

ICONICITY AS A POSSIBILITY OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH OF HYPNOSIS¹

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ABSTRACT. The present work seeks to present iconicity, as a semiotic notion, as a possibility of qualitative research for hypnosis, understood here as processes that cover specific modes of communication and the emergence of trance. Through key notions of semiotics and complexity, the present study discusses some clinical vignettes of hypnosis in which the notion of iconicity and the concepts attached to it offer considerable explanatory possibilities. Then, it outlines how the notion of information in qualitative, material, and interpretive terms can provide elements for the construction of a qualitative research on hypnosis. This moment is discussed and problematized with other perspectives of qualitative research, aiming to highlight the explanatory and methodological potentiality of the notion of information. The paper concludes by pointing out that, although iconicity has not yet been established as a possible important notion for qualitative research, it has characteristics and potentialities that will allow investigations of great pertinence in this field.

Keywords: Clinical psychology; hypnosis; qualitative research.

ICONICIDADE COMO POSSIBILIDADE DE PESQUISA QUALITATIVA DA HIPNOSE

RESUMO. O presente trabalho busca apresentar a iconicidade, enquanto noção semiótica, como possibilidade de pesquisa qualitativa para a hipnose, compreendida aqui como processos que abrangem modos específicos de comunicação e a emergência do transe. Por meio de noções-chave da semiótica e da complexidade, ele discute algumas vinhetas clínicas de hipnose nas quais a noção de iconicidade e os conceitos a ela ligados oferecem consideráveis possibilidades explicativas. Em seguida, esboça como a noção de informação, em termos qualitativos, materiais e interpretativos pode oferecer importantes elementos para a construção de uma pesquisa qualitativa da hipnose. Este momento é discutido e problematizado com outras perspectivas de pesquisa qualitativa, visando-se destacar a potencialidade explicativa e metodológica da noção de informação. O trabalho é concluído ressaltando que, apesar de a iconicidade ainda não ter se estabelecido como possível noção importante para a pesquisa qualitativa, ela possui características e potencialidades que lhe permitirão investigações de grande pertinência neste campo.

Palavras-chave: Psicologia clínica; hipnose; pesquisa qualitativa.

ICONICIDAD COMO POSIBILIDAD DE INVESTIGACIÓN CUALITATIVA PARA LA HIPNOSIS

RESUMEN. Este estudio tiene como objetivo presentar la iconicidad como noción semiótica, como la posibilidad de la investigación cualitativa a la hipnosis, entendida aquí como procesos que abarcan los modos específicos de la comunicación y la aparición de trance. A través de nociones clave de la semiótica y de la complejidad, discute algunos casos clínicos de la hipnosis en el que la noción de iconicidad y conceptos vinculados a la misma ofrecen considerables posibilidades explicativas. A continuación, se describe cómo la noción de información, en términos de calidad, materialidad e interpretación puede ofrecer elementos para la construcción de un estudio cualitativo de la hipnosis. Este punto es discutido y cuestionado con otros puntos de vista de la investigación cualitativa, con el objetivo de poner de relieve el potencial explicativo y metodológica del concepto de información. El estudio se concluye señalando que, aunque

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esta idea aún no se ha establecido como la investigación cualitativa, que tiene características y capacidades que le permiten una gran relevancia de la investigación en este campo.

Palabras-clave: Psicología Clínica; hipnosis; la investigación cualitativa.

Introduction

The interest in hypnosis resumed in the last twenty years is deeply marked by a considerable gap between researchers and clinicians. While the former, usually under medical and cognitive inspiration, are concerned with evaluating efficacy (Jensen & Patterson, 2014), the latter seem to be keenly interested in the development of clinical efficacy techniques (Neubern, 2016a). Although such interest is of great importance to the field, by placing hypnosis as the focus of research and clinical training, it also reissues the dichotomy between theory and practice or research and application (Morin, 2001), somewhat disregarding the subjective dimension of hypnosis (Neubern, 2016a). Processes highlighted by fundamental names in the field (Erickson & Rossi, 1979; Roustang, 2015) such as mutual influence, hypnotic communication, corporeality, the role of the subject, the emotional, symbolic production, hypnotic phenomena and the unconscious are widely excluded as themes of reflection and research.

In this sense, while on the one hand the criticism of the use of theory by clinicians has resulted in a certain contempt for reflection, on the other, the social and human sciences have shown no interest in hypnosis as a social practice. The qualitative reflection and research (Creswell, 2013; Denzin, 2014) and perhaps clinical ones (Lévy, 1997), whose proposals may be directed to such aspects of subjectivity, seem to remain indifferent to such processes, leaving aside a field of great relevance (Stengers 2001; Neubern, 2016b). Thus, despite the considerable tradition of research on ritual trance (Mancini & Faivre, 2012), the clinical field of hypnosis does not seem to arouse the interest of qualitative researchers who would have much to say about it.

Iconicity, which consists in the ability of the signs to transmit the qualities of the objects they represent (Nöth, 2015), can be an interesting alternative for the research of this field. Studies based on the perspective of iconicity have brought significant contributions in semiotics, literature and linguistics, arts and philosophy (Hiraga, 2005; Jappy, 2013). This is because, in addition to referring, as a semiotic process, to different levels of organization of communication and human experience (Colapietro, 1995), it also points to a subliminal relationship between the qualitative processes of communication and the emotional and unconscious dimension of the subject (Neubern, 2016b). Roughly speaking, the very constitution of the signs present in a hypnotic suggestion would have iconicity as a basic foundation, which could favor a different access to central processes of trance, constituted mainly by the feelings.

Thus, the present study aims to highlight iconicity (Jappy, 2013; Nöth, 2015) as a qualitative research possibility for hypnosis. In order to do so, it seeks to present some key notions, such as signs (icons, indexes, symbols and hypoicons), types of experience (firstness, secondness, thirdness), information and trance, linked to the notion of iconicity capable of promoting clinical and qualitative research both in their reflection processes and in their dialogue with the empiric. These notions stem, for the most part, from Peirce's semiotics (1993, 1998, Jappy, 2013, Nöth, 2015) and, at times, from the complex thinking of Morin (1996, 2001, Neubern, 2016a). Some of the clinical appointments of Milton Erickson will be presented, highlighting the roles of iconicity in the suggestions and then discussing the notion of Peircean inspiration information (Mladenov, 2014) as a possible element for the construction of a research in the objective here proposed.

Two caveats are necessary in this regard. Firstly, an established methodology is not proposed, but possibilities for a qualitative research. This is because, in addition to the fact that semiotics itself is still a "science to be done" (Santaella & Nöth, 2004, p. 71), it does not yet have its own conception of human subjectivity, despite significant efforts in this regard (Colapietro, 1989; 1995). This is what justifies, therefore, the restriction of iconicity to the processes of communication, whereas the notions of subjectivity and trance will be taken from a complex view (Morin, 1996; 2001; Neubern, 2016a). Secondly, Erickson's appointments will be used as an illustration, because this author is perhaps the one that best facilitates an approach from iconicity, given the metaphorical character present in his work (Erickson & Rossi, 1979), which does not seem to occur in the same intensity in the other major authors of the area.

Hypnosis and iconicity

Trance is characterized by a kind of decentering of the *ego*, that is, a process in which this *ego* ceases to be the so-called center of power and decision with which the subject identifies himself to place himself more or less passive before the emergence of other processes (Neubern, 2016a). The references that guide the relation of this *ego* to the world (time, cause, matter, other, and space) undergo considerable changes and are followed by the emergence of a polyphony, both individual and cultural, which seems hardly visible to the individualistic logic of contemporary societies: an intimate person may emerge from the subject's history, such as a love (therefore, a *thou*), a saint or spirit that represents a cultural belonging (a *we*) or phylogenetic processes, such as anesthesia and analgesia, which refer to the animal heritage of man (*it*).

Nevertheless, it is important to note that in the face of such polyphony, the role of the *ego* during the trance may be somewhat varied. It can be a mediator between different demands, such as between a spiritual mission and individual needs; it can put itself as one who makes decisions after conflicting or negotiating with other voices; can learn to access phylogenetic processes of great therapeutic help; can be enslaved by these other voices and also constitute a representative of their niches of belonging. Not without reasons, it is possible to conceive that this *ego* is the identity mark of a singular and individualized subject, but also a representative of the significant social exchanges that preceded it (Morin, 2001).

Hypnotic communication, on the other hand, will be conceived here from iconicity as a semiotic process (Jappy, 2013; Nöth, 2012; 2015; Peirce, 1998). Each gesture, word, intonation of voice, figure of speech and dramatic role that induce the trance constitute as signs, that is, what represents an object and produces an effect in the mind of the interlocutor (interpretant). As regards the relation with the represented object, the signs constitute themselves as icons, which attach qualitatively to their objects (such as a not very detailed drawing of a person, adjectives, adverbs and verbs), indexes, which link to the object in a physical or functional way (such as footprints in the sand or the indication of a thermometer, relative and demonstrative pronouns) and symbols (representing them by laws, habits and conventions, such as words and speeches). It is important to emphasize that, from a logical point of view, indexes always have icons, while symbols have icons and indexes, which allows us to conceive that, in some way, iconicity is always present in the processes of human communication, including hypnosis (Neubern, 2016b). It is also worth remembering that the signs commonly articulate and form broader configurations, the semiotic forms (Jappy, 2013) that make up the heterogeneity of everyday communication processes.

There is an interesting feature here for the study of hypnosis as yet unexplored (Neubern, 2016b): signs logically link to different dimensions of human experience (Peirce, 1993), namely, *firstness* (icons, feeling, potentiality not yet existent, present), *secondness* (indexes, reaction, concrete singular phenomena) and *thirdness* (symbols, thought, laws, habits that allow for a future perspective). This perspective seems very pertinent to the theme, since it emphasizes that iconicity refers to the access to a fundamental dimension of subjectivity - the feeling - essential to trigger the trance state (Erickson, 1964; Roustang, 2015), but also to a variety of possible trance conceptions that may involve automation and index redundancy (Erickson, 1964), as well as their symbolic and spiritual characteristics (Erickson & Rossi, 1979; Neubern, 2016a).

However, iconicity brings yet another important potentiality for Erickson's hypnotic communication research - the notion of hypoicons (Peirce, 1998), i.e. the impure icons for having a concrete substrate, since pure icons would only occur in the imagination of the subject. Hypoicons, also conceived in this trichotomy, would be the images that refer to the *first-firstness* (which present qualitative similarities to their objects, as the adjectives), the diagrams as *second-firstness* (which present the functional relations between the components of the objects, as the descriptions or narratives of an event) and metaphors as *third-firstness* (which represent in one sign the juxtaposition of two distinct fields). So, in the metaphor *love is blind*, used to illustrate the positions of folly and bad choices of those who love, there is the juxtaposition between one field (behavior, morality) and another field (a physical limitation, blindness). Allegories are a variation of metaphors (Jappy, 2013) because, although this juxtaposition does not occur in the expressed sign, they occur in the subjectivity of the person as interpretant, provided that this person has prior knowledge about those fields. This is the case of the fables of Aesop, La Fontaine, religious texts and many songs that sing a letter referring to another implicit situation (Neubern, 2016b).

Outlining research: key concepts

Such perspectives are pertinent to the research of hypnosis, since they refer to a connection of great relevance between the suggestions and the trance. This relevance is mainly due to the iconicity that is present in the suggestions and accesses the subject's deep and unconscious dimensions, mainly involving feelings (Neubern, 2016b). It is possible to conceive, therefore, that the hypnotic suggestions, in their variability, have a potential of producing significant experience that allows a pertinent understanding of what can occur to the subject.

In the following suggestions, Erickson (1964,) names truisms (obvious assertions) and interpersonal (alterations of tones of speech and pauses in certain passages of speech, in italics in the quotation) directed to a patient intensely anxious.

You are convinced that you are resistant to hypnosis, that other therapists have failed you, despite many efforts to induce you to trance. (...) And you have expressed your conviction that I cannot induce you into trance, and with the same frankness I believe that you will resist every attempt I make to you, despite your desire to cooperate. *However, since you came to therapy*, and you attest to being a tough, uncooperative patient, let me explain a few things *before we begin*. So, *I can have your attention* just sit with your soles on the floor, your hands resting on your thighs and *do not let your hands touch each other under any circumstances*. (pp. 301-302).

In general, the structure of this suggestion can be conceived as a diagram, in which there is the report of facts and a fundamental characteristic of the signs of the secondness that is to fix the attention of the interlocutor - point of great importance to trigger the trance state (Erickson & Rossi, 1979). In the case, there is an account of obvious elements brought by the patient that fix his attention and seem to leave him, somehow, responsive to the therapist. However, the organization of this report is not done by chance: the obvious sentences are ordered by the therapist and cut with interpersonal suggestions that seem to constitute a significant difference as to the patient's original speech, since they are suggestions that lead to the trance, unlike their unfitness and resistance. There is even a subliminal allegorical content in these phrases, as in the case of the "*before we begin*" which iconically reflects the anticipation typical of the anxious and "*do not let your hands touch each other under any circumstances*" which likewise reflects the contact between the conscious (in which they would tend to rationalize) and unconscious (in which one could allow more spontaneous experiences) dimensions.

Another significant example of hypnotic communication is found in Erickson's case (Erickson & Rossi, 1979), where a cultured and paraplegic young woman, living with urinary and fecal incontinence, was thinking about giving up life because her condition of *ugliness, disability and deformity* prevented her from fulfilling dreams like marrying and being a mother. At a certain point in the process, in which the young woman is already in a trance, Erickson (Erickson & Rossi, 1979) seems to abuse metaphors and allegories:

Men are curious creatures because they may feel attracted to and marry anything that looks like a female. Imagine a man in his wits getting lured by an Ubangi platypus woman, *but they do this*. (...) And what one sees in the other is difficult to know, but *love is blind, the authorities say*. And please do not try to tell Mr. Hippo that Mrs. Hippo does not have a nice smile. (...) We have to thank the Gaussian curve, *the natural distribution curve*, which allows us to say that 'for every Rachel there is a Reuben and for each Reuben there is a Rachel'. 'East is east and west is west and will never meet' was not said for men and women. (pp. 433-434).

In the passage above, the sequence of diagrams, metaphors, and allegories have a considerable content of iconicity as they refer to people and beings outside the standard of beauty who, like the young patient, have desires of lovingly and sexually joining one another. However, the difference here is present because all the protagonists presented can achieve the union, despite their apparently impeding conditions. Iconicity, therefore, is found both in the unfavorable condition of the protagonists and the young woman, and between the fulfillment of the desires present in both, elements that seem to have had a great impact on their feelings. Of course, other elements that seem to require a certain level of

intellectual training, such as references to distant tribes, animals, authorities, and the Gaussian curve may have played an important role in such a connection between the stories and the world of the woman's experiences.

Unlike the previous example, these semiotic forms were not used here in order to fix the attention in order to trigger the trance state, but as a kind of alternative for the symbolic resolution of an impasse experienced by the woman. The flood of examples directed at her, with a strong emotional repercussion given their iconicity, present a difference in an essentially symbolic plane, causing her subjective production to leave a meaning "I am ugly, disabled and will not marry" to "I am outside the standard of beauty and normality, but I can get married". It is noteworthy that, despite the easily perceived relationship between such sentences and the configuration of her experience, the hypnotherapy of this young woman was closed with a process of amnesia, so that ten years after her therapy she was already married with four children and did not even remember being Erickson's patient. Such a reconfiguration seems to have had its roots in deep and unconscious emotional processes to its *ego*, whose decisions, however, seemed to have faithfully followed the change initiated there.

The analyses developed so far should not mean that the semiotics of hypnosis is restricted to verbal, grammatical signs and prosody, since, as Neubern (2012) points out, Erickson's work is characterized by a dramatic dimension, in which the therapist adopts therapeutic roles as a way of influencing the patient. Later, the same author also characterizes it by the expression *clinic of showing* (Neubern, 2016b), which refers to how the different actions of the therapist that compose the dramatic roles are willing to present, without explaining, the messages addressed to that particular person. The perspective of a *show* has a considerable appeal to iconicity, since the therapist puts himself, without explaining anything to the patient, in a position or mode of relation similar to that of some important person of his history in order to favor the creation of some alternative to their demand or problem.

This is what occurs. for example, in the case of Pietro (Erickson, 1958 quoted in Haley, 1985), a talented young flautist who had sought therapy because of an intense swelling in the lower lip that made the use of the flute unfeasible. Because of a life marked by a tyrannical and controlling father, Erickson takes a relatively authoritarian stance, but at the same time offers him the opportunity to retaliate against his commands with various types of verbal aggression, sometimes made as jokes. After a few months of therapy, when Pietro was preparing to say that Erickson was to be a lousy father, he turned to his therapist and said, "but you are not my father!" (p. 93), to which Erickson nodded to then say that after all this work he would be able to talk to his father as an adult, without all the aggressiveness he had presented in his office. A few weeks after this episode, his lip returned to normal and Pietro was able to resume his career as a musician.

In this case, the signs that compose this authoritarian role of the therapist seem to reverberate in a figure very present in the lived world of the musician who, despite an oppressive influence, seemed to be surrounded by defenses against all aggressiveness generated by the patient as a reaction to such a relationship. In bringing the figure of the tyrant, embodying it as a role, Erickson also allowed a way for such aggressiveness to surface and was somehow worked through during the sessions, so as to prepare him for the possibility of a real conversation further. In short, the *show* seems to evoke, by means of iconicity, such figures and modes of relation, while at the same time it also includes, in the construction of this role, the possibility of some significant change that can make a difference therapeutically.

The three examples discussed here may be somehow synthesized in the phrase of an old patient of the author who reported that *during hypnosis he seemed to see a movie in his mind while the author described another movie out there*. The different semiotic forms present in the process of hypnotic communication thus seem to constitute themselves as a script that resembles and evokes the drama present in the world of experiences of the subject which, however, in the trance experiences it more intensely and vividly, due to the changes that characterize such experience. Nevertheless, given that this world has an infinity of experiences that are in the shadow of the dominant logic in the world of the subject, the therapeutic process can also evoke, through iconicity, other experiences of this same world, in order to challenge this logic and propose therapeutic change. This imaginary movie of the experience of the subject therefore has scenes, meanings, images, emotions and characters hitherto hidden, that is,

semiotic forms of great relevance to the subject, who can be invited to compose a new script and establish a therapeutic change.

Iconicity and information

What has hitherto been developed should not mean that the search for iconicity is limited to the mapping and classification of signs in hypnosis, but rather to a logic according to which feelings play a central role in communication and trance. As a starting point for this reflection, it is important to highlight the notion of information (Mladenov, 2014), while taking into account that the research involves a whole constellation of concepts and actions, whose scope would not fit within the limits of this work (Creswell, 2013; Denzin, 2014; Lévy, 1997). In general, information consists of a construction that seeks to establish relationships between different empirical evidence, as well as the researcher's construction of thought (Demo, 2001; Gonzalez Rey, 2005). Fleeing, therefore, from the trap of raw data that self-explain and appeal to a pretense authority, it becomes of great relevance in the current research landscape as a way of avoiding narrative impositions and self-evident explanations that most seem to reproduce the *thematias* or fixed ideas of the researcher (Morin, 2001) than to establish a dialogue with the empiric.

Mladenov (2014), in an interpretation of the notion of information in Peirce, conceives it as the "sum of the synthetic propositions in which the symbol is subject or predicate, or information concerning the symbol." (p. 38), and besides the synthetic, there are the connotative and denotative propositions³. The connotative implies a content of depth, therefore, more connected to the firstness and the feelings; the denotative, in which there is a perspective of extension, involving the multiplicity of information between two terms, thus typical of the secondness; and synthetic, which involves the previous ones, being thus closer to a logic of thirdness. Although such a notion has not yet been developed in terms of what is presently understood as a qualitative research (Creswell, 2013; Sardan, 2015), mainly regarding hypnosis, it is possible to conceive it here as a central reference, including due to the series of other key concepts that accompany it as a logical necessity.

In this way, one of the first possibilities for which iconicity points is the quality of information. In the cited examples, when Erickson (1958, quoted in Haley, 1985), in a clinic of showing, poses as an authoritarian figure mirroring Pietro's father, opens space for the investigation of a web of signs linked to a qualitative dimension of information. From the therapist's point of view, there is a series of processes that allow the construction of this role: the posture of being emotionally touched by the patient, in an attitude, in which, through the relation, he is prepared to apprehend what this other brings, as if he could conceive it in his own feelings, with little or no direct interference from conscious thought. It is a way for the therapist to connect and, to a certain extent, to delve into his own firstness, which allows for a different perception of the other. This is what some therapists informally call feeling, a kind of emotional and intuitive perception of the other and the context, and which, in Erickson's case, seemed to be very accurate. From this form of relationship, which can be constituted as a more or less radical type of trance of the therapist (Neubern, 2016a), there is a creative process of character construction, in which the therapist begins to incarnate, from his form of being authoritarian, the figure of Pietro's father, in order to seek a reverberation in his world.

From the patient's point of view, the construction of information refers, above all, to what is shown in his actions, which escapes his intentionality and sometimes acquires a spontaneous character. What he presents to the therapist, under certain conditions, are signs that refer to deep processes of other forms of conversation and emotional attachment in his life (Colapietro, 1989), but to a large extent are outside his conscious cogitations. Although Pietro might feel uncomfortable with his father's tyranny, he could hardly assume his resentment and aggression toward him, nor even conceive that his symptom was configured with such feelings.

³ Indeed, the theme of the information in Peirce is much broader (Nöth 2012), but this work will be restricted to the aspects highlighted here.

From a hypothetical exercise⁴, it would be possible to conceive that signs linked to the firstness (such as icons and images) that permeate both experiences, such as “oppressed, imprisoned”, “chest tightness”, “blocking”, “resentment”, “repression” could contribute to the construction of connotative propositions that may have been formulated by Erickson as “he feels oppressed by the father”, leading him to a synthetic proposition such as “I will assume the father’s role to reproduce oppression, but favoring expression of repressed resentments”. Thus, the quality of information seems to be linked to the semiotic processes of a profound intersubjective exchange between the protagonists - the touch of souls (Neubern, 2016b) - to an emotional evocation of the therapist from his presence with the patient, to the creation of a the first relational field between them (Ferro & Basille, 2015), the construction of a character that is shown but not explained, as well as spontaneous processes of the patient, that point to the uniqueness of the subjectivation of his world, before and during trance.

Another possibility brought by iconicity is the materiality of information, which concerns its physical substrate or, in the semiotic condition, the existing and singular sign (Jappy, 2013). In the case of truisms and interspersals suggestions in front of an anxious patient, as reported above (Erickson, 1964), these diagrams and indexes can fix his attention, involve his resistances, and subtly lead him to a trance state. With regard to the therapist, information intertwines with a process of perception of signs (mainly indices) involving non-verbal processes (voice tones, pauses, postures, movements, ways of fixing attention), forms of relation, of speech and of thought and a diversity of signs about the context itself. It is a moment of research in which there is a descriptive and denotative predominance that situates the researcher in this reality.

There is also a great variability of typical indexes of trance (Erickson & Rossi, 1979), such as the hypnotic mask, reflex changes in the glottis, changes in temporal perception, muscle spasms under the skin of the face, finger spasms, respiratory rhythm change, among others. The patient, in turn, presents to the therapist his *reactive* aspect, therefore, referring to a secondness, which also has a spontaneity, but is presented as a priority due to the relational game established with its interlocutor. The relational choreography that is drawn between them confers a character of dependency between them as far as the construction of the information is concerned.

It should be noted that the choreography between therapist and patient does not imply a mechanical and purely intellectual attitude, especially because of the iconicity present therein. This is because the diagrams and indexes used involve the therapist’s own corporeality, which demands an emotional connection with the other. Without such a condition, the mere expression of truism may sound to the patient as technical manipulation, since it does not seem to refer to a deeper consideration of his world. The emotional connection, very present in the *rapport* of hypnosis, that is, an interactive game in which there is strong responsiveness between the interlocutors (Erickson, 1964), starts from a firstness present there and from the similarities between the signs presented by the therapist and the processes experienced by the patient. Hence because the information at this moment refers to signs of this specific relationship and the context that permeates it that make up complex semiotic configurations of the relational process.

Often, the material dimension of information seems to be a problem for research in the human sciences which, when they do not seem to ignore it, reduce it intensely as to its complexity, being conceived as stimulus, cognitive input, or as a written or taped record. In the case of hypnosis, this restriction greatly impoverishes the research process that implies images, sounds, silences, colors, odors, temperature, movements and rhythms (Roustang, 2015), that is, signs are highly pertinent to the experience lived at that moment. Of course, the material content of the information does not guarantee the determination of such processes and, consequently, a reliable interpretation of the processes that follow it. Between communication and experience there is no linearity, since in both there are autonomous and creative processes that give them an undesirable character of indeterminacy (Bergman, 2009; Morin 2001; Neubern, 2016a).

⁴ In the proposal of this work, the exercise is hypothetical because we do not have more elements of the cases discussed to properly construct the propositions and information.

In the same vein as a hypothetical exercise, the case of the anxious patient of Erickson (1964) forced him to sensations that seem to touch his corporeality, which at the same time involves a sensitivity (Neubern, 2012), yet refer to a descriptive need of observation. Such sensations of impact may have led the therapist to produce denotative propositions with strong descriptive appeal, such as “he claims to be resistant to hypnosis”, “he claims that other professionals have failed”, “and that I will fail too”, “but he came to therapy” and “always anticipates events”. And as a synthetic proposition, he could formulate something like “I will express this sequence of truisms to him and, under interweaving, I will emphasize the fact that he has come to therapy. Then I will use phrases that fix his attention on the obvious, interspersed with phrases that attest that we have not yet begun to work with hypnosis, although the hypnotic induction is already happening.”

There is, therefore, a construction of information that is articulated with the description of what is experienced in the therapeutic relationship. Iconicity is in a kind of reaction that resembles the expressions of the subject, as if mirroring them, but that does not fail to add some differences of expression. These signs are of great importance for a more refined construction of information, either as questions related to the conception of the relational context (Neubern, 2016b), or in the identification of typical trance problems, such as complacency (Stengers, 2001), a condition in which the patient intentionally meets the expectations of the therapist, and the differentiation between legitimate trance and simulacra.

To conceive the material dimension of the signs, with all their appeal to the descriptive, does not exhaust the problem of pertinence of information, but only composes one of its moments. If in semiotic terms this would be the level of synthetic propositions, in terms of qualitative research, it would be that of interpretation, in which the previous information is articulated, the theoretical concepts and the senses produced by the subject. This is because the signs need to be configured in broader propositions that refer to the meaning that emerges from the information (Kim, 2015) or its heuristic potential (Gonzalez Rey, 2005), so the information needs to say something about the possibilities of interpreting and explaining such complex dimensions in hypnotic processes in a research. The suggestions used in the case of the young woman patient of Erickson (Erickson & Rossi, 1979) are a relevant illustration in this sense, mainly because of the analogies and metaphors that are presented to her. In expressions where there are romantic encounters despite the outward appearance of beauty or in the expression “love is blind, say the authorities”, there is the articulation of a set of signs and information that point to an understanding of the construction of senses of the young woman and theoretical notions about the hypnotic process itself.

On the one hand, the expressions involve elements of meaning for her, since bizarre and ugly beings and people (like her) can see the beauty among themselves and feel attracted (like her) and establish a loving relationship (her desire prevented from happening). The way these elements are configured in these forms resembles their subjective configurations on the theme, but they add significant differences, since they point to concrete possibilities of making their desire feasible. The expression “love is blind, say the authorities”, interspersed in this sequence, brings a metaphor and considerable reinforcement for being uttered by authorities (perhaps psychologists, psychiatrists and scholars of human behavior). Love, the field of human feelings, is associated with another field, blindness, the field of physical incapacity, to allude to the possibility of bizarre choices, in which the pattern of appearance is not decisive. At both times, there is an understanding of the meanings of such a subject for the patient, an understanding that has undergone processes of firstness and secondness and which culminates in significant changes of meaning, given the changes she has achieved in her life.

On the other hand, the information here also refers to a theoretical knowledge of the hypnotic process, especially with regard to subliminality and the creative processes of the unconscious (Neubern, 2016a). Analogies and metaphors consist, as a hypnotic suggestion, of Erickson's important innovations (Erickson & Rossi, 1979), because they access deep processes (through iconicity) without the conscious *ego* being able to interfere, at least on a large scale. Unlike the imperative commands (orders), the patient tends to identify and not resist, producing spontaneously from them, which still brings him a condition of authorship and not obedience to an external one, as in case of orders.

At the same time, from the point of view of the production of experience, there is a creation that takes place in the unconscious, from similar processes, which has considerable autonomy in relation to the conscious *ego* (Morin, 2001; Neubern, 2016a). If metaphors and analogies are pertinent and access the patient at this level (through iconicity), he can unconsciously appropriate them and initiate a series of changes in line with his therapeutic perspectives and needs (Neubern, 2016b; Roustang, 2015). This kind of parallel functioning between conscious and unconscious gives the patient an experience that change occurs to him from the inside out, without him knowing how, being supported by his new ways of deciding and conceiving himself and the world.

The information at this interpretive level refers to the maximum point of the research, since it involves the use of theoretical concepts in a proficient dialogue with the empirical, which brings basically two implications. First of all, such articulation is often problematic, because it establishes a tension with the theoretical frames of reference, leading the researcher to an uncomfortable place of uncertainty and instability. This is because the information has a not inconsiderable content of *rebellion* to the theoretical concepts, which is not usually welcome when the researcher adopts a naive perspective of submitting the world to his theoretical contributions, instead of conceiving them as a possibility of dialogue with this world (Morin, 2001). Hence, mechanisms of narrative imposition and dogmatism tend to arise, in which, by a coup and not by heuristic pertinence, the researcher's concepts impose themselves on the information, ignoring important facets of the reality studied - one of the main reasons why important authors of hypnosis (Erickson & Rossi, 1979; Roustang, 2015) criticized the modern ways of conceiving theories.

However, in the perspective presented here, there are possibilities for such problems to be dealt with in another way, although the dogmatic risk never ceases to exist (Morin, 1996). This is because, on the one hand, the categories used to construct information, such as signs and forms, based on a pragmatic perspective (Peirce, 1998), constitute open instruments, since they articulate elements of the empirical, without imposing a priori content. As there is no universal content, the impetus for confirmation, dear to many researchers (Sardan, 2015), can at least be greatly reduced. On the other hand, the subject becomes a fundamental condition for research, because it is through his active and creative role (Gonzalez Rey, 2005; Morin, 2001) that he can authorize an interpretative condition that is based on a logical relevance of his arguments against the empirical and their own theories. In short, it is the subject who guarantees that research is carried out in its main purpose - thinking - escaping the doctrinal appeal that produces a supposed comfort, based more on a relation of power than of dialogue with the world.

Secondly, this level also implies reflexivity (Denzin, 2014; Neubern, 2016b), in which the researcher thinks about the relation with the subject in trance. This refers not only to one more important place assumed for the construction of information, but also to an ethical question, since we are not talking about one another, but with another, with the perspective of forming a *we*. In this sense, ethics assumes a moral sense regarding a responsibility assumed in this relation, both with the other as a subject whose presence should not be disqualified under the pretended authority of the knowledge of the researcher and of the therapist himself, but understood within his own references of world (Neubern, 2016a). Ethics and methodological relevance coincide here as the need for research, because it is necessary to question the extent to which the narratives of the researcher consider or distort the world of the patient who is available to the trance state, influencing the pertinence of information and the quality of the bond.

However, information also involves ethics as *ethos* regarding the world's belonging of the protagonists. This is because, if the *ego* is also a representative (sign) of other conversations and belongings (Colapietro, 1989; Denzin, 2014; Morin, 2001), the clinical and research meeting is also a gathering of collectivities, in which knowledge and characters are present and, mainly, pertinent for the construction of the research through its representatives. This dimension of thirdness is also a return to the firstness, since such belonging could not take place were it not for the role of the feelings and the relations of iconicity that ensue (Neubern, 2016b).

Final considerations: from prohibition to adventure

Conceiving this work around a prospect of *possibility* is of great relevance in the clinical research of hypnosis. This is because, in a certain way, iconicity as a semiotic process opens up valuable ways, highlighting the feasibility of constructing a coherent research that involves different moments. It is true that the necessary conditions for a methodology are still lacking, such as the relationship between the constellation of concepts and the empirical hypnosis, the criteria of research legitimacy, the reflexivity of the context, the protagonism of the subject, and a community that shares these assumptions and allows the collective discussion that characterizes science (Demo, 2001). Nonetheless, the very notion of information raised here allows us to highlight the promising aspect of this proposal by linking different moments and concepts of iconicity to processes of quality, materiality and reflection, taking as a stage the relational context of hypnosis and the thinking scenario of the researcher as subject. The construction of information is linked to processes of iconicity that permeate the subliminal communication and the trance experience, which is a step of great relevance for research. By emphasizing signs of different logical modalities (such as icons, indexes, and symbols), it also points to a path that prevents the reductionism of a single unit of production in research (Neubern, 2016b), whether linguistic (discursive, spoken or written), behavioral or cognitive.

However, the term *possibility* brings another message of deeper content - that of adventure and utopia. This is because if a theme like hypnosis constitutes a marginality, it should not imply a historical rejection that still exists today through taboos and interdictions (Stengers, 2001), but a challenge for science to rethink and grow from its limitations and failures. The research proposal discussed here, therefore, consists of this adventure, since it places marginal processes for the modern eyes (such as iconicity, subjectivity, feelings and trance) as the central focus of generating their ideas that without loss of rigor and responsibility, remains committed to creation and thought. Perhaps only then will a more comprehensive and rational understanding become possible of what hypnosis represents as a field of study and what it says of the very institutions that produce psychology and science in general.

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