspects featuring our filed study, namely:

- The distancing of hermeneutics from a psychology of author;
- The passing to a text model as opposed to the dialogue model.

Both issues trigger a debate based on the notion of the world of the text, with a view to create links with the filed of psychotherapy and in particular with an existential phenomenology approach.

### Hermeneutic Phenomenology

In *Du texte à l'action* (1986), Ricoeur explains something he had started developing in *Le conflit des interprétations* (1969), that is, a critic to Husserl's phenomenology in its idealist version. Consequently, he supports an excerpt of hermeneutics in phenomenology stressing the interdependence between them both. The arguments become clearer in *Du texte à l'action* where Ricoeur explains five theses of Husserl's idealism adding the hermeneutics antitheses so as to suggest the «mutual belonging» between phenomenology and hermeneutics. We shall not present a detailed explanation of the arguments; instead we shall pinpoint a number of aspects enabling us to follow the hermeneutics proposed by Ricoeur and clarify a number of issues arising from that hermeneutics.

First of all, let us see the heideggerian basis followed by Ricoeur. Prior to the radical stances materialised by phenomenology, distancing itself from a scientific perspective, we shall mainly focus on the ontological basis of comprehension posed by Heidegger, thus overcoming the boundaries of the subject-object division. Yet, Ricoeur is more in favour of replacing the "being in the world" by the notion of "belonging" to which he opposes the idea of *distancing*. Later on, we shall understand how these two concepts are the basis for a desired dialectic between explanation and comprehension. At this stage, it is important to recall that man is launched into the world, and only then he tries to understand it (Verstehen). The subject-object relationship gains an ontological link inherited from Heidegger's hermeneutical phenomenology. In fact, this might well be one of the equivokes resulting from a strictly existential reading of the *Being*

and *Time*, that is to say, despite going deeper into issues such as *the being to death* and *anguish*, to mention but a few, the aim is not to develop an existential psychology; but to relate the *Dasein* and the real beyond the strict subject-object link. Hence, the major issue becomes the worldliness of the world, the condition of being an inhabitant of the world that makes it possible for the *Dasein* to develop the triad: situation – comprehension – interpretation. Prior to any speech, a being has already been launched, a prior being there which does not know the object, a being that simply is to be understood. Above all, to understand in the sense of comprehending the possibility of being.

The primacy of fundamental ontology over epistemology and the psychology of the subject has two drastic effects upon these. We should stress a main idea: the *ideal of a transparency of a subject to itself is inaccessible*. This had already been opened up by the reading of Freud and explained in *Le Conflit des Interprétations* (1969). Starting with Marx, Nietzsche and Freud, the masters of suspicion, the modern man's narcissism is dealt a severe blow for it imposed an "illusion of the conscience of his self". Conscience then becomes a task and no longer an experience. By freeing phenomenology from Husserl's idealism, a path Heidegger had already opened up, Ricoeur nevertheless suggests a longer way; a way through an ontology of comprehension which turns the *Dasein* into the location of the understanding of that entity that questions its being. This long way means a necessary deviation:

*There is no understanding of itself which is not mediated by signs, symbols, and texts; the comprehension of itself coincides, lastly, with the interpretation applied to these mediator words*  
(Ricoeur, 1986).<sup>1</sup>

This aspect is directly linked to another criticism made to Husserl's idealism: the equivoke of intentionality. If this was the decisive ground introduced by the Brentano-born phenomenology, the matter of the fact is that according to Ricoeur the misunderstanding generated within phenomenology discarding the first of all lessons (the awareness of something as opposed to the awareness of the self) is equally important. The descriptive model is not questioned, nor is the *époche*, which in fact is perceived as the space needed for man to construct the meaning of his life. Reduction reflects within the phenomenology the need to hold off hermeneutics which like phenomenology searches the meaning through the experience in the world which in turn is not accessible to the immediate knowledge.

Intentionality, the great treasure of phenomenology, was held in the grasp of the idealist perspective:

*Despite originating in the discovery of the universal nature of intentionality, phenomenology did not follow suit to such discovery, that is to say, the meaning of awareness lies outside the awareness itself*

(Ricoeur, 1986).<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, so far we have a *Dasein* launched into the world beforehand through which it will be possible for it to understand itself as a project, always open as a being. We are inevitably linked to the world by an indissoluble belonging. But, if in Heidegger's view, the *Dasein* is itself a place of revelation, of a make-see, for Ricoeur it will be necessary to mediate through signs, symbols and texts, through a dialectic where man needs to hold off to repossessing his ipseity. Intentionality and reduction itself stress the need for the awareness to search for the meaning outside itself. The hermeneutic circle denies both the Husserl's project in search for a final reality or of a primary intuition: "every interpretation places the interpreter *in media res* and never at the beginning or at the end" (Ricoeur, 1986).<sup>3</sup> What is then the implication of the proposed deviation?

The hermeneutic task is now clearer. It is no longer a matter of a symbolic interpretation as the author suggested in his first works, but to take the burden of a double task: to restore both dynamics of the text. In other words, to reset the internal structure of the text and its projection as a different world I could dwell in as if it were mine. This way, we enter the notion of the *world of the text* featuring the hermeneutics of Ricoeur. We are now far way from Husserl's idealism and coming closer to an interdependency between phenomenology and hermeneutics and closer to the role played by hermeneutics in restoring the internal world of the text of its projection. Yet, we are at a crossroads both for the psychologist and the psychotherapist. First of all, hermeneutics distances itself from its romantic perspectives and no longer aims at a psychology of the author. If, on the one side, the comprehension of the Heideggerian being is based on the mundaneness of the world, on the other side it discards a psychological view of that comprehension. The interpreting focal point is readjusted and it is no longer a question of understanding the subjectivity of the subject, but of putting into perspective the work of the text built as a world. On the other hand, the dialogue model is discarded for it has been replaced by the discourse anchored by the writing. Intentionality of the subject-author is no longer a concern for hermeneutics, the same way the model of dialogue is no longer such a concern; likewise, the inter-subjectivity of the subject-author no longer imposes boundaries to the speech now made into a text and which is ready for interpretative research. The hermeneutic task proposed by Ricoeur confronts psychology with two challenges simultaneously: the refusal of the dialogue model and the rejection of the

search for intentionality of the subject. We shall leave these two issues open-ended and review them later on.

## The World of the Text

Before we think over on the issues generated by the hermeneutics proposed by Ricoeur, let us go deeper into the notion of the world of the text and a number of related concepts: the event, the speech and action. For Ricoeur, the text is not merely a way man resorts to for exchanging messages; it is instead, a means of communication *in* and *through* distance. By claiming that the text is the primary space, the aim is not to turn the writing into the focal point of hermeneutics. On a first stage, we have to look for this focal point in discourse, then in the speech-writing and language-writing oppositions and finally, the notion of work. The objective is to shed light on the world of the text as a fundamental point from which man historically puts into perspective his own experience, his relationship to the real. Therefore, the main concern of hermeneutics is to move from the notion of text to the idea of openness to the world – the world of the work that projects itself, that opens itself and enabling the understanding of the self.

Yet, we must go through some intermediate steps. The first step opposes the linguistics of the language and the linguistics of discourse. A language may have centrifugal moves with no apparent end through codes and a specific language; conversely, discourse has a fundamental trait which is distancing and which translates into an event – meaning dialectic. Firstly, discourse is meant as an event for it happens over a given time, while language is virtual for it happens outside time. In a discourse, someone says something, someone expresses something and by doing so he intends to describe or represent something. This characteristic distinguishes discourse from language. Language revolves around its lexical system where signs refer to other signs; as for the discourse, it is a representation of the world. A world described by someone who speaks and by doing so he expresses himself before someone else who becomes the receiver. The time element is once more located between speakers who may extend or suspend the event of discourse, that is to say, the description of a world.

Yet, it is not the transitory nature in time that we wish to understand; instead, it has to do with the meaning that can remain within that which has been said. The cynosure of the hermeneutic controversy lies in the fact that the event goes beyond itself, in the articulation between *meaning* and *event*. It becomes therefore important that the linguistics of the discourse comes closer to the theory of the acts of speech. A theory mainly developed by Austin and Searle and presenting three interwoven levels: the locutionary act, i.e., the act of saying; the illocutionary act representing what we do when we utter something and the perlocutionary act translating

the implications we create in the meantime by the fact of saying what we have said. If, at a first stage, we are at the propositional level of the act of saying, this level in turn may constitute itself as an action in the sense that we may make a promise, promote an idea, give an order, while we are already doing something (illocutionary); finally, by executing an order, or giving an instruction, we can cause a series of reactions such as ill-feeling, frustration, or even satisfaction caused by the instruction received (perlocutionary). What is fundamental is to consider that the acts of speech translate a re-writing of the action, in so far as they cause *de facto* alterations of what has been lived by every one of us. The meaning of discourse has different levels - cognitive, emotional and inter-relational - not being limited by the experience of human language only. On the contrary, it has a direct impact on action, causing alterations among subjects and on their relationships with the world. We can therefore understand the first move of the textual paradigm based on the event-meaning dialectic.

On the one hand, discourse is not merely a language; a number of reasons make it an event. On the other hand, the event may overstep the bounds of its transitory nature and bear a stronger mark within human action by creating a meaning that arises from the aloofness of what has been said just like framed by the theory of the acts of speech. Discourse is a happening given by the resulting meaning.

Yet, a number of other steps have still to be crossed before we can attain the notion of a textual hermeneutics. To envisage discourse as a structured work. If the phrase is the standard for the hermeneutics of discourse, the work makes it possible to extend the hermeneutical issue and become a specific, total and finite world. Besides the concept of work, the distinction between language and writing will make possible for one of Ricoeur's objectives to overcome the romantic hermeneutics: to make the text autonomous as far as the author's intentionality is concerned. We therefore claim a space needed for the text, not limiting it to a psychological perspective, but permitting instead a distance that will be reassumed in the act of reading, this reading being a the task of interpretation. By refusing the aim of grasping the author's intention, the text becomes the space where the subject can understand himself before the work. The work translates into a speech aiming at the truth, at promoting the intentional creation of a world in direct relationship with reality - the world of life. The role played by interpretation then becomes the "role of explaining the way of being in the world exposed *before* the text"<sup>4</sup> (Ricoeur, 1986).

This shows why Ricoeur too stressed the heideggerian concept of mundaneness. The world of Heidegger is not only the totality of the beings, the being in the world; it is also the transcendence accomplished by the *Dasein*, the world that is never in front of, the world that becomes "mundane". The *Dasein* goes beyond itself not in relation to the beings, but

towards the world understood as an *horizon of possibilities of the being there to interpret*. The *Dasein* knows itself in the world. The world of the text is itself a world that is different from the real world and because it is different it can confront with the latter, it can de-construct it and question it. But if the world of text deranges our real world, it also becomes a set of possibilities for our living experience reaching other horizons for our reality, reshaping it and re-organising it. The world of the text thus interferes with our action and transfigures it.

### Human Action as a Text

The notion of the world of the text makes it possible to explicit the objective as well as the author's scope of action: the text is the paradigm that allows going beyond the boundaries of romantic hermeneutics and of the dichotomies between explanation and comprehension, thus being the basis of Ricoeur's proposal for a general hermeneutics. Let us then approach a number of aspects dealing with the relationships between the theories of the text and the action so that we can present our thorough views.

The explain-understand dialectic becomes viable because the relationship between writing and reading fosters possibilities not achieved in a dialogue or in the speaking-hearing dichotomy. The textual paradigm makes it possible to develop an explicatory objectivity provided it is grounded in four basic features: the capacity to fix the meaning in the writing; the distance from the author's intention; it develops through non ostensible references and by the fact that it is an open-ended work allowing different readings-interpretations. The text, just like an individual, may be perceived from different perspectives, in which case this will be a perception-like scenario and where the viewer has always a particular view. Phenomena can always be perceived from a variety of perspectives, in the same way that a text can be interpreted in a variety of ways, though not unlimited. It is therefore important to stress the constructive nature of reading or of a view over human action and that nature is anchored to the hermeneutic circle: the whole influences the parts and vice-versa. In a text, as in an action, the phrases and the acts do not have an identical value; they are part of a "cumulative and holistic process". Phrases and actions are not grouped on the same level, in value terms; on the contrary, they are envisaged and put into perspective in a distinct manner according to the strength and importance recognised through a constructive process, a game between the whole and the parts.

As a matter of fact, this issue refers another bond: conjecture - validate. Within a hierarchisation of interpretations of texts or actions we are poised before the "logic of subjective probability" and if in the hermeneutic circle where the interpreter is always placed *in media res*, the first move is

materialised by the conjecture of the parts (phrases / actions) these not assuming towards the whole (text / individual) a static and final nature. The text, just like the subject, constructs itself, instead of being-achieved through a succession of phrases or actions. If there are no previously defined and adequate rules for the creation of conjectures, there will be, nevertheless, adequate validation procedures. Validation of an interpretation is not achieved through an empirical checking, but through a logic of "uncertainty and qualitative probability" underlying the conjecture – validate dialectic. This is not the universe of the empirical truth, of the cause-effect relationship; this is rather the ambit of fields where validation of generated conjectures is the result of argumentative processes. This does not mean that all interpretations bear the same value, or that there are unlimited possibilities to interpret a text; the same applies to human actions. Human actions have a context too, a limited and restricted amplitude which is similar to the semantics of a text. There is a multitude of possible meanings for an action as opposed to a finitude of possible constructions; of probable constructions should we say.

Between the specific multiplicity of a text and the identical plurality of human action, Ricoeur calls once more for a number of aspects of the theory of action, namely those relating to the intentional and motivational dimensions of the action. The action is understood when to the question *what?* we add the question *why?* Intentionality is expressed by wishes and beliefs and is translated not only by the intensity of the act but also by its underlying meaning. That is why the author suggests that human action can be understood on the basis of the subject's motivation and intention and both may be the object of an argumentative logic that explains the action and places it in a space suitable for the conflict of interpretations.

As from now, we must clarify a number of issues. As we explained previously, our interlocutor holds a dialogue with a long-established tradition, trying to develop his own hermeneutic proposal far off the psychological concerns as opposed to this paper. On the other hand, as it is known, Ricoeur applied his textual paradigm to supported by Max Weber's idea of "reasonable action" with a view to prove how a theory of the text is linked directly to a theory of action, and mainly to explain how, in his view, the methodology of text interpretation is a paradigm suitable the object of human sciences. This is not the core of our debate. We do not intend to review the methodological aspects of research; we simply want to think over the space for the therapy conjuncture. Discussion over the methodology is outside the ambit of this paper, as is the controversy fuelled by Ricoeur and Gadamer's hermeneutics, since the latter anchors his interpretation perspective in the dialogue and not in the text as opposed to the former. We shall try to think over Ricoeur's textual paradigm as from the inner side of itself.

## The World of the Text and the Existential Phenomenological Psychotherapy

Our viewpoint is that psychotherapy is the core of the issue. To put it in a nutshell, we might say: *how does Ricoeur's hermeneutic phenomenology which is based on the textual paradigm, positively or negatively affects the existential phenomenological approach in psychotherapy and what bridges can be thrown across this approach?* Two issues already referred to join in: the refusal of a dialogue model and the rejection of the search for the subject's intentionality.

At this stage, it seems important to us to suggest the mediator psychologist before reviewing the arguments of a strictly psychotherapeutic nature. Let us recall Jerome Brunner's cultural-based psychology for which *meaning* is the central concept. The meaning of human existence is constructed upon the experience and the subject's intentional status based on symbolic systems of culture that develop processes of interpretation of life in common – we might call this a psychology of the common sense. One might say that Brunner's cultural psychology places man in the world. The subject constitutes his intentional statuses by participating *in* and *through* culture. His living experience then becomes shared and public and as a consequence interpretation lies in the world and not in the isolated being. A psychology with such concerns will not discard what a scientific psychology so easily rejects; the wish, the belief, the intention and commitment. These have been systematically excluded from the "good psychology" since they do not take into account an indispensable premiss: an explicatory status. For Brunner, this aspect is explained by the fact that the subjectivity of human experience is looked down and this translates into the mistrust with which we envisage of people *say* as opposed to what people *do*. Cultural psychology based on the meaning of human experience considers not only what people do, but also what people claim to be their motives for a given action and what people say about the others and their actions, and "what people claim as their worlds" (Brunner, 1990, p. 27). The main question for that psychology is to move through the intentional statuses that translate into the "situated action" of subjects rather than to try and prevent or check the veracity of human behaviour.

According to Ricoeur's language, we might say that for Brunner, there is a fundamental unity within the say-do dialectic. The narrative knowledge suggested by the author is not concerned with causal explanations or empirical proof. It is directed to intentionality, to the "vicissitudes of human intentions"; it moves along probabilities. His feature enables us to suggest that there is a direct link with the dialectic referred to by Ricoeur: the conjecture and validation of human action we referred to earlier. The links between cause and effect and intention and action mean distinct

logics. In the former we can identify and distinguish the previous aspects that bring about consequences and Ricoeur even presents a very simple example: if a match can cause an explosion, I can define the first without mentioning the second. Conversely, I cannot understand an action separately from the underlying intention as explicated by the relationships between these two questions: *what?* and *why?*

These contact points between this psychology and Ricoeur's phenomenological hermeneutics seem clear to us. Let us see, then, how in our view these are intimately linked to the premisses of the existential-phenomenological approaches of the psychotherapy conjuncture.

We shall start by one of the pillars supported by Ricoeur: heideggerian ontology. The existential phenomenological approaches in psychotherapy identify themselves with the notion of that *Dasein* which even before it comprehends it is already *there*, launched into the world. This openness embodied by the *Dasein* where it falls from its inner self presupposes a frustrating aloofness that is it is not the intra-mundane entities that frustrate the *being there*; it is the world as "mundaneness" that frustrates the *Dasein*, it is the very being in the world that is frustrating, for it is alone, all by itself, it *ek-siste* strangely in a world where it does not belong, but an uprooting instead. The triad situation – comprehension – interpretation follows a logic that extends to the therapeutic space, but as contended by Ricoeur, man has not one situation only; he has and lives in a world. Always launched into, he will have to turn awareness into a task. The long path followed by Ricoeur seems to us to be clearly linked to the room for two where knowledge itself becomes a task, of, shall we say, an interception of texts that cross themselves. But let us move on, on a step by step basis.

The opposition between dialogue and text. By explaining his textual paradigm, Ricoeur makes it easier for us to understand the importance of language itself, or preferably, the importance of the linguistics of the discourse on which the therapeutic relationship is based. Let us see, then. The main issue of discourse has to do with a distance that translates itself in the event – meaning dialectic. The four features distinguishing this linguistics from discourse are indeed a good description of the therapeutic space: it occurs over time; someone speaks and by speaking he is describing, expressing a world; by expressing himself he does it in front of someone else. These four issues are inherent in the intra-subjective relation. Besides, we should stress that is not the transitory nature of human language that weights more but as upheld by the theory of acts and speech, it is what remains said that enables to create a meaning for the events of the speech. The different levels (locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary) translate the recording of speech as acts that have a real impact on people's actions, influencing them emotionally and at the cognitive and inter-relational levels. The difference between language and

discourse lays basically on the possibility for the latter to become an important event because of the fact that distancing from what has been said confers a meaning to it.

The theory of the acts of speech seems to stress the concerns of Brunner's cultural psychology which does not discard the relationship between what people *say* and what they *do*. This dialectic may open up a privileged way for the meaning of human experience, for the action situated in the world. This relationship between say and do has direct implications upon the therapeutic space. What is spoken within the inter-subjectivity of dialogue bears undoubtedly a relational mark of the order of what has been said of the theory of acts of speech marking and pinpointing a path that is inherent and restricted to the relationship between both subjects, but which is also related to the world expressed in the narration and its characters. Language perceived as a discourse has an exponential effect upon the relationship; the propositions go beyond themselves and beyond the strictly prepositional act; they mark and define the room for the happening lying between two subjects. Thoughts, cognitions, emotions, dreams and illusions stake out a path as if they were riveted to specific points of time relational space, as if they were a text fixed by writing.

On the other hand, the world of what has been said is the world of incarnated experience. As a matter of fact, that is one of the conclusions derived from the reading of Freud: the direct link between desire and speech. There is no living experience that remains untold of as expressed in the latest Heidegger: "Language is the dwelling of the being and in that dwelling man lives" (Heidegger, 1947/1987, p. 31). If the *Dasein* is ontologically distant and closer to itself from an ontically perspective, there should be no reason why this difference, this absence as to itself will let it fulfil the empty spaces left by an experience that "demands to be told". But if the theory of the acts of speech to which the textual paradigm resorts both as an explanatory and comprehensive model, the theory of action – another one of its pillars – also makes it possible to establish close links as the therapeutic space. What can we then extract from the articulation between the text and the action?

Actions also stand out of the subject while acts leave an inscription, either upon his experience or upon those he is related to. Human actions leave imprints; they mark off and beacon the course of events of history and of the inherent stories. In this sense, the action is independent as to the primary intentions of who caused them to happen; it enjoys autonomy identical to the semantics of a text. With a proper autonomy marking a course of events, actions are a space shared publicly, open to confrontation of interpretations. Open-ended works, exposed to the eyes of various "readers". On the contrary, we might say that texts deal with nothing but the world of human action as vividly expressed in the theory of tragedy of Aristotle: the *muthos* of the tragedy, the fables, the plots, are all a *mimesis*,

that is to say, the creative and constructive representation of human action. It is through the action meaning that it stands out from the action event, i.e. it is the “noematic structure of action that can be fixed and stood out from the interaction process and become an interpretative object” (Ricoeur, 1986)<sup>5</sup>.

In order to understand that structure, it seems fundamental to Ricoeur to attend to another aspect of the theory of action: the one that stresses the intentional and motivational nature of the action. In this sense, human action as it is supported by Bruner, can be understood from intentional acts from agents that move within the shared space world. Hence, the link between *what?* and *why?* and we should add *how?* based on a phenomenological perspective of the therapeutic space. How a given aspect was experienced. Consequently, we can try and understand human actions on the basis of intentionality, and far away from the logic of mere causality and its effect.

The textual paradigm of Ricoeur’s phenomenological hermeneutics has close links to the dynamics of the therapeutic field. It is our viewpoint that the notion of the world of the text symbolises well the intersections referred to, for it contains the fundamental features. A distance that makes it possible for the subject to repossess himself as from an expressed world that is like an open-ended work. Likewise, in therapeutic texts the world enshrined has a direct link to reality – the world of life (*Lebenswelt*). The therapeutic relationship without previously defined paths becomes a space for the construction of the subjects that are positioned to put into perspective the *horizon of the possibilities for the being-there to interpret itself*. An interpretation that is made from a co-narration with an internal dynamics projecting itself in that relational inter-subjective space as if it were another world. That world as it is suggested by Ricoeur both different and identical to daily reality of a *Dasein*, allows that *Dasein* to place itself before spaces that he may dwell into. It is in this sense, that world of the text which is understood in this way, even within the therapeutic relationship, opens new horizons by de-constructing and constructing our real and trough intervening in our action. As said before, the world of the text intervenes at action level and transfigures it.

The theory of existential phenomenology within psychotherapy has insisted on a relational perspective instead of closely looking at human existence. Human existence could be translated by this simple sentence form Lyotard (1954): “The world is therefore denied as an exteriority and asserted as an environment, the I is denied as interiority and asserted as existing”. If the analysis of the *Dasein* means exploring its central dilemmas – frustration, choice, freedom, meaning and temporality – the way its answers are positioned in relation to the entirety of its world is equally fundamental. As supported by Spinelli (1997) “whatever the response, however, what is significant is that the response itself expresses

the stance we take toward our relations with the world”. In this sense, the existential phenomenological model is based on a clarifying exploration of the being in the world and of its contradictions and frustrations as stated in the notion of the *self-construct* (Spinelli 1997). In this concept, the author includes our values, attitudes towards ourselves and towards the others, aspirations, the story that distinguishes us as an incarnated individuality of the being in the world, so often experienced without questioning. It is our view that this exploration of the being in the world, may be grounded on the conjecture – validate dialectic as supported by Ricoeur. Within the therapeutic relationship both subjects are two interpreters themselves placed *in media res* before the text-narration opening up before them. Here too, the first move consists of the conjecture of the parts (phrases / actions) in relation to the whole (text / individual) without assuming a final stance. The conjecture – validate logic derives from a constructive process where the parts and the whole influence themselves permanently not through a mere chronological succession or superposition, but mainly through a subjective probability that is always limited to the multiplicity of possible meanings of the acts of the speech.

It is our view that the challenge that the existential phenomenological model supports for the self-construct of the person totally complies with the conjecture – validate dialectic as described by Ricoeur. On the other hand, the self-construct as previously explained has a direct link to the notion of the world which is fundamental in the context of the existential phenomenological psychotherapy. The world is a central concept that does not derive from theoretical issues only: on the one hand, the world created between both subjects is specific in itself, on the other hand, the existential therapist does not exclude all the dimensions included in the “outside world” and which are part and parcel of a person’s experience. In a certain way, the stress is laid on the “bringing the world back to the therapeutic field” (Spinelli, 2002). Inter-personal relations are a major feature to express the *being there* of the subject, the particular way he lives in, he lives the experience of his own idiosyncrasies, the others and the world.

In this sense, it is very important to stress the fact that existential phenomenological psychotherapy goes through a construction process, the texts-narrations are expressed as if they were an open-ended work, and as one might say using Ricoeur’s way of putting it, the aim is to explicit the way of being in the world exposed *before* the text. If the *Dasein* transcends itself not in relation to the entities but towards the world, this world becomes a horizon of possibilities for the *being there* to interpret itself. In the therapeutic context, the mundaneness of the world is crucial for the understanding of the situation – comprehension – situation triad. This world put into perspective before the “text” may thus intervene upon our action transfiguring it and placing the individual in a dialectic of belonging and distancing that enables him to re-construct his ipseity.

It is important to recall the notion of *anchorage* suggested by Frederico Pereira (2001). By referring to the relation within the psychoanalytical context, he stresses the important role played by the anchorage function occurring between two texts – that of the analyst and of that the analysed. Both interwoven texts, with a logic of inherent validation which is proper to whole made by them both, we might say, enables the anchorage function to set the limits so that the possibilities of interpretation do not fall a prey to pure semiotic deviation. As said by Ricoeur, “a text is almost an individual” if beyond a situation, the individual has above all a world; likewise, human action is a limited field of possible constructions for its interpretation. This applies to the psychoanalytical relation, for interpreting a text means above all creating and constructing other texts for which the subject can devise other possibilities about himself, the others and the world. We are therefore at the stage of meaning construction. By reconstructing narrations, both the analyst and the analysed create other narrations, the hermeneutic process meaning thus and enlargement of perspectives (Pereira, 2001). This is why, in our view, there is a particularly important excerpt in *Du texte à l'action* to understand the close relationship between Ricoeur’s hermeneutic phenomenology and the therapeutic field:

*What seems to legitimise this extension of the conjecture from the realm of texts to the realm of action is the fact that by arguing about the significance of an action I keep my wishes and my beliefs at a distance and submit them to a concrete dialectic of confrontation with opposing viewpoints. This way of keeping my action at a distance so as to become aware of my own motives, paves the way for a sort of distancing that occurs in what we call the social inscription of human action (...). If we have reasons to extend the concept of “conjecture” to action, “conjecture taken as a synonym of verstehen, we are equally authorised to extend the validation taken as a synonym of erklären to the field of the action*

(Ricoeur, 1986)<sup>6</sup>.

## Discussion

It is our viewpoint that Ricoeur’s hermeneutic phenomenology present a close relationship with the therapeutic field, namely as to the existential phenomenological approaches. The world of the text enshrines a set of concepts that stress this relationship, not only through a subject-oriented psychology (the subject constructor of a meaning) but also through a therapeutic perspective that favours the understanding of the way the subject positions itself towards the world. The controversies between explanation and understanding settled by the proposal of the textual

paradigm are identical to the conjecture – validate dialectic when the model of text is transposed to the notion of human action. These issues pave the way for a deeper reflection in the near future so as to focus on other areas of Ricoeur’s works developed in “Soi même comme un autre”, namely the notion of narration identity.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Il n’est pas de compréhension de soi qui ne soit médiatisée par des signes, des symboles et des textes; la compréhension de soi coïncide à titre ultime avec l’interprétation appliqué à ces termes médiateurs” (Ricoeur, 1986, p. 33).
- <sup>2</sup> “La phénoménologie, qui était pourtant issue de la découverte du caractère universel de l’intentionnalité, n’a pas suivi le conseil de sa propre trouvaille, à savoir que la conscience a son sens hors d’elle-même” (Ricoeur, 1986, p. 59).
- <sup>3</sup> Toute interprétation place l’interprète *in medias res* et jamais au commencement ou à la fin” (Ricoeur 1986, p. 54).
- <sup>4</sup> ‘Expliciter la sorte d’être-au-monde déployée *devant* le texte” (Ricoeur, 1986, p. 128)
- <sup>5</sup> “C’est sa structure noématique qui peut être fixée et détachée du processus d’interaction et devenir un objet interprété” (Ricoeur, 1986, p. 215).
- <sup>6</sup> “Ce qui paraît légitimer cette extension de la conjecture du domaine des textes à celui de l’action, c’est le fait que, en argumentant au sujet de la signification d’une action, je mets mes désirs et mes croyances à distances et les soumetts à une dialectique concrète de confrontation avec des points de vue opposés. Cette manière de mettre mon action à distance afin de rendre raison de mes propres motifs ouvre la voie à la sorte de distanciation qui se produit dans le cas de ce que nous avons appelé l’inscription sociale de l’action humaine (...). Si nous sommes justifiés à étendre à l’action le concept de “conjecture”, pris pour synonyme de *verstehen*, nous sommes également autorisés à étendre au champ de l’action le concept de “validation”, dont nous avons fait un équivalent de l’*erklären*” (Ricoeur, 1986, p. 228).

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