

The Verbal-Visual Synaesthetic Language: "metaphors and restitutions drawn" (by the therapist)

Gloria Bova ¹

Abstract

The article shows a research about language matching personal studies and experiences in the field of art, medicine and psychotherapy. The article concerns a language capable of rediscovering the archaic, retracing the meaning of a story and giving back its competence and mastery of self and of its life to the main character. The verbal-visual synaesthetic language is the sign that accompanies the word, or in other terms, it is a verbal communication reinforced by the use of the graphic-visual aid as a symbolic representative - as it has been observed in the perception interference phenomenon.

¹ *EUKOS “Center for the research and the development of psychological sciences”, Milan. Italy*

While elaborating the Phenomenology of Perception by Merleau-Ponty (1945), M. Armezzani¹ expresses the need for psychological sciences to rediscover the world of life and the real meaning of perception, in order to think of body, space, time, language and communication in a totally different way. It is, in fact, within the experience of the therapeutic encounter that I have searched for those new "objects" (ibidem, p.136) where body, mind, feeling, emotion, perception, memory, comprehension, autonomy, identity, realization, therapy, life, individual, relationship, family, and community, could acquire a new meaning and be woven together, handled with confidence, just like a goldsmith who gathers the scattered pearls and threads them one by one to reassemble the necklace. Everyone already has their own pearls. The thread is what is usually missing. The thread represents language, a language capable of rediscovering the archaic, retracing the meaning of a story and giving back to the main character its competence and mastery of self and of its life.

The verbal-visual synaesthetic language was developed and tested in the construction and experimentation of the systemic based Conservative Integrated Model (M.I.C.)². It is the sign that accompanies the word, or in other words, it is a verbal communication reinforced by the use of the graphic-visual aid as a symbolic representative - as has been observed in the perception interference phenomenon³, later proved in the recent research by V.S. Ramachandran⁴ of the University of San Diego, California. Ramachandran defines synaesthesia the synergic perception of various senses, underlining the universality of such processes and their importance for the elaboration of metaphoric thought.

The ability to represent graphically and symbolically has been present throughout the whole history of mankind, in every form⁵, from art to mathematics (even numbers, in the end, are graphic and symbolic representations of quantitative concepts, just as musical notes are of sounds, etc.). Even the use of various means of expression and perception can be found in the natural historical evolution of mankind and preceded the use of writing. In fact, in our oral culture, history and wisdom were passed down

¹ Maria Armezzani, (2002) *Esperienza e significato nelle scienze psicologiche*. Laterza (pp.134-135).

² Theoretical Model presented by the author at the II National Congress of Italian Psychologists. Rome, May 2004.

³ In Arcuri, L., Castelli, L. (1996) *La trasmissione di pensieri*. Zanichelli, (p.187).

⁴ V. S. Ramachandran, *Udire i colori, gustare le forme*, in "Le Scienze", n. 418, giugno 2003.

⁵ Hofstadter, D.R. (1979) *Godel, Escher, Bach: un'Eterna Ghirlanda Brillante*. Adelphi, Milano, 1984.

through the tales of the storytellers (the same synaesthesia can be found today in some TV advertisements⁶). This evolutionary step can be clearly seen when children are taught to read, and images gradually disappear to be replaced by written words (which become sounds, even in silent reading). But even after that, the primary tendency to use images persists in learning or visual memory. As neurophysiology clearly shows, synaesthesia is inscribed in the complexity of our cerebral structure. It is the archaic that is awoken by the visual-verbal language.

In ancient times, Aristotle, though without the neurophysiological knowledge of today, already intuitively asserted that knowledge, which all men aspire to, passes through reiterated and memorized perceptions, especially those of sight and hearing. He saw the foundation of imagination in the perceptive ability of man, a foundation of mental images that never lie because the senses are never wrong (the modern man has drawn away so much from his bodily perception that he can no longer hear such archaic messages. The subsequent separation of body and mind has left its mark.) Aristotle also claimed the need for science to express itself through language and more precisely through speech.

The verbal-visual synaesthetic language, now corroborated by the neurophysiological information on the underlying cortical and sub cortical circuits, talks to man rediscovering the archaic. If used methodically in the psychological session, it opens doors to new horizons and encourages understanding of dysfunctional mechanisms and dynamics, a faster retrieval of one's own awareness and that of one's history, past and future. This supports the initial hypothesis of a higher efficacy of a verbal-visual restitution compared to a mere verbal one. In line with the studies on Psychoneurolinguistics⁷, the simultaneous activation-stimulation of different senses (vision and hearing), and as a consequence the simultaneous activation of specific cortical and sub cortical areas⁸, produces, in fact, a Somatosensory Insight (or synaesthesia), that includes both an affective insight and a cognitive one, producing a therapeutic transformation ("kunesis" versus "entelechia"). This transformation can not be obtained with only an isolated insight⁹.

⁶ Arcuri, L., Castelli, L., (ibid.).

⁷ Bandler, R., Grinder, J. (1981) *Metamorfosi terapeutica: principi di programmazione psiconeurolinguistica*. Astrolabio.

⁸ Ramachandran, V.S. (ibid.)

⁹ from Galimberti, U. (1992) *Psicologia*. Garzanti, 1999, (p.534).

When both verbal and visual stimuli are used, the therapist can draw specific graphs through the interaction with the patient in specific moments of the therapeutic process. During the research that has been conducted, the protocoled graphs were developed extemporaneously during the session and were therefore specific for the particular symptomatology and dysfunctional dynamics. The drawings have been categorized in simple and complex graphs or in individual-, couple-, or family-specific graphs. Each one of them has proved to be generalizable (to different patients with similar clinical conditions) and repeatable (at different times, with the same patient, when the therapy has stalled, in order to resume progress), proving that the person's experience has remained stored in memory and has been learned.

The graphic-symbolic representations (drawn by the therapist), if appropriate and to the point, can be used also with psychotherapeutic and psychoanalytic models that have a different conceptual basis (if these allow an active interaction during the session), just as the graph of the Genogram Method¹⁰ (drawn instead by the patient). With the verbal-visual synaesthetic language we can also answer the Psychology of Meaning¹¹ when it asks for a kind of knowledge that, springing from new research procedures, in which there are new ways of interpersonal communication that do not disregard the reality of the experience, would explain the principle that language has no meaning outside intersubjectivity and that language is not a system of symbols but a group of "speech acts" in which communication and sharing of meaning is attempted.

James Hillman¹² seems to make a similar request when he asks if we want to silence the conceptual noise of the psychological jargon and create, in the therapist studio, an atmosphere in which the various moments speak to us using their particular terms, and we answer to ours. In this way, therapy becomes a means to try and discover what those terms are, setting the diagnosis aside in favor of creativity, therapist and patient together, a common language suitable for this particular life. The goal is not to cure life, or to make it normal, not even to stop its sufferings, but that life becomes more of itself.

In the verbal-visual synaesthetic language that the author proposes, knowledge is a subjective and intersubjective construction of meaning that is

¹⁰ Method developed and tested by the author, currently taught through specific training courses recognized in e.c.m. by the Ministry of Health.

¹¹ Armezzani, M., *ibid.*, p.27.

¹² Hillman, J., Ventura, M. (1993) *We've Had a Hundred Years of Psychotherapy-And the World's Getting Worse*, ed. Garzanti.

implemented with the use of the graph as a symbolic representative through "Metaphors and Restitutions drawn" and not just "talked".

References

- Armezzani M., (2002) *Esperienza e significato nelle scienze psicologiche*. Laterza.
Theoretical Model presented by the author at the II National Congress of Italian Psychologists.
Rome, May 2004.
- Arcuri, L., Castelli, L. (1996) *La trasmissione di pensieri*. Zanichelli.
- Ramachandran V. S., *Udire i colori, gustare le forme*, in "Le Scienze", n. 418, giugno 2003.
- Hofstadter, D. R. (1979) *Godel, Escher, Bach: un'Eterna Ghirlanda Brillante*. Adelphi, Milano, 1984.
- Bandler, R., Grinder, J. (1981) *Metamorfosi terapeutica: principi di programmazione psiconeurologica*. Astrolabio.
- Galimberti, U. (1992) *Psicologia*. Garzanti
- Hillman, J., Ventura, M. (1993) *We've Had a Hundred Years of Psychotherapy-And the World's Getting Worse*, ed. Garzanti.

Address reprint requests to:

Gloria Bova
Viale Regina Giovanna 33. 20129 Milan. Italy.
Ph. +39.02.29512967 Mobil: +39.340.3359183
Mail: EUKOS@fastwebnet.it - www.eukos.net