

Order to deconstruct !

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*The fingers carry us
through the fields of the air
towards the nest of the eyes
where the names are based and merge*

Jean Arp

Steve Levine is one of the major authors and teachers of the expressive art-therapy; he particularly brought there the concept of *poiesis* as a central concept.

It is this sensitivity which made me approach him with great interest in the Nineties because I also sought to conceptualize the art-therapy on the basis of this concept and found in its texts a resonance with my own research as well as more advanced maturity of the thought. On my side, I based my work on a French-speaking bibliography coming from art, phenomenology, psychoanalysis and ethnology; his is more traditional, comes from anthropology and philosophy and is rooted in the English-speaking literature. I like the intercultural meeting much. Its significant and respectful personality is oriented towards the human meeting and the mutual deployment. It became one of my intellectual guides and also fellow traveller.

In several texts, and in particular in the first chapter of *Principles and Practice of Expressive Therapy Arts*, Steve Levine formulates the bases of a philosophy of the expressive art-therapy, it proposes a history of the concept of *poiesis* and of its multiple significances and especially articulates order and chaos to study *poiesis*, that he regards as being an equivalent of the concept of art in English. That is not really possible in French as well the word of art evokes there the product of museum or theatre, cultural and commercial context rather as the process of creation.

While agreeing to connect poiesis to the Beautiful, like Plato and Aristotle, he differs from these two traditional thinkers, for which to create was an act of will. According to them, the beautiful results from the success of the form as it expresses a project, like a gain of order on chaos. For Plato, says Levine, it is the Idea, pure, abstract and essential form which must be represented in the artistic work for glorify the truth; the beauty results from it. The idea thus preexists to work, and it is its essence which must find a sensitive shape.

Plato discredits poiesis that it compares to the imperfection of the action on the matter.

Levine takes also its distances with Aristotle for who poiesis, while being a means of complementary knowledge to *praxis* and *theoria*, is a simple alternative of *techné*, to the service of rationality of an action's project.

Levine on the other hand stresses the importance of Nietzsche which takes distance with Plato in his famous study on tragedy. Poiesis becomes there essential and is connected to the Greek god Dionysos, essential counterpoint in a Society delivered to the absolute power of the rational thought and technique, allotted, they, in Apollo. The tragedy, according to Nietzsche, allows the profitable meeting of order and chaos, light and shade, Apollo and Dionysos. Steve Levine fully follows the thought of Nietzsche by recognizing the importance of disorder in creation and care, whereas the latter are, in general and particularly currently, associated with the effort of order, rationality and management.

He also rests on Heidegger which, while prolonging Nietzsche on its vision of poiesis, takes distance especially on the idea of a Will of surpassing of oneself, the super-man of Nietzsche, preferring an attitude to letting go, a reverie, open to surprised and to mystery of work in progress

I do not want of course to summarize this text more here, it is useful to frequently read and read again. I want now prolong the reflection initiated by Levine in the context of the art-therapy on the revalorization of chaos and of disconstruction in the creative process. It seems to me that, while opening in a good manner this track of study, Levine does not venture there rather far. I want then to show that exist several types of chaos among which some of there are not present in poiesis. I want finally indicate some tracks to facilitate and accompany poietic chaos in a therapeutic direction.

Recently, by moving my atelier, I found an old canvas which I painted and left beside several years ago. I forgot the reasons and the context of his creation, but by seeing again it at this

moment I found it rigid, closed and too structured. It missed air, openings, potential nuances. I wanted to take it again and to work it over again because colour corresponded to an interior climate which lived me then and the square format was a true call because it joined a current interest for him. But I felt terribly wedged by this form *déjà-là*. There was nothing to add and to remove, it was a too ordered and closed overweight.

I wanted to garage it again, but stays called at the same time by a new emerging challenge of the situation: how to make alive a closed and rigid work?

This questioning is also often present in the work of therapist. One commonly regards the sickness as marking the sudden appearance of a disorder in a state of stability, health. But it is possible to reverse the proposal in a manner seems to me very productive by saying on the contrary that the sickness is an excess of order, of a certain order which does not allow any more transformation and change necessary to any adaptation and alive evolution. This proposal seems to me particularly efficient for the psychic diseases.

I want have been able to cover the canvas with a new white ground or to preserve the frame and to throw the old canvas and to replace it by a new one. But I preferred to play in the field of present work and not to destroy it matter which could be a springboard. I put to add spots of colour in nuances close to those which were present, to stick images of magazines whose colours were also in resonances with the preliminary form, I turned the canvas in different directions from that which it had found before.

After a moment, aggravated by this play which seemed to me in spite of very free and which did not produce a form, I forsook the work and posed it aside.

In returning the following day, my glance posed on the canvas discovered with surprise that a new work was in birth, drew my attention and gave me the desire to joining it. A certain rhythm of the lines, a vibration of the blue colours, a new ratio of emptiness and fullness had emerged. I looked at the canvas like an emergence of work and no more like one old creation.

While thinking to this sequence, it had become to me clearly that a stage of disconstruction had been necessary to the reopening of the creative process. A stage of disconstruction was necessary which was not a destruction of materials, but a crack of the internal logic of preliminary work. It was necessary to upset the structure of work and of my own glance carried above. It was necessary to introduce chaos into order. It was necessary to regard the *déjà-là* as a starting material and not as an achievement or as an inert matter.

It is this track which I want to deepen, it seems to me to conceal a key of the poiesis.

The poïetics of Paul Valéry, work being done

The French poet Paul Valéry, charged with a chair of poetry at the *Collège de France* chooses in the first part of last century to orient his teaching towards the poem being done more than on the reception of work, differentiating by there aesthetics which relates to the reception of work, of *la poïétique* which studies the forming work in progress.

More recently, the French artist and philosopher Rene Passeron, in a clear affiliation with Valéry, affirmed that *la poïétique* interested him in the sense that it was directed towards the becoming of the work and its impact on the creator rather than on the impulse of the creator on the work. This author organized *la poïétique* as a knowledge in service to the forming art work.

Passivity

Certain currents of the art-therapy put forward psychology and tend to regard the person of the creator as the principal cause of the work. These currents set up methods of reading the work to carry out an understanding return on creator's psyche, particularly on his unconscious, in an Apollinian orientation.

While following the intuition of Levine as for a dionysiaque poiesis as much as an Apollinian one, one sees that a decentering of the creator's motivations is necessary for the birth of a creation. In recent writings, I showed that one could even regard the whole situation of the moment of creation as cause of creation.

The material is a partner of poiesis at the beginning of creation as much as the creator. The material is not an inert matter, with its potentials, its dashes, its textures, its odors, its limits, its questioning, its opening. The material requires of us to tighten the ear to him, to lend our hands, our sensitivity and our imagination to him. For that it is necessary to have a quality that Merleau-Ponty called the *passivity*. Passivity is the ability to let itself be called and be taken by the dash of material all while taking it in an action of working.

French author, Stéphanie Ménasé, in his recent book "Passivity and creation" studies the link Merleau-Ponty does with Modern Art through the concept of *passivity* proposed by this philosopher. She develops this concept with forces examples in the field of painting.

Ménasé present passivity as a state of availability of the human being to what can occur and what for he is the mediator of the potentials more than the author of the form.

"La possibilité de l'introduction d'un autre régime de l'expérience, l'ouverture d'une autre *dimension* nous apparaissent exemplairement comme étant à l'œuvre dans l'art. Il semble fécond d'interroger cette dimension. Je la nomme "passivité". J'entends par là, cette dimension du mouvement dont je suis le médiateur, mais qui d'une certaine façon se fait en moi sans moi, à mon insu" (p.10). I purpose this translation: "The possibility to put us in another mode of the experiment, the opening of another *dimension* which appear to us exemplary as being in working in Art. I name it "passivity". It seems fertile to question this dimension. I understand by there the dimension of movement which I am the mediator, but which is done, in a certain way, in me without me, without my knowledge" (p.10). The passivity about which Ménasé speaks is an operative passivity, i.e., a non-passive passivity, but acting and opening one. In connection with passivity, Ménasé says: « Or ils (les artistes) ne l'envisagent pas comme problème, mais comme l'expression d'un flottement qui ne suspend pas la possibilité de faire, mais exprime l'échappement en son sein. » (p.16) "But they (artists) do not consider it like problem, but as the expression of an undulation which does not suspend the possibility of making, but expresses the exhaust in its heart." (p.16). It thus the creator try to make and let make, to be active and passive in same time, to be crossed by the dash of an birthing form and to subscribe to this dash by offering his capacities his sensitivity.

This passivity is an essential dimension of poiesis and joined certain assertions of Levine which underlines the utility to let go itself to the forces materials and to put will and intellect at the second plan of the creating process.

The deconstruction

To reach this state of active passivity, it is necessary to be ready to deconstruct what is already formed. Jacques Derrida vigorously emphasized the deconstruction like creative method to approach a given work and to prolong certain atrophied dimensions of them. He does it starting from the forward setting of his internal contradictions. Like the example of the canvas taken again a few years after told higher shows it, it is not a question to destroy, but to deconstruct the preceding form and to install sufficient chaos, insane and extravagant in what comprises too much rigidity and order. This is done starting from contradictions present in work. One does not pass simply from an old order to a new order; it is necessary to experience between the two stage a sufficiently confused, formless and not controlled disorder so that exists a ground to the work to come so that it plants its roots there. A few years ago I proposed the concept of *composting* in complement of that of crystallization proposed by

Paolo Knill to understand the need for a creative disorder in creation and for a disassembling of what is *déjà-là*.

Deconstruction is an attitude related to the passivity, it comprises a larger gradient of activity, aggressiveness, in a creative direction, is clearly mobilized. Deconstruction indicates that it is sometimes necessary, to actively dismantle the existing order of world so that something again has a chance to occur. Deconstruction allows chaos, emptiness of what was, only precondition to happen of new. Deconstruction is an active process of critical contact with the limits of the established order of a work, to show of it the insufficiency and the inadequacy in the present questioning just like for the realization of the desire. It is a precondition to the later rebuilding of a more satisfactory reality, which will emerge by passivity, like itself, by crystallizing the potentials of the situation, out of project and will. To become requires a decentering of what one became, a deconstruction.

The broughters (opérants) of passivity

Ménasé studies the manners invented by certain artists *to enter* in passivity. It notes and details a certain number of *operative*, i.e. of manners to support the creative passivity of forms, meaning and artistic experiment. « Hasard, imbécillité, automatismes, chaos, simplicité, prise à la lettre, être rien, sans volonté, sans ressource, écervelé, non-maîtrise, imprévu, surprise, émerveillement,... » “Hazard, imbecility, automatism, chaos, simplicity, catch with the letter, being nothing, without will and resource, scatterbrain, not-control, unforeseen, surprise, amazement,...” are some of the broughters among the most practiced to open the creative action.

The broughters allow occurred of forms and non-intentional meanings in the work with the call of forces and figures of unconscious, in the form of exhaust. Let us hear here as much freudian unconscious made with repression that bionian unconscious composed of the dashes and potentials of the existence of the person not yet occurred.

For Merleau-Ponty, says Ménasé, they are these broughters which open to the birth of literary, pictorial, philosophical work,... They make it possible to dismantle already made thought, culture and standards which inhabit in the creator. I would say that they also make it possible to exceed rigidities resulting from the defensive psychic symptoms of the creator which on the contrary tend to repeat the same forms and process.

Ménasé also points out that Merleau-Ponty spoke about "fission de l'être", “fission of be”, i.e. innovative thought being done by the crack of the form and the acquired meaning. The idea of fission clearly expresses the need for a clear violence in the act of creation. But this violence

does not destroy, it widens, it opens the possible ones of the creator and his vision of the world. It tackles what blocks the living development. It is a deconstructive and non-destroying violence.

Chaos and tohu-bohu

I will use here the word tohu-bohu in place of English hurly-burly because it is the original Hebrew form, which is also used in French.

To support passivity some particular personal qualities are necessary for the patient and for the therapist. It is necessary to tolerate to feel not-knowing, doubt, informs, nonsense, chaos. The painter Antoni Tàpies explored without slackening informs as a favourable state for creation.

The psychoanalyst Wilfried Bion has insisted on the capacity necessary to the therapist to support the dubious, to doubt and to be *without desire and memory* for being alive and opened to consider what is presented in the present moment of the meetings and not carrying the preceding meetings or existential or theoretical problems personal. To invade the present moment of the situation with what one knows, can prevent the development of the therapeutic relation and of the maturation of the patient. This state makes try out chaos and dubious, it is difficult to live, impossible in the duration, says by this author.

The majority of the authors quoted above thus evoke chaos like complement and opposite necessary for order. Chaos represents a state without order, incomprehensible and foolish, delivered to disordered forces. It wakes up a naturally anxiety or an important anguish at any human being because a vital human task is sufficiently to organize the experiment of living to establish a feeling to exist rather durable and stable, therefore sufficiently ordered in confrontation with continued emergence of the new.

It seems useful to me to present a reflection on the meaning of the word chaos in using another synonymous with chaos: tohu-bohu.

Originally, one and the other term, in their respective cultural fields, Greek and Hebrew, express a formless and disorganized state preliminary to the creation of the world. But in the current language, if the two terms are almost equivalent, chaos rather evokes a state lived with dread due to loss of the order, whereas tohu-bohu evokes a preliminary state to creative emergence, rich of unknown potentialities. The emotional sensation of tohu-bohu is rather an anxiety impressed of curiosity and waiting of what can occur. Tohu-bohu thus makes it possible to conceptualize what precisely interests us in this communication: disorder, in what

it is a source for what will have suddenly been born, a situation's statement open on creation to come.

With *tohu-bohu*, we rather touch the nothing and the emptiness that chaos. The emptiness whose French philosopher Henri Maldiney, who dedicated many writings to the creative process, known as which it is « la réceptivité qui ne devance pas l'événement qu'elle aura à accueillir », “the receptivity which does not precede the event that it will have to accommodate” or : « un vide qui éclaire où il devance », “a emptiness which lights where it precedes” , or: It is this same philosopher, taking again the thought of Hans Prinzhorn, which says art « n'est pas Gestalt, mais Gestaltung, forme en formation », “is not Gestalt, but Gestaltung, form in formation”. That implies a gradient of continuous *tohu-bohu*, simultaneously with a process of crystallization of the forms.

An essential sequence for poiesis

Recently, during the supervision of an educative team, we approached a painful set of themes for them: the feeling of increasingly strong contempt which they felt on behalf of their hierarchy. At this feeling to be scorned and denied in their professional identity, was added a feeling of don't knowing anymore how to work and carry out their task. The direction of the institution had recently emitted new directives to make work more effective and to limit “relational on-engagements” of the employees, i.e. the too great emotional and temporal implication with which they accompanied the situations of which they had the load. They then owed to time and to note the interventions and to detail the distribution between relational work without objective and work of management of situation which is based on a validated project by the hierarchy, this with an aim of reducing the duration of the interventions and thus their costs.

In parallel, the team felt impotence growing in certain situations with the users of their institution. They said to encounter relational deadlock regularly and felt led to impossibilities of intervening, the users fleeing the meetings.

Initially, it was necessary to welcome the situation in a respectful way in space of supervision. We unfolded the problems by facilitating the verbal expression of emotions, phantasms and body feelings of all partners. What is briefly told in preceding paragraph took several hours at several surging conflict and painful meetings to be expressed in a confused and extremely emotional way. The summary which is given here was only possible afterwards.

The reception of the entirety of the situation was necessary, without wanting to shorten the most painful moments by proposing too quickly artistic work which could have induced an

avoidance action. The team did not know any more about which rules, and especially, about which values to rest. They tended to accuse each partner and tended to develop a theoretical sales leaflet of attack. The verbal unfolding of the *ball* of the situation had begun to deconstruct painful emotional atmosphere. But it was necessary to still pass then by a more active deconstruction in an artistic way. They used in a repetitive way the image of a ball of string like metaphor of their institutional experience. I proposed to them to not elaborate the idea of ball, too near to professional experience and to their own narration, but material called in this image: the string. That was to allow a certain de-centring of the suffering problems.

In the form of dance, they were going to be able to try out several types of strings, different material, wire and cords. This invitation was to feel the characteristics and qualities of these ropes, their differences, and to play with. They of course got mixed up them, but also disentangled, crossed, attached in increasingly complex figures.

This proposal had initially an impressive effect seizing, one moment of stupor, immobility suspended the group. Glances of mistrust, questioning, incredulity appeared. The surprise went large, but was exceeded thanks to the relational alliance created until there between educative team and supervisor. That helped certain to pass to action, timidly initially, then more boldly, then by involving the others. One had needed that I introduce a rupture equipped with certain violence to exceed the level of the rational and theoretical verbal exchanges, almost ideological, active in previous time. This moment was that which required the most active presence of me and of engagement, of taking risk. It is there that I had the most impact and influenced the most strongly the process.

On the stream of these improvised choreographies, they began to play more and more fully, they lost the conscious symbolic bond with their institutional situation and took pleasure to play directly with these imaginary strings or ropes made with their own flesh. Some confusion emanated then from the group, an exuberant moment and a joy made possible to pose in turn or side by side several figures without judgment, without seeking any resemblance to anything. There remained nothing any more but playing to give, demolish and transform forms. They started to explore various manners of blocking or of resolving the scenic figure. Several times they were surprised and amused by impossibility of moving. A rather impressive *tohu-bohu* emanated from it which invited even colleagues of a team close to the institution to put the nose at the door to see what occurred here funny and excited uproar there.

The forms were born from themselves, procreated, rebounded the ones on the others.

Then, a verbal work has followed in which were named the various figures and their formal qualities. A reflexive activity then made possible to anchor the experiment of the workshop in the questioning which had opened the supervision. Bonds between the danced forms and the forms lived in the institution were possible, opening new prospects and point of view on their situation, it is not interesting in this communication to detail this stage and its contents. Now we see an interesting sequence which relativizes the stress laid in general in art-therapy on the effort of working. This sequence seems to me specific to poiesis:

Suffering order → deconstruction → tohu-bohu → new emerging order surprising → descriptive attention on qualities of the forms → anchoring in the starting questioning and daily reality

This sequence presents order and disorder as complementary one of the other. The disorder is a passage between a pathological order and a new order, more alive, which can emerge from the tohu-bohu. One cannot know this new alive order, called work or existence, before it appears and takes form. It is unforeseeable, but one can support emergence and accompany it by it.

Therapeutic work is this significant accompaniment of each stage of the sequence suggested here, but it must stress the deconstruction which requires courage and effort much larger than the movement of crystallizing a new form.

The suffering order must be first of all accommodated with respect because it was a creation, even if it was rigidified with time and because its efficiency became insufficient so that the patient has the feeling of good life. The deconstruction is proposed by the therapist in the creative setting with sufficient force and tenderness at the same time like a possible de-centring of the preliminary order. This de-centring is often experienced with disturbance, anxiety, even pain, by the participants. It gains to be impressed with senses, emotion and imagination in a play full mood. These are ingredients of poietic tohu-bohu. The therapist must be able to propose creative settings opened to deconstruction, to surprise, tenderness and energy. The tohu-bohu, once reached, must be cherished because it is a marvellous running source, a mysterious material's bath. It gains to be tested a sufficiently long time to taste the various aspects and to let of them the various elements meet, be attracted, according to the affinities directed towards work to come. The new order of forms and meanings comes then in general alone, by the power of the situation and materials present in the tohu-bohu. It takes partners and lance they ahead.

Creation must belong to the patient, the therapist should not be too active at this stage, he is rather a witness who can feel gratitude to take part in a moment of transformation. Expression of specific formal qualities of the workshop and anchoring in the starting questioning and the daily life is done most of the time with the verbal language which is effective enough for that. The poietician therapist is a frontier runner (un passeur in french).

Poietics

If one thus considers a artistic and therapeutic discipline of which the central concept is poiesis, such as defined in this text and in the work of Levine, it is necessary to go further that the simple joining from those of art and therapy, even if the word “art-therapy” found public place in history and identity of our discipline. The addition of the word expressive is also insufficient to respect the power of the essence of the concept of poiesis.

Theoretical and conceptual researches of Steve Levine associated with that of Paolo Knill on the methodological level and other authors within Expressive Art Therapy, seems to me to constitute a very interesting base to consider a full scientific and artistic discipline which deserves to bear its own name.

Just as starting from the Greek word *physis*, we obtain physics; just as starting from *techné*, we obtain technique, or in the same way still as starting from word *praxis*, we obtain practice, we can naturally pass from *poiesis* to poietics. I suggest planning to introduce this concept into our vocabulary. It seems to me to be ventured on the way opened by Steve Levine, regarding poiesis as alliance of an Apollinian and Dionysiac movement, order and chaos. I tried to show at which point the attention of the therapist must be related to the accompaniment of dubious, of foolish tohu-bohu, so difficult to experiment, rather than at the time of the rebuilding, of working, of crystallization, which will come by itself. With the word poietics, I finally think of having proposed a concept for our discipline which honors really its principal concept: poiesis. To finish and to thank him, I leave with pleasure the word to Steve Levine himself in an extract of *The Precious Hours*, a poem of his work *Song the Only Victory*.

*These are the precious hours
when all is still,
the world not yet awake,
all dreams off glory
lived only ace has dream,
the moment before
the killing starts.*

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