

Peter Sinapius

“What did not exist, happened”

About the Third

Referring to an improvisation with Miles Davis, the pianist Herbie Hancock once reported:

"Once I played a completely wrong chord in the middle of Miles' solo. The tones, he played, integrated my mistake so that it suddenly became something right - that just blew me away. He did not hear it as a wrong chord, but as something that passed. And he took responsibility to make it into something right ...".

The word "pass", which is used here in the context of a musical improvisation by Herbie Hancock and Miles Davis comes from the French word “passer”, which means something like "to happen". Miles Davis' attention in this situation was neither on the past – on the 'wrong' chord – nor on the future – of what he had expected Hancock to play. In passing, Davis refers to an incident for which he takes responsibility, in order to unexpectedly transform a chord into an aesthetic form. This form is the so called 'Third' that emerges from a dialogical situation.

In sociological and psychotherapeutic theories the notion of the Third means an event or a situation that goes beyond dyadic models of relationships. In artistic practice in counseling or therapy the Third refers to the artwork that plays a mediating role between two poles. So the term is used to refer to different things in different contexts.

I would like to examine different perspectives using the following example. A small, unimpressive piece of wood with a string at its upper end, has accompanied for close to 15 years. There is a story connected to it, which gives it meaning. Without this story, it would have ended up in the garbage. It is an object that is primarily characterized by two features: a movable and an immobile part.

For four-year-old Zacharias, it was a helicopter and has like a helicopter a movable and an immobile part. Zacharias was the little pilot who flew it through the studio, while I could enter and participate in his dangerous maneuvers.

What is the 'Third' in this example? Is it the work, like the block of wood with a piece of string on top, is it the imagination of a helicopter or is it connected with the game, like the situation between me and Zacharias and his dangerous maneuvers?

To answer this question, it is worth differentiating between the various theories about the Third. This will enable us to refer them to applied arts from a suitable perspective.

Theories about the Third.

If it comes to the Third, there are two prominent positions, alongside many other possible theoretical perspectives. Each of them leads to different concepts in the research and practice of applied arts. One position relates the Third to the work that is accessible through our senses and is a joint experience for therapist and patient. The other position refers to the Third as an event that can happen between them: An interaction that makes sense by itself, a moment in which something unexpected appears.

It is not easy to put the two items into a relationship, because quite different theoretical models are involved in them, in which the "Third" plays a role: there is the reception-aesthetic perspective, a psychoanalytical, a sociological, a philosophical and an anthropological perspective etc. I will outline these perspectives briefly in order to differentiate between them:

- In visual studies the relationship between artist, work and viewer and the interdependencies within this constellation are investigated. Here the work has a mediating position between recipient and artist.

If we apply this configuration to the artistic work in counseling or therapy processes, we can represent it as a triangle that subtends between client, therapist and work. The lines between the corners of the triangle mark their relationships to each other: the relationship between client and work, between therapist and work and between client and therapist. They are determined either by the creative actions concerning the work of art, by the perception of what has been created or by the interactions between the two

who are involved. So the work is the common reference point between therapist / counselor and client.

In the game with Zacharias we refer to the work, the helicopter, in order to encounter. This is an example of a situation in which all three relations, marked by the triad, are involved. Zacharias' creative experiments culminated in this object and the related attributions. As a therapist I could refer to the object and share the image of a helicopter with Zacharias, if I agreed with him, that we were playing a game.

- In psychoanalytic theory, the work is embedded in the transference and counter-transference in therapy that are significantly influenced by the work as a present "Third". A major difference between pure psychotherapy and art therapy is that in art therapy the imaginations of the patient are not connected with a dream, but with the work as a common reference point for client and therapist. Zacharias had not dreamed of a helicopter, he imagined it in a block of wood with a string on top. The therapist can share this imagination if he participates in the game.
- In sociology the figure of the Third has replaced dyadic models of the relationship of "self and other". It is for example possible for me as a therapist to be actively involved in the interactions with Zacharias participating in the game with the helicopter, and at the same time to take a perspective outside of this game as an observer, who is reflecting upon what happens. In social research, this third figure is the participant observer.

From the perspective of the observer in art therapy practice the art therapist must be able to reflect on what is happening in therapy. We call this "controlled subjectivity". As a therapist you oscillate between two viewpoints: You are a participant in the game with the helicopter, but at the same time you have to be able to reflect from a higher perspective, virtually from a third position, on the interactions. This is the figure of the Third.

- In cultural sciences the term "Third Space" has been established as a space, where cultural differences are renegotiated. It's about the "in-between", between the shores, between here and there, a place where a third thing can occur.

This place has a similarity to the space which is marked between me and Zacharias through the game: The playing field as a Third Space to which we can both refer. Winnicott refers to this space as a transitional area – as in cultural sciences. To speak with Winnicott's words: "Psychotherapy takes place in the overlap of two areas of playing, that of the patient and that of the therapist. Psychotherapy has to do with two people playing together. "

"The place where cultural experience is located is in the potential space between the individual and the environment (originally the object). The same can be said of playing. Cultural experience begins with creative living first manifested as play."¹

- The philosophy of aesthetics and media studies use the term "the Third" with a different meaning. Art is seen as an event that happens between artist - viewer and work. The work of art is no longer independent of the artist like an artifact that refers to a meaning like a sign, symbol or metaphor outside of the work. The artwork gets its importance, like in a performance, only in the current interactions between artist and viewer.

The game with Zacharias is comparable to a performance. The piece of wood gets its importance as a helicopter in the game that takes place between Zacharias and I. Outside the game the piece of wood loses this meaning. It is neither a representation nor a symbol of a helicopter.

Now, in listing these possible perspectives you may realize that it is a problem if you discuss the Third referring to different theoretical positions, because "the Third" can have various meanings. Psychotherapy and art therapy relate in different ways to the scientific disciplines associated with the term "the Third". Sometimes several theories are connected to each other – putting either the therapeutic relationship or the relationship between client and work more into the foreground - depending on the point of view.

When I refer to "the Third" from now on, it is my intention to develop aesthetics as an area through which we can gain a different approach to our reality. I think this makes sense, since the relationship between aesthetics and reality of life changed significantly over the last

¹ from "Playing: Its Theoretical Status in the Clinical Situation," 1971

decades and aesthetics were given a dominant role in our everyday lives. Images have become means of direct and extended communication. Aesthetic representations are used in all areas of society, politics and everyday life, to advertise, to influence, to entertain or to communicate. Never before have so many images been produced. Music or stories are invented, which are conveyed by modern media and are omnipresent. The rapid spread of aesthetic means is not accompanied by an increasing perception and a competence to deal with images, but rather by a loss of perception.

Science has responded to this development in different ways. There was the "iconic turn" in Visual Studies, the "performative turn" in media sciences and there was a reorientation in the philosophy of aesthetics. The philosophy of aesthetics was traditionally related to the fine arts and was returned by a number of authors to its origin considering it as a philosophy of perception. They understand aesthetic perception as a special way of perception through which we relate to the reality of life in a different way. These theoretical concepts can be used as tools to investigate processes of perception in art therapy. This is what I will be referring to, when I speak about "the Third" in the following.

Aesthetic experience as the basis of our history

In therapy or counseling things can at first be negotiated through language, problems can be described and explored verbally. In applied arts something else plays a role when the art therapist and patient get in contact: they relate to a piece of art as a Third in their relationship. This Third is not only an object of verbal reflection, but also a direct experience that both might have: it appears in its aesthetic dimension. Between therapist and patient something comes to sound, a story or a movement takes place. What shows up doesn't open up in retrospective, but in the very moment of its appearance. It takes place below the threshold of conceptual and reflexive knowledge and presupposes that we dispense our conceptual knowledge in order to become aware of the ambiguity and the abundance of sensory impressions. A sound, a taste, a color, a movement are perceived in the moment of their appearance, not in retrospect. To become aware of it, we have to stay with them. Verbally we are able to describe this process of perception, but not its aesthetic content.

This is connected to the experience of what we call "the Third." These experiences are what our stories are made of: they continue, open up new chapters or lead to surprising turns.

I want to show what I mean through an example:

The book of Xaver und Wastl was my favorite book as a child. It is about Xaver, who is thin and tall and always wears red striped tights and Wastl, who is small and has red hair. Xaver lives in the attic of an old house. When he looks out of the window, he sees only house roofs, no people, no cars or playing children. Therefore, he always desires to live further down so that he can see everything. If Wastl looks out of the window, he sees only paving stones and legs because he lives in the basement of the house. He wishes to live more upstairs, so that he can see everything.

Xaver and Wastl are friends, they play in the gray backyard, dream together about their dream house or take a walk. One day they discover an old, abandoned hut on one of their walks. Because no one lives in there, they decide to move in. After they have asked the owner Mr. Dinglmeyer for permission they start to renovate the barrack. They organize paint, with the help of the chimney sweep they put the oven in order, and they paper the walls and furnish the apartment with a table and chairs made of orange crates. And after they are done they invite all people that helped, the painter, the chimney sweep, Mr. Dinglmeyer and their parents to celebrate the official opening of their dream house with cake and lemonade.

As a child I loved this story and its images. I was familiar with the attic of Xaver, the basement of Wastl and the dusty backyard. I was present during the renovation of the barrack and was sitting at the opening of the hut at the table. This is as true, as the story of Xaver und Wastl is.

We all have our stories. They are sometimes more important than what actually constitutes the reality of our lives. When we grow up, our stories seem to become insignificant. We behave as if they no longer belong to our biography, but they are part of it. They are the background of our activities, of our self-consciousness and our lives. With each step in our biography we are continuing them.

If I say that I knew the attic or the basement of Xaver and Wastl, their construction trailer and that I shared their renovation and opening ceremony, these are bodily experiences. The term "body" belongs to a key concept of phenomenology. It is the medium through which we experience ourselves and the world. Our consciousness is embedded in sensory experience. Phenomenology thus contradicts the assumption that the anatomical body and our consciousness, which is located in the brain, are opposites. We gain experiences if we relate to our environment through our senses. A child who has a picture book in its hands grasps what it sees, with all its senses: it sees, hears, smells, tastes and is actually involved in the story that is told or shown. This is called trans- or multimodal perception. When the child gets older, it starts to develop theories and explanations about its experiences. We call this reflection. Quite often the sensory experience of the world fades behind this verbal reflection.

In applied arts we deal with similar experienced worlds as in the story of Xaver and Wastl. Here a shift of realities takes place: on one hand it is the literal reality, which is close to the reflexive logic of everyday life and on the other hand it is the imaginary reality that is more connected to sensory and aesthetic experiences. While the first, the literal reality, can be expressed verbally, as we single out certain aspects from the range of our experience in order to identify it conceptually. Imaginary reality is connected with our global sense of self that is anchored in our self-awareness.

In this sense the "Third" in the relationship between client and therapist can not be nailed down to the actual artwork, which is part of the "literal reality" because it belongs as an event to the present moment of aesthetic experiences. It happens. It is perhaps comparable to what is commonly known as the "wow effect": one has understood something without knowing exactly how it happened.

Aesthetic Events

I want to use the following example of an art therapy process in order to take a closer look at the aesthetic qualities of therapeutic interactions, from which the "Third" can emerge: David is a boy who lives alone with his mother. If he is allowed to visit his father, he may sit

in front of the television and watch movies like "Jurassic Park". When David started to work with me in art therapy, he was not only "hyper-kinetic" and "perceptually impaired", which preceded our meeting as labels, he was also deeply disturbed.

We played scenes from the movie "Jurassic Park" over and over again: David turned into a flying dinosaur with a pair of scissors in his hands and left behind a trail of destruction on the board, on which we had carefully built a city out of paper. One day he decided to make a little clay pig in order to "slaughter" it, as he said. After he had formed a wonderful pig with my help and with much dedication, he started to threaten the pig with the scissors. All my pleading and begging was fruitless. David insisted to cause a massacre. So with the scissors in his hands he slowly got closer to the pig - but before he could stab it, in literally the last second, I stopped him by instinctively grabbing the pig and transforming it back into a piece of clay. I prevented a "bloodbath" because I could not stand the situation. By that a different image emerged than that, which preceded the situation. David accepted this. We have never repeated the game.

This situation describes an incident that goes beyond the presentation or production of a piece of art. In this case the aesthetic experience can not be reduced to the created work itself (the modeled pig) and it doesn't reach its fulfillment in experiences that you can have with an aesthetic medium (sculptural material). Neither is it a stage play, because here no roles are represented. As a therapist, I did not play my horror. I was horrified. David did not simply "enact" scenes; he put himself through his actions in a conscious contradiction to me as a person. These events can not be adequately described in a traditional way by looking at the aesthetics of the artwork.

Beyond the fact that here a pig is modeled or an action is staged, the interactions between me and David have aesthetic dimensions: in a certain way they are dance-like, music-like, symbolic- and poetic-like.

First, the movement impulses which determine the invisible dynamics between me and David, are like a dance. They are determined by sensing our proximity, the touch and the contact as well as the pause and the lightning-fast reaction that prevented a "bloodbath". They were the background for the game that took place. They occurred on the border between play and personal concern.

But the movements also have something music-like: A drama manifested between David and I that cast a spell on us both. I got involved in a strange and unfamiliar situation and took an active role in it. I was not just a commentating observer of an event that took place in front of me. Like in a piece of music between me and my counterpart something came to a sound while I was actively referred to the part that the other played.

Finally a story arose from the dialogue between David and I. It had a central motive and an inner logic. This story did not have the function to open up biographical material in order to evaluate it and make it usable for therapeutic purposes. It unfolded its communicative value in the current therapeutic situation. This has something symbolic in the sense of the Greek term *symbolon*. *Symbolon* initially meant something like "memory shard": The host breaks a coin, a ring or cube into two pieces and returns one half to the guest. If the guest or his descendants will come back in the house, a whole can be seen on joining the shards together. The single fragment, the memory shard, carries the whole thing in itself. Gadamer describes it as the sought-Other, which is completed to a whole by our individual experience.

The end of the game in my example came unexpectedly: David approached the pig with scissors; it created a tremendous tension between us until I acted in the very last second. This is not the result of a carefully planned action, but a gesture that completes the story.

Like in an artistic work the meaning of interactive actions do not emerge until the final gesture is done, the last word is spoken, the last brush stroke is made, and the last note has died away. This is characterized by the Greek term "*poiesis*": the unforeseen "Third" that arises or emerges from a therapeutic encounter. It is what "happened" in the play between Davis and Hancock, without being caused intentionally. Like the hurrying stream of a poem is leading in a shape and in the end suddenly opens up in its meaningfulness and sensuousness, it is the flow of aesthetic actions in art therapy that can lead to an aesthetic whole.

What did not exist, happened.