CATHARSIS AND ITS RELATIONS BETWEEN ART, THERAPY AND ARTS THERAPIES

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Thank you!
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Naslov
POJEM KATARZE MED UMETNOSTJO, TERAPIJO IN POMOCJO Z UMETNOSTJO

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Povzetek
V središču raziskave je pojem katarze, bistvene sestavine uspešnega psihoterapevtskega procesa, kadar je vanj vključena pomoč z umetnostjo.
S tem namenom je opravljen pregled literarnih virov, kjer gre za opredelitve katarze v različnih geografskih, zgodovinskih in socialnih kontekstih ter kot sestavine terapevtskih pristopov.

Cilj raziskave je preko analize obstoječih teoretičnih in praktičnih opredelitev tega pojma, prispevati k jasni opredelitvi pojma katarze ter izpostaviti pomen jasne definicije pojma, ko gre za področje pomoči z umetnostjo.

Abstract
This research focuses on defining the catharsis phenomenon, since it is an essential component to successful outcomes when arts therapies are included in psychological treatments.
For this purpose, definitions of catharsis as given in different sources are investigated and the cathartic phenomenon is recognised as a concrete event occurring in different geographical areas, historical periods and social contexts as well as in a range of different therapies.
The final part of the thesis attempts to advance a somewhat clearer and objective view of the investigated phenomenon and presents some possible conclusions regarding the topics in consideration.
Through the analysis of various sources regarding catharsis as a theoretical and practical phenomenon, the proposition of this work is to support the importance of catharsis in defining arts therapies.

Ključne besede
katarza, umetnost, gledališče, terapija, umetnostne terapije, očiščenje, obred, disociacija.

Key words
catharsis, art, theatre, therapy, arts therapies, purification, ritual, dissociation.
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1.1 Defining catharsis

When talking about tragedy, Aristotle was the first to give a sort of definition of catharsis, though not mentioning the term catharsis:

Tragedy, then, is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative; through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these emotions. By 'language embellished,' I mean language into which rhythm, 'harmony' and song enter. By 'the several kinds in separate parts,' I mean, that some parts are rendered through the medium of verse alone, others again with the aid of song.

(Arist. Poetics 6, 1449b24-31, trans. S. H. Butcher)

Because catharsis is a metaphor used by Aristotle to describe how the audience of a tragedy is effected, lay people automatically tend to associate the concept of catharsis to the realm of theatre. The aim of this work is to reveal the strong connection not only between the event of catharsis and the experience of the theatre but also between the event of catharsis and any form of art, given that art is a form of purification.

A discourse on art assumes some necessary – yet not sufficient – underlying conditions. There must be an object, which could be a book, a painting, a music piece, a performance, etc, that has to bring at least two people together: the artist and their audience – in this sense an artistic object becomes “social” object. Art needs to generate knowledge albeit at an unconscious level. Often a work of art is commented upon as if it were a person. Comments such as “you see, this Picasso looks nervous” or “what a sweet, good-hearted song” are not considered unusual. This happens because art can rouse feelings – even though it is usually made up physical items – except for certain typologies of theatre where art stems directly from the body. Art performed by the body is perhaps the highest form of art, one which expresses emotions most intensely. Art becomes an object capable of infusing emotions, which can become ideas, through perceptual apparatus. It is based on imitation and even when it is abstract it infuses, and therefore imitates, the artist’s image of life projecting it into the art object. (Calandrelli, n.d.)

The emotions roused by an artistic object can be clarified by neurology. A particular type of neurons, called mirror neurons, fires in response to an observation-imitation combination, e.g. observing and imitating someone in action. Sometimes emotions are so strong and intense that the person gets lost within the artistic object abandoning their human nature, and blending into the art form. When this happens, the person becomes a victim of “self-purification”: he or she is immersed in the cathartic process and, when reawakened from this condition, acquires a superior consciousness about themselves and about what occurs to their person. (Chasseguet, 1989)

J. Dewey and G. H. Mead proposed a socio-biological model of emotions by which the initiation and climax of bodily emotion process develop naturally, and that conscious feelings occur to the extent that climax is delayed. A desirable distance from experiencing emotions and the idea of conscious climax are both the result of the previous experience. This set the conditions to allow catharsis with the natural body processes such as laughter and crying. This new theory shows the relationship between mirror neurons, distancing, role taking, pendulation in somatic therapy.
Still, somaesthetics does not seek to oversimplify mental phenomena or experience into the electrical activity of neurons. Instead of choosing one materialistic side of the mind-body discussion, it formulates the ontological postulate of the existence of a body mind. Somaesthetics treats the body (soma) not as a psychological mechanism or prison of the soul, but as a sentient, experiencing and experienced corporeal being. (Koczanowicz, 2012)

Many researchers, including Georges Lapassade, committed themselves to the study of the altered states of consciousness, whose existence originates from the ordinary and daily human process of dissociation. Dissociation is a biological process set up by humans in various areas of their daily life. A dissociating process takes place when a subject weakens his or her mental faculty to correlate the pre-arranged associative chains (associative faculty), and engenders thereby new possibilities of meaning. In other words, dissociation is originated when one loses the direct connection with the surrounding world and seeks a new connection with an inner world which though deriving from themselves moves away from the real one. (Ampolo & Carretta, 2005)

Catharsis can be defined as a moment of dissociation capable of generating in human beings a new awareness about their inner change and, consequently, a modified state of consciousness. For the purpose of analysing catharsis, it is necessary to step back from the all-too-widespread conviction that the modified states of consciousness are symptomatic manifestations of pathologies. It is interesting instead to consider the exploitation of this “getaway from the ordinary” as a daily innate ability, indispensable to everyone. Lapassade also considers it correct to refer to this phenomenon as a “modified state of consciousness” since the transformations concern thought, perception and emotionality. Changes of a different nature (e.g. behavioural and physical) are evidently possible: these are, though, “additional” changes whose absence is not an obstacle to the occurrence of a modified state of consciousness. (Lapassade, 1995)

For the purpose of providing an answer to the question of what the cathartic need to lose control is, and to explain what happens during a cathartic process, Guinagh (1987) proposes three models of catharsis: the so-called hydraulic (or container) model, the unfinished business model and the conflict model.

The hydraulic model is that defined by Breuer and Freud: basically the mind is conceived as a container in which space for emotions is not unlimited. This is the reason why bottles up emotions explodes with catharsis. This model is still used in current theories to explain catharsis, such as that formulated by Jackins (1978), and is subreptitiously present in Janov’s primal therapy (in which catharsis is employed but it is not officially declared).

For the unfinished business model of catharsis (brought about by Perls emotions are urges to act out: for example, anger is the urge to hit someone or something and fear could bring about the urge to run away. Emotions are therefore strictly linked to something physical.

The third model individuated by Guinagh (1987), is the conflict model; a theory which combines the best elements of both the container model and the unfinished business model. For Guinagh this model had also been defined by Freud but was clearly described by Scheff (1978). The latter made a distinction between emotions that are expressed and emotions that are felt but not expressed. He referred to the emotions that are felt but not expressed as “distressful emotions”. These are a compromise between the expressive emotions and the defences against this expression. In other words, sadness is a distressful emotion but not an expressive one as it is discharged in
catharsis when it explodes in, for example, a crying action (where the act of crying is the result of the counterforce against the remission of the sadness that holds the expression of sadness back).

In each of the three models pinpointed by Guinagh (1987) catharsis is an emotional breakdown that occurs in the struggle between the expressive emotion and the failed defence to express it.

1.2 Western theatre: its origins and its connections with catharsis

A better comprehension of the concept of catharsis is possible by looking back at the past, and specifically at the realm of theatre. This thesis focuses on three main theories, all of which date back to the late XIX century, presenting the origin of theatre in rituals. According to James Frazer (2005), all cultures evolve in a similar way, so by observing the evolution stage of the existing tribal societies may contribute to understanding of how theatre originated.

The members of tribal societies are not able to explain certain events, in which they experience as the overwhelming power of nature: that is why they believe these natural events to be controlled by a god. The origins of theatre date back to the moment when actors began to embody this divine power within a performance, which was usually sacred. A renown research regarding the birth of theatre was conducted by Claude Lévi-Strauss. The researcher followed an inductive structural approach derived from his individual studies of the tribal societies. His ideas coincide with those of Frazer, indeed, they both recognise religious rituals as being the origin of theatre, and that in every type of society there exist myths and rituals. (Pignato, 2006)

Catharsis is probably the nucleus formerly included in the Greek tragedy within western society; Greek tragedy is to be analysed because of its connections with catharsis. As already mentioned, many researchers believe theatre to have been generated from rituals. Most of the rituals were likely to be connected with the themes of pleasure (food, home, sex, family etc.), power (the call to conquer, assuming power or assigning it to the tribe), sense of duty towards a divinity or the fellow community. It is no coincidence that these themes play a fundamental role in theatre too. Most of the functions of the rituals are also typical of the theatre, which exploits masks, dances, music, actors, the power of words and specific special areas dedicated to particular actions. Theatre and rituals seem to have a common social exigency: both need to set and shape their ideas and their relationship with the outer world and through them the participants, try to overcome their struggles against an incomprehensible reality. Through theatre and rituals, humans manage to gain stability, balance and satisfaction from their “being in the world”. (Campbell, 1992)

In the past, theatre and rituals constituted a whole within unitary entity. The history of theatre today presents them as two different concepts, though a separating boundary is often difficult to identify. In the ancient Greek society, tragedy (sung by the choir) and comedy (sung by the inhabitants of the village) were originally improvised, sung by the choristers of the dithyramb and of the phallic songs. With Arion and Thespis, tragedy later morphed by assuming the form of a written poem, though such hypothesis is not endorsed by the whole scientific community. It seems to be proved, however, that tragedy evolved from the celebrations in honour of Dionysus. (De Romilly, 1997)

On the one hand, there were tragedy and comedy – that is to say, the official theatre supported by the State – on the other hand there were the Pantomime and the Farce – the poor theatre.
Ancient Greeks worshipped Dionysus in several periods over the course of a year: in December for the Rural Dionysia, in January for the Lenaia, in February for the Anthesteria and at the beginning of spring, the City Dionysia was held in Athens, during which a famous competition for tragedians was organised. Most of the tragedies known and staged still today are those written by the participants in this competition. The structure of tragedy gradually changed over the course of three hundred with the integration in the performance of “official poems”, comedy and satiric drama. Initially, in the VI century BC written tragedies followed a scheme in which a single actor played all the roles, the lyrical and choral elements predominated, and the main theme was a mythological tale, often based on the ancient past. Subsequently the number of actors increased (V century BC), some tragedies started with a prologue, which was to recount some episodes preceding the narrative; following the prologue, the spirit of the tragedy was defined with the entrance of the choir (parodos). The central part consisted of episodes during which the action of the drama was enacted, alternating these with choral intermissions called stasimons. The tragedies ended with the exodus (the exit of the chorus and the actors). A later and more important step in the evolution of theatre was taken with the advent of Roman theatre. Already in 364 BC Etruscan actors accompanied their dances with flutes. (Nietzsche, 1995)

Roman theatre underwent the influence of the Etruscan theatrical tradition. In the Roman society, performances, which generally were improvised and consisted of farces or similar plays, usually took place during religious celebrations, free entertainment events (dancers, acrobats, tamers), celebrations in honour of military victories, to inaugurate new buildings, and to celebrate important public figures. It was only in 240 BC that the theatrical performances set up by travelling theatre companies began to be organised privately or for a paying audience. Later, thanks mainly to Livius Andronicus (active from 240 BC to 204 BC), Gnaeus Naevius (270 BC - 201 BC), Plautus (259/251 BC - 184 BC) and Terence (195 BC - 159 BC), Roman theatre went through a short phase of written tragedies and comedies – phase which ended in AD 65. At this stage tragedies and comedies had become less popular while other types of performances such as the farce, miming and pantomime dominated the scene: plays featuring simple actors prevailed over the more cultural ones. In AD 313, with the promulgation of the Edict of Milan thus meaning that Christianity was officially established, the plays performed up to the moment were banned due to their “wickedness” and to their alleged connection with pagan and heretical celebrations. In the Western Roman Empire, theatrical plays disappeared altogether, the last documented performance dating back to AD 533, while in the Eastern Roman Empire plays continued to performed until 1453 – year of the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople. Unconventionally the travelling theatre acts modified their structure slightly and continued to be performed during the Christian celebrations, despite the disapproval of the Church. (Brockett, 2008). Concurrently, a form of theatre approved by the Church became established so considering its characteristics, we can conclude that the medieval Christian performances evolved from the ancient Roman street performances.

In later years, while in the Roman Empire the sacred performances were becoming more and more present, in Italy a new form or theatrical performance, which developed from the central role of the jester, came about: the Commedia dell’Arte, also known as Italian Comedy. Jesters were frequently employed by noble families for their enjoyment, but were also often fundamental entertaining figures in the folk feasts celebrated in towns and cities. Interestingly, Carnival and the Italian Comedy came about in the same period, the jester being the connecting link between the two. They were fundamental figures during the carnival celebrations, especially in Venice. Indeed, this city played a major part in the development of both the Carnival and the Italian Comedy. (Manani, 2007)
According to records dating back to 1531, two illustrious Venetian families officially opened two private halls for a paying audience where Italian Comedy was regularly performed. Because of the increasing demands and expectations of the audience, jesters began grouping up to form travelling companies which became ever more popular. As a consequence the features of the plays changed and became more detailed leading to plays that were entirely written, thus the disappearance of the *canovaccio*. The *Canovaccio* was a very short general script that delineated how the plot was to develop from the starting scenes to the end of the play. For many years Italian Comedy was based on the *canovaccio*, where improvisation dominated and only certain parts of the play were defined. Still, in order to deal with the new requirements, the companies necessarily had to modify their structure, which lead to the emergence of the roles. Indeed, during the XIX century, the theatre “of the actors” turned into the theatre “of the actor”, marking emergence of the leading actor. The written theatrical plays evidently adapted to this system: while the plot was initially defined on the basis of the system of the roles, it then focused on the central role of the actor. The themes of the plays continued to relate to the ordinary life events. (Molinari, 2003)

The western concept of theatre was not influenced by the evolution of the eastern theatre until the second half of the XIX century. It was only when the important figures of the western theatre became interested in the idea of traditional theatre that it significantly attracted popular attention, allowing a conscious idea of catharsis through theatre to emerge. By no coincidence the same period experienced the germination of both experimental theatre and art therapies, analysis of which is presented in paragraph 1.4.4.

1.3 How the phenomenon of catharsis is connected to other phenomena

The most important concepts regarding classical Greek theatre can be found in Aristotle’s *Poetics*. Aristotle (384 BC - 322 BC) dealt with both the typologies of Greek theatre: tragedy and comedy. Although it is likely that the philosopher investigated the former type of theatrical form more extensively, unfortunately his work is no longer completely available, however it is on what he wrote concerning tragedy that the attention is focused. (Aristotle, 1981)

The first discourse regarding catharsis was delivered by Aristotle, who considered it to be a fundamental element to control humans’ passions and sensations. Plato (428/427 BC - 348/347 BC) appears to have the same opinion regarding this point though a deeper investigations reveals the opinions of the two philosophers diverged radically as Plato considered all art forms as mere “duplicates”. Indeed, according to his philosophy, ideas are the only reality, while all the rest is simply a copy. Therefore, nothing but ideas is real and every object is a mere copy of its original idea. It is important, within this context, to highlight Plato’s idea concerning art. Given that art is the copy of an object, it is therefore, a copy of a copy, and for this reason it should be censored. Artists create phantoms whose only purpose is to enhance human irrationality (human subconscious is mainly dominated by the irrational unconscious side of human nature). Accepting this statement as a starting point, the reasons Plato condemned any art form – with the only exception of the music performed by a musician, as the musician himself “creates” the piece – become clearer. The philosopher considered tragedy unaccepteable too, as it encouraged an extreme emotionality in the audience. Emotions were seen as something negative: they brought confusion in human existence. (Donà, 2007)

Aristotle, who agreed with this, interpreted it in a positive view. He gave this definition: tragedy has the civic and religious function of supporting and celebrating heroes and gods. This
therefore, connects the ethical and sacred purposes during all the period of its diffusion in ancient Greece. It can be consequently inferred that tragedy was, for Aristotle, the most elevated literary form, capable of combining music, songs, and dances as well as religious and profane life. On the basis of these same reasons, Aristotle believed tragedy to be a representation of false events: it had an allegoric structure, and the events it presented were realistic rather than real (this was the difference between tragedy and history). Tragedy was a way to apply a universal science focused on anything related to humanity on human history and not on the single particulars. Unlike Plato, who believed emotions were to be censored, Aristotle dignified them. (Aristotle, 1981)

Other authors, besides Plato, had the same negative vision of tragedy – Saint Augustine, Bossuet, Rousseau, and Goethe, just to name a few. Aristotle considered negatively any form of social commotion, and believed catharsis to be possible only in the case of violently positive emotions. Catharsis would not be activated as the final act of deliverance from sensations, but rather as a “process” stimulated by a search for freedom. Theatre was a means that helped to control emotions and keep violence away from the real life.

Following this perspective, and keeping in mind the sacred nature of tragedy in the Greek world, it is interesting to analyse a statement by René Girard according to which, the sacred, by means of the tragedy, should exclude violence from the community. Girard also mentions what the Greeks called Katharma explaining it as “a form of refusal made up by emotions”, being emotions excessive during certain events of an individual’s life. With this term, Girard also defines the victims of a sacred sacrifice. This appears not to be a coincidence especially considering his remark regarding the presence in the ancient Greek theatre of an actor who personified the Katharma for the benefit of the audience. His opinions regarding tragedy reveal its possible ritual functions in a context where such functions no longer were necessary. (Girard, 2011)

Aristotelian catharsis in tragedy can have two different interpretations. One considers Greek tragedy to be capable of sublimating passions: it does represent the passions, and it can remove all that is likely to damage the ordinary life. The other interpretation entails that tragedy is a particular type of theatre that is able to originate an altered sensitivity concerning passions (that is what catharsis would be), thus becoming a homeopathic form of therapy. By means of the Greek tragedy the audience is able to let out their feelings and free themselves of their trapped emotions. Whether the former or latter interpretation is more or less effective depends on the personal psychic structure of the spectators. (Sani A., 2008)

Bernays advances the argument that attending a tragic play (as that in the ancient Greek theatre) may have a direct therapeutic effect on the spectators, in the sense that it may clear and alleviate them from build-ups of undesirable emotions of pity and terror. Aristotle also used the term hamartia in his description of tragedy: for him the fall into tragic agent into misfortune is not caused by wickedness, but by a great hamartia on the part of the agent himself (he defined hamartia as a misinterpretation of fact, ignorance of fact, error of judgement) and it is thanks to the hamartia that a different type of catharsis could develop in the tragedy. (Solbakk, 2006)

In their discourses on tragedy, Nietzsche and Hölderlin asserted the necessity of an aesthetic consolation against what is seen – it would be otherwise impossible to enjoy something that is ugly, disharmonic, anguishing. Humans need the Apollonian illusion – in the ancient Greek religion, Apollo was the god of the sun. This is the reason why the philosopher Nietzsche defined “Apollonian” all that is rational, perfectly measurable and clear, in opposition to the concept of Dionysian which includes all that is connected with vital instinct and willpower, and not rational (in the ancient Greek religion, Dionysus was the god of euphoria and promiscuity) – as a filter against the Dionysian essence, which could be treacherous if shown in its pure form. (Ciabatti, 2009)
Flashar evidenced that catharsis is free and accessible to everyone, and is not simply a therapeutic device reserved for the treatment emotionally unbalanced people – in particular he also finds therapeutic value in the uncodified catharsis in pre-Aristotelian views of the effect of poetry, while Janko highlights the fact that catharsis is a sort of training to educate emotions. Also Lear believes catharsis to be an emotional relief rather than a therapy and other authors, namely Keesey and Goldstein affirm that catharsis only provides an aesthetic kind of pleasure. (Solbakk, 2006)

Starting from these considerations, the Aristotelian idea can be further developed. Tragedy allows the audience to experience two distinct types of pleasure: artistic and cathartic. Cathartic pleasure derives from the imitative pleasure, reason why Aristotle found a connection between them: here lies the secret of the artistic object. Art is only possible if something is subjectively beautiful, but the intrinsic differences between all humans make this assertion very partial: it is impossible to classify beauty. The great intellectuals often correlated art entities that are present though hidden. In particular, Plotinus highlighted how one person’s idea of beauty can be very different from another’s. He believed an artist to be able to capturing a universal idea, actualising it in his art. Art, therefore, is made beautiful not by the spectators or by their senses, but rather by something that goes beyond the first impression; something that is correlated with the universal.

The great inventor and painter Leonardo da Vinci had a similar opinion. He believed it possible for paintings to confirm a reality that the viewer could only perceive through them: he affirmed that through his paintings he imitated something that did not yet exist. According to Kant we are not able to justify our assertion when we define an artistic object as “beautiful”, because we cannot comprehend our own Self: the artistic object reminds us of this obstacle. Reason and passion do not help recognise beauty – only the aesthetic sentiment is able to do that, but it turns towards the global vision, and not towards the particular problems of the artistic object. Hegel and Schelling shared the same opinion regarding this: when a person creates art, he or she blends with their unconscious side, and so doing acquires a new awareness about what they should do. Romantic artists can be defined as the ones who sought for the “undefined” par excellence. Contemplating the paintings of some artists, like those by Turner and Friedrich, spectators perceive there is something “more”, but they are not able to understand it completely; with regard to the written works, like the ones by Novalis, it is possible to affirm that they are indeed an attempt to celebrate the undefined. Impressionist artists were not interested in the idea of art: they concretely focalised on the impressions evoked by the surrounding world. This apparently could appear to move away from “art as a connection with something more” – with something that exists, but at the same time eludes the spectators grasp – but this is not the case. Impressionist art was connected with experience, (impressionists painted \textit{en plein air}), and the artists’ aim was to communicate the instantaneous reality of the specific moment in which they were painting providing the communicative essence of the experience. This impression surely was not separated from the artists’ personality. Another well-known artist of the XIX century tried to express something more through his paintings: Vincent Van Gogh. His aim was to communicate an everlasting sensation of pain and anguish, and his success is due to his use of colours, through which he captured his hidden energy. Though their paintings usually do not convey the sense of agitation as those by Van Gogh, Gauguin and Cézanne shared his vision: they considered fundamental to release the archetypical sense and withhold any judgement. Benedetto Croce grounded his thought on the ideas previously expressed by Vico and Kant. He considered both history and art to be “representations of reality”: history represents the “already occurred” events while art represents the “possible” ones. This is the reason why history, based on concepts, presents a logic and intellectual knowledge of facts, while art, based on images, conveys an intuitive and imaginative knowledge. Pure intuition was strongly valued by Croce: he saw it as the immediate expression of a “content of sense”. If content is not
transformed into an expressive form, it will remain a mere sensation, and never became art. Croce believed the cathartic form of art to consist in “giving feelings a shape”: by elaborating one’s own impressions, a person is able to separate from them, becoming therefore more objective and detached. (Donà, 2007)

Each artistic avant-garde of the XX century expressed the belief that art could cross the appearances: referring to Informalism, Lucio Fontana wrote about the tendency of art of going beyond the “conventional artistic forms” (sculpture, painting, music, poetry, etc.), so as to obtain a pure energy from the material in a more effective way. (De Sanna, 1993).

Marcel Duchamp highlighted how all of this happened in the artist’s unconscious side. (Duchamp, 2005)

In a work on Cubism, Guillaume Apollinaire affirmed that art is not concerned with the objectivity of the world: it seeks for what an artistic object concretely arouses in the spectators. The truth about art is likely to change over time because of its references to the audience and to the artist, or better, to the concreteness of the artist, which cannot be fully comprehend even by the artist him or herself. The artistic trend of Cubism clarified the concept according to which the painting itself activates a variety of dynamics in the spectators: the subjective connection between paintings and spectators was now evident. Considering the exponents of Der Blaue Reiter, and particularly Kandinskij, it is evident how the shapes gradually became an essential element in the paintings; it should be recognised that they came to life because of an inner necessity of the painter, and it is essential to understand how every shape was specific and acquired its value thanks to the subjective differences between the artists. Also all the artistic research conducted by Mondrian regarding the plastic representation is finalised to the oblivion of the individual emotions, in order to feel the universal connections between human beings and artistic objects. Pablo Picasso considered it impossible for art to be abstract, because everything is connected with the concrete world. Artists create something concrete that will always be different from all that already exists; nevertheless, the artistic objects they generate are connected to their ideas, and they acquire concreteness (becoming part of reality) only through their creator. This vision relates with Heidegger’s theory: art is complete thanks to its concreteness, because it is in the world, which is to the concreteness deriving from its existence. Though the artistic trend of Pop Art did not intend to refer to anything external to the depicted object, it was not confined to this purpose: the correlations between real life and artistic objects implied an automatic thought which connected the depicted object with the spectators’ daily life. Pop Art has therefore been able to connect art with something deeper and undefined. There are many new interpretations on what art really is. For sure, artists have acquired a deeper consciousness about the great potential that art offers for the the investigation of the Self. Hege saw artists as missionaries whose task was the concretisation of existence in the present. To quote Massimo Donà, art has a privileged relationship with the undefined, because all that exists in art discloses something about our experience that was previously hidden. Among the many intellectuals who analysed art from the spectators’ point of view, Kant should be mentioned once again. He asserted that by looking at an artistic object the spectators distance themselves from it because of a sort of apathy; yet, this condition is not necessary for sharing our experiences with the artistic object. Schopenhauer and Nietzsche considered art to be “pure movement” because of its continuous connections both with the self of the author – first phase: the creation – and with the self of the spectators – second phase: the fruition. (Donà, 2007).

Freud considers play to be probably the first channel through which humans produce art and have catharsis. This activity is widespread all around the world, and children often imitate adult
roles through it: this happens everywhere and in every culture. Another typology of play “aims at entertainment”. (Freud, 1979)

Callowis (2014) believed the existence of the play so important as to create a sociology that took form directly from plays. His research put in evidence the continuity between play and live and underlined how the former is not a mere copy of the latter.

Our knowledge about the evolution of play, particularly in modern and recent times, is not particularly detailed: ancient Greek and Latin sources concerning young and adult people playing are paradoxically easier to acquire. On the other hand, sources confirm the ancient Egyptian artisans crafted dolls from materials such as, ceramic and cloth, and other toys from stone or wooden. As reported by Plato in his writings, in ancient Greece the term skhole connected the two activities of game and teaching: it defined both the school and the entertainment. It is also verified that the Greeks used to cook sweets with the shapes of alphabet letters. In this regard, it is interesting to notice that in today’s English language the verb that describes the act of playing an instrument, or playing a game, or playing a role is polysemous. A similar analogy exists in German: the term Spiel describes both theatrical pieces and games. The German term used for actor is Schauspieler, which means “acting player”. It would be strange if these three different actions (to play a game, a role, an instrument) lacked a somehow common basis, a direct line to the individual unconscious. In ancient Greece, but also in many ancient occidental societies, game had a direct connection with the sacred ceremonies. Game in all its manifestations was later forbidden by the Church – from the late Middle Ages until around the XIV century. However, the Church itself recognised the potential of game and encouraged it especially in the Jesuit schools. With the invention of the printing press by Johannes Gutenberg in 1455 didactic games became more and more widespread, as did the adult version of these games (the “familiar situations”). Following his idea of “collective game”, Friedrich Fröbel promoted the Kindergarten, where children did not play alone, but with their peers in a protected environment where of course there were some rules to follow. Fröbel individuated the fundamental requirements, still today considered valid, upon which games should be developed:

- the game should have a central role in the daily planning; if an adult plays with the child, his or her role should not be predominant;
- didactic games should stimulate playfulness and in meanwhile, teach something as well;
- the area destined to games should progressively develop with growing age of the children;
- play should become part of one’s lifestyle and help to improve it.

As Drarden asserted, “we cannot teach children how to play”, because through the game they respond to a natural impulse – even when this impulse is submitted to the influence of myths, values, preconceptions, the economical situation, the family, the quality of the games, the time spent with their parents, the cultural context, etc. (Meliffi, 2004)

In the English language, the verb “to play” has different meanings, for example: “I’m playing poker”, “I’m playing with my pen”, “I’m playing the guitar”. When we play we usually act freely, and in a way step outside the space and time of our real life. It is a progressive activity which acquires its definition only when it is concluded. When we play we do not usually have a purpose: we play for the pleasure the game brings. Rules are fundamental, they make the game possible; besides, every game is artificial and its rules are known by all the participants. This is evidently a general classification: these characteristics are not common to all the games and the play activities, different games can certainly have different characteristics. Here there is only the presentation of the principal ones. (Calandrelli, S., n.d.)

As pointed out by Callois (2014) the play act recalls a relaxing, carefree and obviously
pleasant situation.

The only conscious purpose of a game is to get pleasure from it, and this is certainly the principal purpose, however, at an unconscious level there more to it than only pleasure. Another fundamental objective of play activities is learning: a game is exploring rules (in addition to the mere rules of the game itself, some particular types of game have rules which are also relevant in the real life) and, consequently, exploring the possibilities provided by the rules. Games can be distinguished in different categories, and each of them corresponds to a phase of infant evolution. In the first stage of child development games are normally based on sensations and movements; the purpose is to help the children to make the most of their muscles, their body and their senses (this category includes ball games, slides, swings, etc.). Later on, these games are replaced with, for example, playing with building blocks, which develop spatial and creative cognition, or still with imitative and imaginative games which often involve the emotional sphere and therefore develop variety of feelings that arise between the children and those who surround them. (Meliffi, 2004)

We cannot be insincere when we play in the words of Friedrich Schiller, in these moments we are “totally ourselves”. A man is really a man only when he is playing. The same process is set up by theatrical acting. Schiller was aware of this and he considered theatre to be a way of re-education. Playing is both an infant and an adult activity, and it helps to develop creativity. Game is fundamental because of its preferential connections with our unconscious side. Its role is crucial in the psychological and pedagogical treatments: the behaviour of playing people, and particularly of playing children, provides a lot of information about their personality, their traumas and their deficiencies. (Heidegger, 2008)

J.Huizinga (n.d.) was the first to show the fundamental characters of social development; he considered play as a free and voluntary action which can take possession of the player even if it leaves the player conscious of being in an extraordinary context different from the usual daily one.

Fröbel (1960) considers game to be the purest, the most spiritual human activity: it reflects life in its entirety, and our private, secret individual nature. Game is joy, freedom, inner and outer peace; peace with the rest of the world.

In Colico, an Italian municipality near Como, Walter Orioli founded a “Theatre-therapy school”, the first school in Italy in which theatre is studied with a psychological method aimed at the improvement of the quality of life. In his book Il gioco serio del teatro (The Serious Game of Theatre), Orioli presents his theories regarding self-improvement triggered by theatre and game. These theories are inspired by the studies conducted by Donald W. Winnicott. It is interesting to highlight that, according to Winnicott, children initially do not perceive themselves as an entity separate from their mother. They realise their status of autonomous beings through a “transactional object” with which they have a playful relationship (this is not a coincidence). (Brumat, 2009)

Pragmatic studies reveal that game is not conceivable in the mere present time: it is projected towards the future, with a continuously evolving objective, and helps the player develop their personality. Imaginative and imitative games are the most effective to help recognise and better understand the reality: they do not substitute what is real but they are a parallel way towards this process of understanding. Game theory is a proof of the relevance of game: it is based on mathematical models obtained from actions which take place in simulated situations. Thanks to this theory it is possible, for example, to analyse the purposes of criminals in specific situations. (Giubbini, 2009)
Violet Oaklander also recognises the important role of games, which she exploits in her Gestalt therapy. The connection between art and game is much stronger than imagined: both are relaxing, captivating, and both reflect something different – they invent and reproduce a new reality. (Oaklander, 2009)

The playing activity is important for all the animal species: it develops and improves their instincts and functions, as it happens in humans. When we play, our natural needs to communicate, explore, construct and stimulate our fantasy acquire a fundamental role, and we have the opportunity of expanding, exploiting and valuing our formative potential. (Groos, 1896) Melanie Klein agreed with the functionality of game: she asserted that children express their fears through it. (Klein, 1978)

The cathartic function of game is crucial. When children play war games, they free themselves of their ferocious and vandalistic impulses. They even express their fears, their fragilities, without letting them take over their real life – they observe and experiment these entities with a sort of detached control. (Michelotto, 2013)

It is very interesting to analyse theatre in the light of what has been said about the importance of game. A playing children are totally captivated in the world of the actions their games. They forget about the real world. The same effect can be observed when actors perform their parts: they forget about the real world in order to put themselves inside the action. Catharsis has an effect both on the spectators and on the actors themselves, because they are playing and they have to believe in what they are doing in order to act effectively. When actors play (if they act properly), as in a playing child their body needs to fully embrace the experience being presented to the audience – a body experiencing things without the context of the object is not an artwork it is just a body, and an object without an observing body is not a sculpture: it is only through the union of these thing that a sort of alchemical reaction occurs and the “artwork” is created. (Milne, 2016)

The actor must really feel all the sensations and emotions of their characters. During the performance, their own personality and their role blend together. The action carried out by a performing actor could be considered as a particular type of game: that is why catharsis can occur both in games and in performances. (Diano, 1974)

As already pointed out, games can be classified in different categories. Considering art and its connections with game, it can be noticed that they are assimilated. Going back to our own infancy, we could remember the time when we played with colours, with materials like playdough, modelling clay, sand, water, etc. This certainly was a different kind of activity, but in our view this corresponded to some card games, for example, or to any other games. This sensation of ours was really true. Although they may be different, all games imply the same type of activity. This does not depend on the means and the vehicle of the game, since all the games are characterised by two common, unconscious objectives: entertainment and learning. An adult within an artistic role play, even only for a while totally believes in his or her ability to communicate through the material or through the means; he or she forgets about the real world to plunge into a parallel world of emotions. Freud agreed with this vision: he compared artists and children, which he thought to be both certain about the truthfulness of their actions and of the world they were going to create, even if they were still aware of the actual reality. (Freud, 1979)
1.4 Analysis of the practical contests in which catharsis is present

1.4.1 Catharsis as a recognized phenomenon in primordial and tribal societies

Rituals, too, have theatrical and dramatic features, to enhance participants’ feelings and emotions. (Segalen, 2002)

Because of the central role they played in tribal societies, rituals are necessarily to be further investigated. Rituals can be defined in many ways, however, they all result from more or less codified individual and collective behaviours that have a corporeal support – a fusion of postural and gestural movements, that are usually repeated (though repetition does not necessarily connotate a ritual), and have a strong symbolic value. Each participant feels they share certain values with rest of the community performing the ritual. For many centuries rituals were considered solely as religious events but around 1960 they began to be seen as social elements as well. Even though rituals are sacred the abstract value to which they relate to can also be connected with something other than a myth and can therefore lead to a cathartis. (Frazer, 2005)

Some of the functions of rituals are to teach people to maintain and strengthen their connections with the sacred life, and transform and diversify the connotations of the rituals according to the needs which led to their bring to their establishment. (Riviere, 2000)

Rituals allow humans to display their subjectivity, even when a group of people is performing the same ritualistic action. This occurs because catharsis is felt subjective within the community of participants. In order to be effective, a ritual must serve a social function, and be codified. When a ritual is instituted, it establishes a new social and cultural order (even is initially the participants are not aware of such changes). Rituals are organised in two main phases. During the first phase, the celebrant pursues an important purpose regarding the life of the tribal community, or the life of everyone: he abandons his ordinary, daily dimension, losing a normal vitality to reach the “unknowable”. During the second, main phase, the celebrant returns, changed: he now hold the “unknowable” within himself. (Segalen, 2002)

In psychoanalysis, through recollection, patients create their own private myth, while in a collective tribal ceremonial the participants achieve, from the situation of the shared experience, a social myth which helps them in their private sphere. The shamanic treatments are the primordial manifestation of the psychoanalytic treatments: shamans materialise a spiritual experience, and they gain their purpose through the materialisation of a myth that needs to be experienced or remembered by the “patients”, just as psychoanalysts do. (Pignato, 2006)

In tribal societies, catharsis is usually connected with sacrifice: when something bad happens, the community does not focus its attention on the perpetrator, but rather on victim and on vengeance. If the focus is on the perpetrator, anger foments the victim’s thirst for revenge. A context such as this reveals the meaning of a sacrificial ritual. Sacrifice is a stratagem: by offering a sacrificial victim to the damaged party, there is no reason to seek vengeance against the perpetrator. (Girard, 2011)

If we consider the role of catharsis as a “purgative medicine”, an institutionalised and controlled sacrifice ritual acquires a cathartic function within the societies where it is performed: it somehow acts as a “dumping ground” when the society manifests its desire for revenge. In this case,
is not only acted and experienced: it is embodied in the sacrificial victim, who loses his life indeed, in order to purify the whole society from its plans of vengeance. Some connections can be found between Aristotle’s description (in his writings on the origins of tragedy) of the sacrifice of the actors within the tragedies, and the actual human sacrifice in the tribal rituals. As René Girard explains, *katharma* was the term with which the ancient Greeks identified both the feelings to be eliminated and – and this was particularly interesting to him – the sacrificial victims. He, too, provided a definition of catharsis postulating the existence of “mysterious benefits” accrued by the population with the death of the human katharma. (Girard, 2011)

In many primordial societies, even if very different and geographically distant from one another, there was the figure of the “sacred jester” – such figure has been found in Africa, Indonesia and America. Despite their very powerful and influential role, when the sacred jesters are involved in a ritual, they acquire a connotation which cannot be assimilated to a respectable social condition. This figure, for example, is usually lustful and lascivious, indeed scenes of mating where the sacred jester reveals himself impotent are frequently staged. He often ingests enormous quantities of food or nauseating substances (mud, or even excrements), and his behaviour violently contrasts with normality. He makes himself look so foolish that the spectators cannot refrain from laughing – and are “punished” by the jester, who therefore maintains his authority. In the societies where the sacred jester is present, his role is also to break taboos and preserve the ancestral culture reorganising the structures in a semantic order. His actions are mostly aimed at highlighting the right behaviour to follow and encouraging reflection. (Mazzoleni, 1973)

For the purpose of analysing the elements of catharsis, it is pertinent to reflect on how diffused and necessary – especially in the sacred rituals – this figure is. As previously debated, one of the major functions of all religions is to maintain order, the other, which relates to the first, is certainly to alleviate suffering. Theatrical performance, transformation, acting, and certainly laughter, for the populations that have a sacred jester, can act as a sort of therapy, a cure. These analogies cannot be accidental: there is probably a connection between theatre, music, and art in general, and well-being, which can be achieved exactly through catharsis. The protagonists of the tribal sacred ceremonies usually wear particular costumes or vestments and masks. The reason why they dress up in these occasions is probably the same as that behind theatrical masking, an expedient actors use to help them better identify with their role. Both on a theatrical stage and during a ritual during a ceremony, there are actors interpreting a role that differs from their ordinary one. How and whether the actors identify with their role is not so important for the audience, who is already convinced of the actors’ ability, but is fundamental for the actors themselves: appropriate costumes and paraphernalia can aid them in their interpretation, hence will activate their catharsis. The same happens in the sacred rituals: the master of the ritual identifies with his role through his vestment and paraphernalia. This is yet another similarity between theatre and religion – or a starting point for a reflection on the differences between them. (Molinari, 2003)

There are some analogies between tribal religions and the role of Greek tragedy: the aim of both is to keep any dangerous element out of the society. Violent feelings are never represented in tragedies, indeed, the ancient Greeks represented their passions in the plays in order to maintain a calm reality; in the primordial societies, sacrifice was instituted in order to allow the victims to avenge the wrongdoings committed against them, in a controlled way which partially safeguarded the offenders. In any case – in theatrical tragedies, in rituals, or in institutional sacrifices – feelings are controlled by rules. (Brockett, 2008)

When catharsis manifests itself in these environments, the context in which this happens is always sacred/mystical. The cathartic experience is often supported by drugs, music, dances or
other mediums. The N’Doep ritual performed by the Lebou tribe (Senegal), is an emblematic example of different mediums used within tribal ceremonies. During this ritual the protagonist of is the “patient”, who is considered “mentally ill” or “possessed”; the aim of the ritual is to cast out the evil spirit from the body of the protagonist. Following a great celebration with dances on the beach, which goes on for several days and during which an ox is sacrificed, the ritual concludes with the gradual awakening of the community from its cathartic state of trance induced by the collective dancing. At this point, it could be interesting to analyse drugs, their use and their contribution to the achievement of the cathartic state. Drugs can be found wherever humans are established: using substances that alter consciousness, or induce visions, has been a common practise in all over the world and in every historical period, indeed, drugs are represented even in the ancient Egyptian graffiti. The global effect of a particular type of drug often derives from a combination of its actual effect and the cultural and interpretative context in which the drug is taken: depending on the geographical and ethnic context, the effects of the drugs can be radically different. This is not because of a biological difference between humans, but rather because of a difference between the expectations, and between the contexts in which the drug is consumed. The participants of sacred rituals are aware of the existence of catharsis, and they exploit it as a controlled and therapeutic modality of trance: in primordial societies, the cathartic state is associated with the fundamental moments of the life course, particularly with those that the hardest to face (rites of passage, funeral rites). In order to reach catharsis through a modified state of consciousness, it is possible to use mind altering and psychoactive plants (consumption from primary sources), or consume the meat of animals that have foraged on such plants (consumption from secondary sources), or still, consume a drug that has already been metabolised by two living organisms (consumption from tertiary sources). This definition may explain some strange killings of animals that still today are carried out in tribal societies, or even the peculiar behaviour of the so called “witches” in Europe in the Middle Ages – it is commonly known that these women prepared their “magic potions” using animals, or particular parts of animals. Ingesting such animal-derived concoctions and using drugs can produce very similar effect: this can explain some cases of cannibalism. The human body produces particular substances which, when ingested, provoke particular effects. When the magic rituals required a human sacrifice, the victim was sometimes eaten by the participants, as it was believed that the limbs, for example, could activate different states of mind, and so very much valued – the sacrificial victim was sometimes tortured before being killed. This too, can be scientifically explained: under torture, the human body produces more psychotropic substances. (Samorini, 2012)

The effects produced by drugs undoubtedly lead to a modified state of consciousness which in turn can cause catharsis and this happens, explains Guinagh (1987) because drugs help lower the defences that keep the real emotions at bay. However, as above explained, this also depends on the context. In the tribal societies, the effects of the drugs are well known by the people who consume them as by the entire tribe itself. They are all aware of the potential fatal risk associated with an improper drug use – fatality which sometimes may happen. Mind-altering substances employed to reach a state of catharsis becomes even more useful during the rituals, being these codified, structured and regulated. (Curcio, 1999)

1.4.2 Catharsis as an unrecognized phenomenon in western society

Catharsis is not normally and universally recognized with western societies, since these civilised societies do not perceive this dissociative state as necessary, and therefore there is no institution that adopts catharsis as a means to achieve purification and wellbeing. Meanwhile dissociation as a human expedient is something that everyone can reach, and this condition makes catharsis desirable for a large part of people, who feel they need purification, to better understand
themselves and finally regeneration. However, this general need for catharsis is not satisfied by any
behaviour that is universally acknowledged (as it was common in primordial societies) nor is it
satisfied by any universally recognized and accepted institution (as for example the theatre in the
Ancient Greece). As a consequence, this constantly unsatisfied need is often taken care of by the
individual him or herself through a research of catharsis. The ‘general’ state of consciousness of the
western individual is dominated by the weariness of everyday repetitiveness. Everyday life is often
overloaded with all sorts of things: objects and images with very little value are imbued with an
everlasting fetishist significance. In this repetitiveness the human being seeks to escape the ordinary
life, the tediousness, and find peace in a personal resource of dissociation. Postmodern-era human
beings – today more than in the past – are encouraged to seek a place where they can confirm their
identity. Such place is an ordinary life is quite difficult to find and perhaps the most important issue
today’s teenagers have to face is that of feeling alone, refused, worthless or even invisible to the rest
of the society. This is also a reason why WiFi devices, such as tablets, smartphones and game
consoles or even devices used to listen to music (starting from the Walkman, back in 1979) have
become so popular. All these devices fill up people’s time and make believe they are busy and
always connected to their peers. What is perceived as the real world is indeed, not the reality.
Today, individuals have well adapted to these virtual realities created by the Internet, video games
and other situations that are not those of real life, causing them to lose their natural ability to
communicate with others. Hence it is possible to state that people today are becoming ever more in
a world that is getting more and more complicated to live in. The technological devices humans use
extensively nowadays, cause them to continuously be in a dissociative state in which their
consciousness is modified, making them believe that they feel better when they use the devices, that
they allow them feel their emotions more intensely, that thanks to them they are capable of doing
everything. In these events there is no catharsis, but rather a catatonic state of dissociation, which
leads the individual far away from their surrounding reality and even further away from their
personal inner being. This, indeed, happens because the world the person experiences and where he
or she acts is not part of reality. (Alam, 2013)

Another negative aspect of extensive use of technological devices is that these convey the
impression that the user has everything under control – literally, that their fate is in their own hands.
However, this is merely an impression as when you are in a ‘traditional’ cathartic state, you
experience real exchange with somebody else, and such is a productive state only when there is an
authentic exchange. The new devices and online social media modernity has provided humans
with, lead to building identities that have very little or nothing to do with the true, real identities.
They are but another mask a person can wear. Post modern people have chosen a simple way to feel
better in a complicated world, but this can lead them very far from their inner being and self
awareness. (Bauman, 2014)

In order to be considered a ritual a series of actions need three conditions: a cognitive
power, an affective power and the ceremony must be organised. If this is assumed as true – as does
Martine Segalen – the ceremony is part of the current society though not necessarily sacred. Claude
Riviere (2000) in agreement with the assumption made by Martine Segalen (2002), believes that the
sacred element is, in many cases, no longer part of ceremonies and that ceremonies still exist in
profane rituals, such as the cult of body or the cult of work. According to Riviere profane rituals
survive alongside with the religious rituals and are independent from one another. This
consideration allows for things to be seen from a different point of view, for example, sport, food,
sex, bullying can be rituals as existing.
In order to better understand this concept some profane rituals are analysed, starting from the ‘football ritual’.

There are several similarities between the ‘football ritual’ and a ‘religious ritual’, one of these being the collective emotional excitement they provoke. Both rituals have ‘followers’, ‘officiants’ and a ‘confraternity’, and both take place in confined and well-defined spaces, built specifically to be the ‘container’ of these events. There are specific schedules and cycles to be followed. In both types of rituals there is an opposition between ‘good and bad’ or between ‘friend and enemy’. They both use their own initiation language, and are organised in a particular hierarchy – which is often subverted in the daily social life. Of course the ‘religious ritual’ has rules that are different from those of the ‘football ritual’, nevertheless they do share certain ritual aspects. Another one of these is the existence of both a public and a private framework. According to Erving Goffmann a framework is a sort of ‘idea of the space’, a context in which each person knows his or her place and role. In football, the field is the public framework (which can expand to television broadcasts), while the locker room is the private framework. Similar elements characterise other contexts in which rituals are performed: for example, in a church there is a front area which pertains the public framework, and the sacristy which is the private area, or still, in wellness and beauty centres (containers of the ‘cult of body’) there are public areas and private areas. Considering the similarities between rituals of football and the religious ones, there are symbolic ritual actions that define the special limits of the area in which the ritual takes place, for example, entering a Catholic church worshippers make the sign of the cross, and in a similar way some Christian footballers make the sign of the cross when they enter the field to play the match, or still, the whole team may form a tight circle to pray together or perform propitiatory shouts. During a sacred ceremony as well as during a football match there are people in action (players in the football match and officiants in the ceremony), there is an audience (which is made up of football fans for the match and of worshippers in the sacred ritual), and in both events there is an exchange between the audience and the people in action – during the football match the spectators cheer to support the team, they react to the actions, while during a religious ritual worshippers ‘answer’ the cues provided by the officiant performing particular gestures and reciting specific prayers. A football ritual has further elements in common with the ‘holy’ rituals of war, as the spectators often shout slogans against the opposing team as if they were enemies. In a football match each team is clearly distinguishable by their kit which can easily be seen by the spectators. Among the spectators there are supporters that have their own specific role (leading the chants, for example), and just like in rituals there are conflicts which are very similar to those between tribal populations. (Ferreri, 2008)

There are also many ‘local’ profane rituals. In some regions of Italy the graduation ceremony is one of these. Following the definition of ritual, this ceremony is a combination of individual and collective behaviours made up of postural movements and signs, and therefore, can be defined as a ritual. In many areas of northern Italy when near graduate students are about to discuss their final thesis, they prepare thoroughly and in depth, and – just as for a wedding celebration – they wear the most elegant outfits, they wake up early to get ready, they get to the venue of the graduation to rehearse their speech. A rigid protocol is respected by the Examination Committee who administer the ceremony, and exchange ideas and ask the student questions pertaining the thesis. At the end of the dissertation the Examination Committee invite to the student and the audience to leave the room and for the verdict. Once the near graduate student is summoned back in, together with the audience, the Examination Committee have already decided the final mark assigned to the work and announce it publicly reciting a fixed formula. Also the festive context following the dissertation is characterised by all the elements of a ritual – often friends and relatives organize a party for the graduate, in which he or she is the absolute centre of attention. There is a historic basis on which this ritual has developed. Indeed, in the 16th century, in Padua,
near graduate students would discuss their thesis in public, in the most important church of the city, following a collective holy ceremony. Following the graduation ceremony they would wear a laurel wreath on their head and hold a sceptre. The tradition of the laurel wreath has survived until today, but instead of the sceptre the graduate might hold a bottle of champagne to share with friends and family. While in the 16th century these celebrations were aimed at praising and glorifying the graduate, nowadays, great emphasis is given to the playful teasing of the friend. For example, once they were honoured and proudly wore the academic gown, now friends of the graduate dress him or her up in tattered clothes; in the 16th century sonnets composed to celebrate the graduate’s life were recited publicly, whereas today, the graduate is propelled to read a sort of rhymed poem that lists all the funny and embarrassing moments of the friend’s life. The whole festive celebration that follows graduation is a fixed parody regarding the graduate’s life, which is accepted by the protagonist and their family – it is a sort of ritual of derision ‘to show love and affection towards the graduate’. (Guerrini, 2007)

Other profane rituals are liked to various seasonal celebrations. There are many holy and profane celebrations in the course a year, and one of the most popular ones in the whole world is New Year’s Eve. Celebrations for this event held all over the world. Sometimes these celebrations include a sacred, religious celebration as well, for example, Catholics celebrate the Te Deum to thank God for the year that has just finished, though our modern society invests the profane celebration with more significance. In civilised societies people often organise big dinner parties and balls in anticipation fort the midnight countdown and the spectacular firework show to salute the new year. (Lanternari, 1976)

It is interesting to analyse the role cinema theatres have in our times. It is first of all a place where people meet and are entertained; it is also a place where individuals can better understand themselves through the films they watch. Today, a film has the same role of tragedy in Ancient Greece – by watching a film spectators can forget about their own existence for some time and focus on the emotions the film brings about. After “losing themselves” the audience leaved the cinema theatre changed. This is the reason why cinema has a central role in our society (this is confirmed by the copious existence of movie contests). Every consideration regarding cinema, however, does not represent a novelty. The role played by cinema is the same as that played by Greek tragedy or by art – substantially, the purification of the spectators’ souls. The need for purification has been a central element throughout the eras, but only at the beginning of the 19th century art critics contemplate the idea of identifying the truth and value of art regardless of its fine manufacturing. Finally, art earned a central role in society and was able to respond to the need for purification. Through art people exchange emotions and sensations – a cathartic state, which is important and allows art be a fundamental element in life – today as well as in the past. (Espinosa, 2000)

In film theory there is the so-called “tragic paradox” that is the circumstance in which, people are likely to be more satisfied in watching a tragic film with a sad ending rather than watching more positive films (De Wied, Zillmann and Ordmann, 1994). This probably happens because spectators are more involved in tragic situations, and are able to better relate with the protagonist. The tragic paradox is most evident in horror and drama, because horror films evoke a sense of fear (phobos), while dramatic films evoke strong pity (eloos), so after watching such movies the audience feel relieved or happy. Indeed, pity and fear are emotions that we generally do not want to experience in real life, but are accepted if they are evoked from a fictitious reality. This means that humans still need to experience these emotions and want to be involved in a terrible and upsetting experience, albeit at a safe distance: contemporary catharsis remains a means to deal with the things of life that individuals would rather not experience first hand. (Bouterse, 2016)
To demonstrate the cathartics effects of television broadcasting, Scheff (2007) refers to Feshbach and Singer. They evidenced how high school students who watched violent TV programmes committed fewer aggressive acts than students who did not watch violent scenes on TV. Among the spectators who watched violent TV, the number of spectators that reduced their aggressive behaviour was greater than the number of spectators who had had a cathartic reaction. According to Scheff (2007) it would be interesting to investigate catharsis within situations that do not arouse exciting stimuli. Scheff (2007) also denounces a lack in the general research on catharsis pointing out that investigation should focus on the quality of the violence and not on the quantity of violent scenes are showed on TV, as it is a help only when it is sufficiently far from the personal experience of the spectator which is when it allows for catharsis.

Undeniably cathartic state goes hand in hand with the search of an identity – true self-identity, the inner being to which individuals do not pay attention in their daily life. George Lapassade defines consciousness in psychological terms as “self-awareness of our own identity in time and space” and asserts that the concepts of consciousness and identity are not interchangeable – according to him identity is something more temporary and ephemeral than consciousness, as the later characterizes human beings in a more profound way.

The erroneous ideology that to reach a temporary state of ecstasy by means of drugs has a cathartic therapeutic efficaciousness has become established in western societies. Such defective ideology has taken the place of other religious or political ideologies. It can heal the symptom, but not the cause of the uneasiness felt by an individual, an answer which is perceived as good by the subject but its efficacy is limited in time (its efficacy depends on the effect of the substance). This resolution forces the consumer to constantly increase the amount of substance to reach an ecstatic state – since tolerance levels become higher – and becomes ‘uncontrollable’ by the individual who totally loses his or her self-awareness. (Curcio, 1999)

1.4.3 Therapeutic catharsis without the use of art

Every therapy involves different stages. In a valid therapy there is transference, counter transference, catharsis, development of self-awareness by both, patient and psychoanalyst, reality examination and instincts sublimation. Besides these phases an efficacious therapy requires some other conditions to be fulfilled. In a therapy there must necessarily be communication, which often might be partially mediated by another element – for example by an art object. Naturally for communication to take place at least two people are needed. Another essential condition is the code that allows the message to be conveyed within the communication: this code must be known and shared by participants (or by the participant) and the therapist. (Grosskourth, 1988)

David Straton observed four types of reactions that occur within in cathartic therapies and labelled them as, the Hydraulic model, the Pavlovian model, the Cathexis model and the Holographic model. The Hydraulic model essentially holds that a fluid or energy in the body and mind may become blocked or obstructed in some way, and that successful catharsis can unblock it. The Pavlovian model is that pertaining a range of phenomena which include arousal, hyperventilation and subsequent abreaction deriving from traumatic events such as shell-shock, religious conversion and political brain-washing. The Cathexis model is grounded on the tight emotional bond between the subjects and the objects. The central concept in this model is that for catharsis to be reached the subject needs to be in a state of psychological arousal. Catharsis occurs when the subject manages to release such aroused emotions projecting them onto an object. The
Holographic model suggests that during catharsis the human brain may use a different approach entirely, possibly utilizing a mechanism similar to holography. (Straton)

Nichols and Zax (1977) argue that catharsis is the loss of emotional control expressed through four emotions: crying, anger, fear and laughter. They include laughter and ridicule, as these sometimes raise the feeling of embarrassment.

Pearls (1970) analysed catharsis, too, using the term “explosion”. In particular he describes four different types of “explosions”: sexual explosion, grief, anger and joy.

Jackins (1978) lists other possible external expressions of catharsis, which include: crying, anger, laughter as well as, yawning and talking to alleviate boredom. (Guinagh, 1987)

Psychiatric experiments that exploited catharsis can be traced back to the end of the 18th century. Philippe Pinel adopted a method known as “Recognition in the mirror”. According to this method, all people taking care of the ill individuals were to support them pretending to share their reality, and at the same time, putting them in front of similarly ill subjects. When the patients found themselves in front of other delirious patients, they usually felt sorry for them and laughed at them, believing they were healthy and totally different from the other patients, who were defined as ‘mad’. At that point the ill persons’ caretakers were to go on supporting them taking a sensitive approach, helping them understand their misleading beliefs. According to Pinel, it was in that occasion that catharsis took place, as to say, when the ill subjects reach the sorrowful self-awareness of being exactly the same as the patients they pitied and ridiculed.

At the beginning of the 18th century there was the widespread idea that catharsis obtained through dramatization of past experiences was considerably helpful in handling problems related to the ego.

Jung explains very well what a “hidden memory” is: it is a real memory regarding events that have occurred, or even simply events, that and individual has in his or her subconscious without being aware of it. (Van den Berk, 2012)

To trigger such memories and have them emerge, psychiatrists and psychologists began using a method which exploits a cathartic process within a state reached through hypnotic trance, which is known as cryptomnesia. Thanks to this method the disturbed subjects relive their past experiences through hypnosis and dramatize them, allowing traumatic particulars, which in a conscious state would not be remembered, to emerge. (Brown & Murphy, 1989)

Psychologists Freud and Breuer had discovered the benefits of catharsis long before they were mentioned as using it as a therapeutic support combining it with art. They believed that neurons were linked together by energy: remembering past events energized the neurons, and this energy remained imprisoned without ever being released. To help release such energy Freud and Breuer would lead their patients initially to an hypnotic state and then asked them to re-live the traumatic experiences from their past (which they had already experienced at the beginning of their uneasiness). The psychologists were obviously aware of the benefit of using the cathartic process which was to be found in this particular method that used hypnosis.

They believed that for each individual there was a good level of excitement in the brain and a natural tendency to restore the equilibrium: they argued that in abnormal situations some ideas, memories, or lines of thought could have accumulated energy in the neurons. According to the principle of constancy, if this accumulated energy is expressed, there is no problem because the

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optimal level of energy is restored. However, if there is resistance to the expression of this emotion, excitement or energy accumulates and is converted into other problems or symptoms by finding expression and release in abnormal and sometimes pathological ways. (Guinagh, 1987)

1.4.4 Therapeutic catharsis with the use of art

Using art as a tool is not an innovative idea. Art has been used in psychiatric hospitals since the 7th century. In Cairo, in psychiatric hospitals it was common to help patients by having them listen to music or stories, or watch theatre performances. Moreover, doctors asked patients to paint images from which they could discover the pathological problems of the patients and better diagnose the psychosis. This was the first rudimentary stage of arts therapies, in which patients communicated without any immediate interlocutor. Efficacy of this kind of use of art is not certified due to a lack of an interlocutor – the pieces of art that were created worked as dialogues without listeners, in such patients were diagnosed as insane. In Europe the passive use of theatre – therefore as spectators – with psychiatric patients was experimented only starting from the 17th century. Before the idea that a mad person was ill because of his or her negligence, the theatre “therapy with delusion” was often adopted; with this therapy doctors and anyone who took care of the patients support their mad fantasies by means of the theatre and of the actors, with the aim of putting their minds to rest, going along with his or her fantasies and therefore stopping their obsessions. (Foucault, 2004)

It was only in 1922 that Hans Prinzhorn published an important analysis of a collection of drawings made by his psychiatric patients. In his study he observes how drawings and paintings are the manifestation of the entire personality of an individual and not only the expression of their pathology. Later on, thanks to the contribution made by Freud and Jung a new approach to analysing the art works by psychiatric patients was taken.

Freud and Jung observed how art works evidenced both the private and collective subconscious. This insight led many new artists to become known, for example, the painter André Breton and the theatre actor Antonin Artaud.

Drawings started to be used as dreams. They were a starting point from where free verbal association could be used and therefore highlight the unconscious elements. However, at that time the new psychoanalytic approach by Freud and Jung was not adopted as ‘arts therapy’, as it was merely a verbal therapy.

Today, we can consider art works the final aim of a therapy and not merely an excuse to talk about problems – this method, however, is still used and can be helpful to solve the problems of the patients.

During the 1920-30s the possibility of using art became universally widespread and all psychiatric patients were invited make use of this media. Doctors began to analyse the quality and quantity of their patients’ art works, which allowed them to have a full overview of the production and progress of the patient during their therapy.

Since 1939 the use of art in American psychiatric hospitals has become standard. And in the same period, in England, the painter Adrian Hill and The British Red Cross Society became convinced that the artistic language could be exploited as a therapy – and not only to gain a deeper
Hill created a sort of a catalogue to understand the evolution of the therapy through the artwork of his patients. In this way the first exploitation of art therapy was theorised. (Franchino, 2011)

Anne Denner, a pioneer in terms of art therapy, developed a new school: she started working with children and only further on in her career she dealt with psychiatric patients. In particular, she believed that the characteristic of art therapy was its ability to have a double language – that of psychopathology and that of art. The former is the universal language used in a medical environment, while the latter is the language used to understand the artistic message, aesthetics, art history and manual skills. According to Denner art therapists need to observe, and understand the created work, and analyse and read the message it bears. Such analysis and reading should supply information on the author/patient’s life and not only on the art object itself. (Denner, 2002)

Art therapists must always be present among their patients – they should teach them the techniques and convey a passion for beauty, and at the same time, talk with them about their creations. Art therapists should therefore look at the works of art together with the author/patient, without using them to seek for something that is in the inner being of the author. Creativity is the focus of all processes, which initially start thanks to the imagination and ability to play, and therefore thanks to the permission and possibility to experiment, but then develops into art. When an individual feels unhappy, disappointed, stressed or anxious, or has a feeling of uneasiness, he or she often has the drive to create something that has to do with art, and the result is likely to be a biographic work. There is, indeed, a connection between the need to restore one’s own sensitiveness and the need to create. Creating a work of art helps to recover from psychic problems, and also satisfies one’s own need of exhibitionism – many times through art individuals confess their taboos and thoughts that are considered forbidden. It can also happen that working with art leads patients to create a sort of ‘twin’ of their personal sorrow: through this doubleness they are able to experiment suffering even deeper, and actually, only then, when it is fully recognised, it is possible to banish sorrow.

The work of art follows exactly the same rules of the “Subconscious Rhetoric” elaborated by Freud: the final work shows the artist’s private side (which is subconscious), and this occurs because the artist refuses the private features of his or her imagination while re-elaborating the work of art. There is a ‘normal’ artistic process, people who have psychical ability sooner or later in their life ‘write’. Writing seems to make communication possible. In ordinary life people usually do not write, because when a person needs to communicate, he or she uses their conceptualization ability and then put their thought into words. Through this mechanism, which implies the use of a psychic reworking, the free psychic energy experiences a change and becomes “tied”.

In his work “Der Dichter und das Phantasieren” Freud searched the causes and motivations that drive people to feel the need to write – for him writing satisfies their desires and fills in some gaps of their life. (Ferrari, 2001)

Freud reflected on what triggers poets (or artists in general) to create a work of art, especially because they are unaware of the reasons and think of themselves as simply normal. The urge to write, draw, paint and create art works is a profound and essential urge an artist feels, which fulfils two different functions. One is a function linked to the physicality of the action: it helps the motoric discharge and satisfies the inclination to release the psychic problems. The other is the narrative function, which is linked to the expression of particular themes and contents. Freud investigated the latter function: according to him it leads to the creation of particular stories.
(especially for children) comparable to myths and legends. For Freud children can, for example, create a personal story in which they replace their true parents with fascinating and gratifying imaginary parents. However, according to Freud the importance of such fantasies is not in their significance but rather in their function, which is to release imagination. (Freud, 1976)

It is possible to affirm that the primary need to elaborate one’s thoughts is satisfied through verbalization, and writing is yet a step forward. It is used to fix, to materialise and define one’s thoughts. Indeed, writing is truly the materialization of a person’s flow of thoughts. When a thought materializes, the person experiences pleasure – this occurs also with verbal language, but the physical gestures required by the act of writing enhance the pleasure. Firstly, written texts satisfy the release of emotions, secondly they satisfy the pleasure which derives from the gestures of writing – there is a physical perception of oneself – and thirdly, when writing, the person experiences the so-called “pleasure without acme”, as Winnicott defines it, which is the typical pleasure we feel when we have to do with art, play, intellectual activities and so on. In order to be able to write a person has to use his or her psychic energy. This energy is not filtered by a doctor, reason why patients feel better when they write – their suffering is suspended, interrupted and therefore writing allows a initial elaboration of the psychic sorrow. Even if there is no cause-effect relation between the will to express one’s psychic troubles and the creating art, there is most probably a sort of continuity between the two. This continuity is underlined also by the variety of psychic resources different people have – and exactly, this variety of abilities determines art works, which are then completely different. (Ferrari, 2001)

Often during the process of creation – actually, in any process of art creation – there is a process of identification. This becomes a necessary element to reach a cathartic state, so for the sake of this work, further analysis and a deeper investigation regarding its role is to be carried out, before considering the role of art itself. All humans in their first year of life feel the personal need for identification, which usually is relegated to an unconscious level of one’s imagination. Only after some years, will this need be fully satisfied through the aid of play and art. Charles Rycroft believed the ‘identification process’ to be a process in which the individual can do three things: reveal their own identity to somebody else, borrow someone else’s identity, and blend or compare one’s own identity with that of someone else. (Rycroft, 1970)

Thanks to the contribution of Melanie Klein it is well known that mental processes are different, and that more than one mechanism coexists in the identification process – for example, fondness, imitation, projection, introjection and so on. To explain it more in detail, Melanie Klein believed that in order to reach identification, an individual needs several projections: he or she absorbs features from other people and at the same time project features of their identity onto other people around them. For Klein – and for Freud as well – the identification process is one of those ways the lead to the building of ego. (Grosskurth, 1988)

Making use of drugs certainly can trigger an identification process, as, drugs lead to a loss of self-awareness and so allows for the creation of a different identity.

Octave Mannoni believes that it is possible to talk about identification only if a de-identification process takes place. According to his reasoning the only conscious identification is that achieved by actors, and exists only when they are able to refuse their own personal identity. (Mannoni, 1988)

Experimental theatre became established together with the rise of the “New Theatre”, as De Marinis defined it. De Marinis described this kind of theatre, as being characterised by distinctive
aspects – the final product and the result are no longer of main importance, unlike the production and the process, which become much more relevant. The “New Theatre” went beyond the limits of the theatre of representation/interpretation. Thanks to this genre of theatre the aesthetic features of the works which were submitted to a total management were criticised and the actors’ tasks were expanded – they not only had the function of being an expert of the appearance. Moreover, the audience was no longer a ‘passive consumer’ of the theatrical play, becoming a character of the play itself. Theatre was then entertainment as well as a cultural tool of communication and to improve knowledge; theatre was the way to satisfy social and existential needs. (De Marinis, 2005)

By considering all these aspects, it is not difficult to understand why theatre has not disappeared throughout time, in spite of the development of cinema and television entertainment, which is easier to access. A possible answer to this might be the fact that in theatre plays there are actors in flesh and blood who play on stage before a live audience, hence the performance becomes a truly unique experience. Also every repeat performance is a new creation, a different experience, because the audience and the venue are different. Another feature that makes the theatre performance unique is the indeterminate blend of bodies in which, the actors create a performance this is made to astonish the audience – and, indeed, each time both actors and audience are unaware of what the experience will be. Also in ancient times the body had the function of exorcising to facilitate catharsis. Theatre performances (thanks to the participants in flesh and blood) recreate the worst mental images and help dissipate them among the spectators (as outlined in chapter 4 this happened frequently in the past during sacred theatrical rituals). Within a performance on stage it is possible to find real and powerful ‘truth’, which is impossible to find in other forms of art. The body is a visible vehicle, and it is shared by all the participants in the experience. The body bears signs, signs of aging and of experience. Moreover, through the body an individual can communicate and it is the only means that allows for pure self-knowledge. (Manani, 2007)

Ernst Cassirer often referred to his idea of art as the “moment of revelation”. He believed that the spontaneity and creativity of an artist are the obstacles to an objective imitation of art, since these interfere with how an artist represents reality. Actors, therefore, cannot represent the reality and most of all cannot represent the reality as the spectators see it. (Cassirer, 2004)

According to him thanks to theatre plays and in particular thanks to tragedy, spectators can see facts and re-live their passions and emotions with all the possible anxiety and violence, but without any obligation, oppression or compulsion. These passions are represented without materialization, and therefore, appear as the making of the art work itself – a dynamic tranquillity. When artists understand the deep meaning of things they should not keep it back, but rather convey it and express what they are feeling and experiencing.

In most performances in the experimental theatre, in 1900, there was no script the attention of the audience was not all on the words alone. The audience was more concentrated on whatever was happening on stage and how it connected to their own personal experience – this kind of theatre is “written” on bodies of the actors, which is the foundation of the experimental work. There are several theatre companies that belong to this genre of theatre, among others, the Open Theatre, the San Francisco Mime Troupe and the Bread and Puppet Theatre. All these companies helped to lay the substratum that led to recognising the therapeutic power of theatre. These companies have been home to some very famous figures of the theatre industry, who have immensely contributed to developing the new concept of therapeutic theatre.

One of these notable figures was Moscow-born Konstantin Stanislavskij. In June 1897, he and Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko opened the Moscow Art Theatre, which would establish
experimental theatre as an alternative to the theatrical aesthetics of the day. At the beginning of the 20th century the Moscow though experimental theatre was appreciated Stanislavskij was not completely satisfied with way the theatrical works were performed; according to him the performances were still too tied to realism. In 1904, with the direction of Vsevolod Mejerchol’d he set up an experimental laboratory based on symbolistic scripts but was not yet satisfied, so he shut down the laboratory. Stanislavskij created the First Studio in 1912 where his method, the Stanislavskij Method was applied. He wrote extensively about this method, defining all the aspects of the system. According to his method the actors were to act without any artifice; they were required to find an inner justification for every single move they performed on stage. According to him the actors had to recall their emotive memories to be able to successfully act out their parts. This was an important innovation for that time as the focus was no longer on the script but on the actors – and to perform properly actors needed to train hard to prepare their bodies and voices for any scenic requirement. Stanislavskij suggested living the role without fiction. He required his actors to play using their memories and letting the subconscious express freely. In that way the actors moved physically on stage as a consequence of real-felt emotions, and this represents the first level of the therapy. The above-mentioned Vsevolod Mejerchol’d was an important theatre director, actor and theatre producer. He was born in 1874, in Russia, and his studies on symbolic theatre were important for theatre therapy too. In particular, following his experience with Stanislavskij he started using mixed techniques, from the circus, the Commedia dell’Arte and still, from Oriental theatre, elaborating a new system known as ‘Biomechanics’. This cognitive and systematic method requires the actors to undergo acrobatic training. With this method actors became similar to machines and are to activate their emotions thanks to particular repetition exercises and kinetic movements. This method works because an individual can feel an emotion thanks to a particular kind of exercise and it is therapeutic because it allows the feeling to be experienced. (Brockett, 2008)

Jacob Levi Moreno was another important scholar of theatre therapy. He was born in 1889 in Romania, and he was above all an excellent psychiatrist and teacher who operated in the United States. At the beginning of his career he was one of Freud’s followers, successively he created his own method, psychodrama, replacing the scheme of unreal transactions that promised self-realization to the patient, with a search for his or her “real realization”. He therefore studied many cathartic phenomena of the Greek tragedy and started using drama to promote catharsis. (Brumat, 2009)

After his studies in Vienna to become psychologist, though he was no expert in theatre, he established his “Theatre of Spontaneity” and “psychodrama”.

He was concerned with creating a connection between the ‘real ego’ of the individuals and the external world. (Moreno, 1987)

In 1921 he started putting his patients on a theatre stage (before he had only used this technique in private sessions) enhancing the significance of the personality of the individuals, while relegating the playwright to a less powerful and less important role. (Moreno, 2007)

Elements that precede psychodrama can be found in many different geographical and cultural locations. Because Moreno believed the traditional form of psychoanalysis expensive and therefore not affordable for many, he promoted alternative options for effective strategies to enable patients to resolve the difficulties they are experiencing. (Schützenberger, 1977)

Moreno’s method entailed that spontaneity were to be supported by a sort of ‘role-play’,
during which the subjects’ personalities were more driven and energetic, hence more prone to learn. To achieve such results, Moreno believed it was better to have a number of real emotions while performing the psychodramatic exercises, rather than just one type emotion that is not bound to reality. The psychodramatic actors taking part in the psychodrama can experience a situation of their past, their present or their future. This enactment is performed together with ‘side’ actors – who can be other individuals in the same situation. The side actors become the therapy for the protagonist of the psychodrama, generating spontaneous reactions and listening to his or her cues, and in the meantime help the individual find the dramaturgical directions. Thanks to the psychodrama and the re-elaboration of the performance, the memories of the events become less traumatic and the individual acquires a more mature awareness of his or her own feelings and of what is actually real. According to Moreno, it is possible to pursue the cathartic goal only when the actor enacts his or her personal autobiographic experience, free from inner and outer conditioning – and this is the feature that most distinguishes psychodrama from the Greek tragedy, which was not an improvisation but a dramaturgy. In Moreno’s psychodrama emphasis is placed on creativity and the power of action; the additional ‘egos’, that is to say, other actors of the psychodrama, are the exact projections of the patient-actor’s expectations, and at the end of the psychodrama the psychic structure remains intact – though it can be effected in other moments. (Cois, 2004)

Moreno distinguishes two types of catharsis that arise from his psychodrama: the active (primary) catharsis, which derives from the direct enactments of actors, and the passive one (secondary), which occurs in the spectators, thanks to identification. According to the creator of the psychodrama, catharsis is a complex process that starts with the actor’s acting and ends with his or her awareness. Once the psychodrama is concluded patient-actors should be aware that psychodrama offers the possibility to experience situations they have never experienced in their real life. (Moreno, 2002)

Today, there are different variations of the psychodrama which use three different methods, Moreno’s Classic method, Schützenberger’s ‘triadic’ method and the ‘French Analytic Method’ devised by Lebovici, Anzieu, Eugene and Paul Lemoine, and dramaturges have over 350 techniques available to use.

The efficacy of this type of therapy derives from the fact that symbolic imagination can arise out of a cathartic state. (Schützenberger, 1977)

Moreno was the first to create a defined method to use theatre as a means to achieve a cathartic state, though numerous therapists, patients and psychologists had experimented with therapeutic catharitcs induced by drama, especially in cases of mental disorders. One notable example among others is the Marquis De Sade experience. At the beginning of the 19th century, thanks to the support of De Coulmier, his therapist in the psychiatric hospital where he was confined, he created quite complex plays that included inmates and real actors. He was allowed to stage several of his plays for a ‘normal’ audience.

Doctor Johann Christian Reil, however, can be considered the true precursor of Moreno. He devised several methods of psychotherapy, of which one included therapeutic theatre. This theatre therapy consisted – just like psychodrama - in bringing the patients’ emotions on stage with the help of the employees of the institute, who played the side roles. In Italy, between 18th and 19th century, notable was Doctor Miraglia, who had his patients with mental disorders act plays on stage. (Cois, 2004)

The term “theatre therapy” was established in Italy and has become universally used thanks
to the technique started around the 19th century. According to its definition theatre therapy is the experience of involving people with different needs in theatrical performances. Walter Orioli founded and directed a school to form the therapist focusing not on the final product but on the process. The school known as “Scuola di formazione in teatroterapia” was located near Milan, precisely in Monza (and later on in other branches in Colico on Lake Como, in Genoa, in Naples and in Padua). He had graduated in psychology and was very interested in theatre (he attended the Eurasiana University of Eugenio Barba) and in Bio energy. The school started to operate in 1984 and, as Orioli explains, theatre therapy is his own personal summary of the experience. Orioli became accustomed with the theatre world in 1973, when he participated in the experimental theatre experience directed by Giuliano Scabia, in a psychiatric hospital in Trieste. He found it so fascinating that he decided to get more involved taking part of the “Marco Cavallo” laboratories. The “Scuola di formazione in teatroterapia” was established because there was the need to create a reliable group of professionals that could teach the therapeutic uses of theatre.

The aims of this school are to:

- form people who are able to understand and interpret the different dynamics within individual or group contexts that can form during a therapeutic process concerning theatre;
- facilitate creative processes using theatre, considered as a combination of different forms of art;
- use expressive techniques to support the personal relationship patients have with their body, voice and movements.

The theatre therapy developed by Orioli uses a performative language, theatrical elements and a qualitative and pragmatic observation to evaluate any result. (Brumat, 2009)

Orioli formulated his concept of catharsis starting from Grotowskij, the Polish expert who supported the idea of catharsis by using signs. According to Grotowskij signs are fluent instincts and the actors’ gestures become symbols for the audience. He believed that when the spectators do not ‘feel anything’, its means that what they are looking at does not express any symbol. (Grotowskij, 1970)

Within the discussion regarding the instances of a tight link between theatre and catharsis, a special place is held by the Theatre of the Oppressed, developed by the Brazilian theatre director Augusto Boal, between 1950 and 1960. Boal determined that during their everyday lives human beings usually are able to both act and observe simultaneously, and starting from this consideration he assumed human beings to be independent from theatre – an individual is both an actor and a spectator at the same time. As Boal pointed out, human beings are aware of themselves while acting, indeed, they are able correct, modify and control their actions depending on the result they want to achieve, and every single modification changes the world around them. The traditional form of Theatre of the Oppressed includes different kinds of activities, even though here too, a special role is given to the act playing. The Theatre of the Oppressed uses physical interactions aimed at changing oneself and truly understand what one is listening to, really feel what one is touching, or see what one is looking at. The Theatre of the Oppressed includes more than 200 games and exercises catalogued in Boal’s book translated into English and published under the title “Games for Actors and Non-actors”. The games presented in the book are useful to activate one’s senses and to help one’s body move less mechanically in order to be able to divert from one’s ordinary behaviours, to then better control our own ordinary thoughts and relationships. Participating in a session of the Theatre of the Oppressed people actively apply themselves while having fun together with other the participants, thus creating positive reciprocal relationships. This occurs because the
plays of Theatre of the Oppressed set the actors in a cathartic state. The work groups participating in the of Theatre of the Oppressed meet periodically to discuss about plays they are working on and analyse the various processes they carried out together.

Theatre acting is not the only way to achieve a cathartic state and therefore a deep therapeutic experience. Another way, which can be defined as ‘primary’ due to its connections with the human nature, is movement accompanied or not by music, and therefore dancing.

Movements are spontaneous and part of a baby’s usual activity that starts in the mother’s womb – movement is an ancestral practice, even though individuals we are often unaware of this because it is an automatism. Children respond to external stimuli with movements of the body being mind and body inextricably linked. Later on, at school or in social contexts, individuals learn to control their instinctive movements, for instance, it is very unlikely to see an adult jumping with joy when he or she meets someone; indeed, there is no longer a tight connection between body and mind. However, the body movements cannot all be concealed – in acting, in performing, body movements are always true and real – the body often communicates though individuals are unaware of the non-verbal language they actually use. (Maggipinto, 2016)

The kinesthetic perception is the feeling that allows humans to understand that their body is moving, and surely actors, dancers, and athletes are more rationally perceptive. For the majority of people this perception is unconscious because of the complex cultural frameworks that surround their lives. It is important for humans, however, to discover the connection between their body movements and their inner being, even though hindered by society. For example, being upset when witnessing a scene of violence or physical sufferance. Humans have learnt to domesticate their instincts, though this is not always good for them. In an essay on authentic movement, Mary Starks Whitehouse explains that humans are exactly what their movement is – the less they experience their own body, the more powerful their body becomes in its appearance; the less truth the body is allowed to express, the more it becomes like an outer garment; the less individuals know about their body, the further they are form their own ego. (Whitehouse, 2003)

A dance/movement session can help create a connection between body and mind, and allows such connection to acquire a shape and power which are beneficial. There are many significant activities that can help approach the subconscious – relaxation techniques, rhythmic breathing, concentration on kinesthetic perception, awareness of one’s body and awareness of the reciprocal relationship between the different parts of the body. (Chodorow, 2003)

Around the seventies and eighties of the last century photography was starting to be used as a tool to achieve self-knowledge. When people look at a picture of themselves, they become aware of their physical and psychological appearance and their social position – individuals can also analyse themselves looking at their past ‘ego’. In the realm of psychoanalysis the use of photography as a means of therapy can be distinguished in two areas: one is the photo-therapy in which the therapist uses the photos supplied by the patient for therapeutic reasons; the other is therapeutic photography. This term indicates all those photographic techniques exploited outside a therapeutic setting, without any supervision on the part of the therapist, to help achieve self-knowledge – the aim of such tool is not a clinical one. (Krauss & Fryrear, 1983)

Characteristic of an image is that it has a selective feature, being its time and space defined and limited. An image may also help identify particulars that had not been seen in real life. Looking at a photograph a person can experience catharsis thanks to the emotions directly connected to the subconscious that the image arouses. Such emotions become pure at the end of the therapeutic
The experience is the same as that felt in a theatre performance; in case this case the image has the same role of the actor’s body.

Considering the art of music, Aristotle asserted that there were no good or bad harmonies; all could be helpful when used well. The idea of catharsis itself describes how music can be the medicine for the soul – music can imitate emotions or passions that cause pain or sufferance, and from which the individual wants to be free from. According to Zardino and other theorists operating in the 17th century, there is a kind of rationality in emotions and feelings, and there is a correspondence between music and the whole emotional world. For Diderot music is the most powerful reference to the expression of originality. He believed it to be the connection to some primordial instinct that inhabited the human being before language and verbal communication, and therefore he maintained that music is the nearest contact to nature that humans have. Levi Strauss noticed that two different layers coexist in music: one layer is the cultural one and it depends on the type of sounds, pauses and other musical features performed; the other is the physiological layer and it depends on the organic rhythm. (Manarolo, 2011)

The first thing a child experiences is sound, and this helps to build the ego. The expressive code of emotions is immediately related to the environment, and the emotional communication is ‘directly’ or ‘spontaneously’ linked to the world. (Galimberti, 2010)

Sounds or music can help the direct expression of emotions and can help a mediated communication through the musical code. A piece of music can be the immediate expression of emotions, as well as a symbol of the emotions. In this second case music is a way to re-elaborate feelings; it is the same as with other forms of art which can help achieve a cathartic state and therefore the purification of emotions. Music can activate an archaic psychic function, which is as close to the senses as to the verbal language; it flows through the body and is experienced in a subjective way. Initially it attracts the inner being and the perception of the listener, then, it creates connections with the mental emotions. There is a subject of research known as “Genetic Psychology of Music”, and Jean Piaget committed himself to studying the functions of the psyche’s general music competences. Other scholars, among which Johannella Tafuri, conducted in depth researches on the cognitive and perceptive processes that biologically arise from music intelligence. Perceptive and cognitive abilities start developing in the womb and progress up to late adolescence. There are many theories concerning musical intelligence and therefore also the exploitation of music as therapy. Children start to engage with music through their actions, while, for example exploring musical instrument using simple physical movements to get to know the object. Subsequently they understand that it is possible to create particular sounds with that object and therefore start creating sounds and listening to their creations. Edwin Gordon believes that the process with which humans learn music is the same as that used to learn how to speak. Indeed, he devised a system based on the evolutionary phases of a child. A child first listens to the sounds produced by a familiar voice – for example that of the mother – then he or she will start to sing, and later sing and play consciously. Only at the end of the process, Gordon asserts, the child is able to complete the acquisition of music through the grammar and syntax of music, which is exactly what happens with language acquisition at primary school. According to Gordon, it is essential for the child to develop a good “Audiation”; for Gordon, Audiation is for music what thought is for language. Francois Delalande noticed that contemporary musicians were creating music that was very close to the music a child would play. Starting from this consideration he realised the importance of the playful aspect in the process of music acquisition. Indeed, contemporary musicians have an original approach to making music and do what children would do, they embrace the recreational aspect of the process. This leads to Piaget’s cognitive psychology, which is based on three recreational phases during a play activity; playing makes it simple for children to learn the experiences and add them into their mental
schemes. The three phases are:
1- sensory-motor play, typical of first years of the child;
2- symbolic play, in which the objects are used as symbols of other objects;
3- rule-governed play, often played in a group. (Manarolo, 2011)
2. The problem

The term “catharsis” already existed in ancient times, and its notion as a need for purification has always been present in human beings all around the world and in every historical period. Some societies understood the positive potential of catharsis; others did not. The first part of this work explains how catharsis occurs when human beings “lose themselves”, while the second part aims at understanding when it could occur in the context of the actions of an ordinary life. Through catharsis, individuals have the possibility to observe their passions represented on stage, and consequently can distance themselves from them. Catharsis allows individuals to control the situation more objectively, “from a distance”. The task of the psychologist or psychotherapist is to release patients from their anxieties and help them become more self-aware and to be able to individuate and rationalise their problems. In the light of these considerations the connections with catharsis are clear.

It must be underlined that catharsis helps better understand what happens within oneself. This dissertation focuses mainly on this principle, based also on the acknowledgment that studies on catharsis are not exhaustive. Scheff (2007) denounces a lack of research in this subject and states that it would be interesting to further investigate if catharsis were defined independently of the arousing stimuli. The sociologist believes that the abandonment of the idea of catharsis in social/behavioural science is, on one hand, due to Freud’s influence in psychoanalysis, on the other, to the line of research in experimental social psychology that takes into account “catharsis aggression”. In both cases, according to Scheff (2007), it is the confusion on the concepts that fallaciously have led to abandon research on catharsis in these fields of study.

The experiences an individual has when watching a film, listening to a piece of music, or assiduously attending gym sessions are examples of modified states of consciousness and catharsis is a peculiar variety of this state of mind. Unlike other typologies of modified states of consciousness that generate an inner change in the subject, catharsis brings about an additional effect: it is therapeutic and regenerative. (Alam, 2013)

Several definitions and categories of catharsis are available for scholars to debate about, however, in Italy discussions regarding medical catharsis or magical catharsis, the latter being linked to religious ethics, are still rather scarce; the therapeutic power of philosophic-aesthetic catharsis is instead more likely to be considered. On the basis of the conditions previously exposed regarding catharsis as a modified state of consciousness frequently engendered through the stimulation of the mirror neurons and body-mind activity, it is inferable that this form of estrangement from reality can be engendered by art. It is precisely through the contemplation of art forms – created by the subject themselves or by others – that awareness of their own limits and emotional blocks can be improved, and deliverance of the latter can be accomplished.

Catharsis is an important theme in many scientific contemporary areas though perhaps it is more often named than actually analysed. The first approach to reasoning about catharsis was when I began to create art myself and take part in theatre performance and dance compositions. These personal experiences allowed me to get a glimpse of the enormous potential of this altered state of consciousness and sparked my investigation in the theme of catharsis.

My research lead me to understand that wherever there are or have been human beings there also is and has been some form of catharsis. Catharsis is a basic and fundamental form of self-
purification which is essential to evolve as humans beings, though often rejected by the predominant culture.

This research will appeal to art therapists, artists, and also to all those who are not experts in this field, as it does not merely analyse what catharsis meant in the past or what catharsis is considered in the very present. Indeed, this research wishes to serve as a path to better understand the possible therapeutic routes of catharsis, especially in the realm of arts therapies.

In western cultures catharsis is commonly considered as a phenomenon of the past but there are elements, in this research, that evidence that the need for catharsis is definitely very important also for the contemporary individuals.

Catharsis may appear to be the magical key that enables people to solve their problems, hence a positive therapeutic outcome (whether it is an artistic therapy or other therapy). Although it may seem unlikely, a theoretical debate on catharsis as the only means to attain the purpose of arts therapies has never been addressed before. Such lack of practice is particularly significant in Italy, where the experiences of Art Therapies appear to be quite disparate and fragmentary – there is no officially recognised association of chartered art therapists in Italy. With regard to arts therapies there are many schools of thought that follow different theories and practices without necessarily sharing the idea that the sole purpose pursued by the art therapist, irrespective of the method and the specific artistic medium employed, must be to help the patient attain catharsis.

Fragmentation also characterises the variety of professional skills and core qualities required of an art therapist, indeed, Italian professionals often appear to be specifically specialized in a single artistic channel rather than mastering a multidisciplinary approach that would favour the arising of catharsis for the patient.
3. The aims of the research

Clear and organised empirical information on the experience of catharsis hardly exists. It was thanks to personal experience that the thesis that catharsis and arts therapies are strictly related and linked came into existence. In order to support such thesis an in-depth investigation of the concept was carried out. This research examines catharsis within different contexts and different historical periods, in order to evidence its relevance and connection with arts therapies.

The aim of the research is to give recognition to the phenomenon of catharsis within arts therapies giving evidence of how the therapeutic efficacy of the arts therapies derives from the patient being able to experience catharsis.

This research was carried out for two main reasons: one was to highlight a lack of information within the literature regarding arts therapies, the other, to evidence how such substantial lacuna is likely to alter the practical implementation of arts therapies hindering their success.

A further aim of this dissertation is to improve the general concept of arts therapies and evidence that achieving catharsis can be considered the element that concatenates all forms of arts therapies, irrespective of the method or the medium adopted.
4. Qualitative phenomenological research

4.1 Method of the research

By comparing literature on the phenomenon of catharsis and analysing the many contexts in which catharsis has played and still plays an important role, recognition and definition was given to the phenomenon as belonging to both past and present human contexts.

Deriving evidence from the literature and sources that debate on catharsis, the research outlined how such phenomenon is a dissociative process that has been, and is still beneficial for human beings,
5. Discussion

An in-depth analysis of the literature and sources available have evidenced that there the Greek tragedy. The purpose of both was to keep at bay the dangerous and negative forces of vengeance, envy and disgust.

The ancient Greek represented their passions on stage in such way to maintain a composed situation in the reality. In the primordial societies the rituals included sacrificing a victim to satisfy the need to avenge and injury or wrong the participants suffered, which occurred in a controlled ritualistic space in order also to safeguard the perpetrators of the vile deeds. Be it a tragedy on stage, a religious ceremony or an institutionalised sacrificial ritual the feeling and passions are controlled by a set of ceremonial rules. In primordial societies, the sacred overlaps the profane and life of the tribe is regulated by both religious and civil rules. As in ancient Greece, in the primordial societies the sacred sphere is not neatly distinguished from the profane one. Both the sacred and profane ceremonies are conducted by celebrants, as well as by actors, dancers, musicians, etc. This concept is very similar to the contemporary idea of theatre – another reason why it is possible to assert that there is no difference between theatre and sacred rituals.

Following the line of reasoning of Garelli (2001) and analysing what has previously been mentioned it is possible to assert that there are a number of differences between the use of catharsis in the sacred rituals of the tribal societies and in the modern civilised societies. Over time the cathartic state – contrary to what happened in tribal societies – has become less present in western religious rituals. We need not go back too far in the past to realize how the cathartic state played a substantial role; one need consider merely a couple of generations before the current one to get an objective idea of the fact. Many religious ceremonies entailed rituals that are no longer performed, for example, the processions or collective rituals held in honour of saints or during sacred festivities. Of course this is not true for every religion – Buddhism or Islamism experience rituals and ceremonies differently; however referring the major religions of the West these changes are evident. Catharsis is to be found in various contexts, even if not officially recognised. If we think of catharsis the first image that arises is definitely not something related to spirituality and not contemporary – we associate it with tribal societies.

Following the considerations above mentioned, we now know that a ritual is a codified structure in which there is sequence of gestures to be performed. In a ritual there is a theatrical element, and communication occurs between the representatives of the real and of the symbolic realms. During a ritual, a cathartic moment usually takes place while the gestures are performed by the celebrant or by the participants. This happens because rituals belong to a context that different from ordinary life, but shared and profoundly felt by the participants – rituals are established in order to improve life conditions, but they act on a totally different level than ordinary life.

There are many similarities between Moreno’s psychodrama and some ritual moments of primordial societies, and this – without any doubt – evidences the connection with catharsis. In Sub-Saharan Africa, for example, there is the “palabre” ritual. During this ritual the whole family (‘family’ is meant here as an African would use this term, that is ‘the whole community’) partakes in the discussion on the community’s everyday problems. The symbol of this ritual is the Sankofa bird, where sankofa translates as "go back and get it", and is represented by a bird with its head turned backwards with an egg in its beak. This is a metaphor to express the importance of discussing about the past in order to build a better future.

Of course not all rituals end up arousing catharsis, this occurs only when the participants
are really involved’ in the ceremony. For the spectators of a football match catharsis is most likely to arise and also for people celebrating the New Year’s festivities, however such state does not occur, for example for those attending a graduation ceremony. For catharsis to happen the participants in the ceremony need to be totally focused on the event and this does not happen when it is a person other than oneself to present the dissertation. During the graduation ceremony the only and indisputable protagonist of the event is only the graduating student and all the other participants attend the ritual but are not participants, indeed, there is no exchange of gestures between the graduating student and the attendees. For these reasons the dissociative process of catharsis usually takes place in designated places during particular events. In these events there is usually an element of repetitiveness – there can however, be catharsis also if participants take part in a ceremony for the first time, therefore this perhaps is not an essential condition. Catharsis usually takes place when there are numerous participants – possibly also caused by mirror neurons – and when there is an exchange of feelings between the participants, or between the participants and an object.

Through the analysis of the sources, it is interestingly noticed that sometimes the same process is repeated in different types of activity. Nowadays individuals are normally occupied every day and have a variety of different hobbies. It is reasonable to think that such hobbies are beneficial thanks to their cathartic function/power. Western individuals live in a society in which emotions and their manifestation are not recognised as legitimate. There is no institutionalised place whose only aim is to arouse feelings – as instead existed in ancient Greece. However, people need to express their emotions and sensations, and normally manage to do so in recreational contexts. Theatres are the recognised place where people can be entertained and benefit from the recreational and cultural elements of the experience. It is however, not officially recognised as a place where something is performed simply to help raise self-awareness in the spectators. A similar situation can be noticed at the cinema theatre too: nobody thinks of it as a place where a cathartic state can experienced but rather as a place where people are simply entertained.

There are, as explained in this research, many significant activities that can link individuals to their subconscious, for example relaxation techniques or concentrating on breathing, but in this paragraph I would like to focus on other ways to connect to one’s subconscious. In particular I am referring to those cases in which it is possible to shape one’s subconscious through the physical movements and gesture an individual performs. Triggered by the movement of one’s body their ego and body react and one should be totally ‘in’ the movement, that is, to experience it profoundly. This is the process in dancing therapy, which also replicates the catharsis phases.

Unfortunately, following my research, I have come to believe that there are some dissociative states that can lead people who are seeking for their identity into an unreal parallel world, which is not the inner world of the subject, but rather an additional world. These ‘false’ cathartic states can be truly dangerous for some individuals who, at an unconscious level, are pursuing an ‘authentic’ cathartic state. Such dissociative states occur in events which are ‘out of control’, that is to say, not manageable by the subject who is pursuing them. One of these ‘risky’ dissociative states for the person is that brought about by the use of drugs as a diversion and very differently from their purpose in the primordial cultures; as an expedient to escape the daily routine or to avoid feeling sorrow. Drug use in western societies is not limited merely to the ‘recreational’ sphere. Many people take drugs, medicines or psychiatric drugs to improve their work performances. This kind of drug use does not have the purpose of achieving a modified extraordinary conscience state, but rather affirming one’s own real and daily conscience, hence it does not generate catharsis. The use of drugs, both legal, namely alcohol, tobacco, coffee, anxiolytics and antidepressants, and illegal, is felt as answer to the need of modifying one’s own ‘ordinary’ consciousness, in order to no longer feel it, to escape from ‘the uneasiness of regular life’ and from
the ordinary sorrow of life. This response is mainly offered by the pharmaceutical industry, which with a profit-making business has imposed the ideology that medicine leads to wellbeing – as the answer to sorrow as well as a way to improve the ordinary state of mind.

Regarding my reasoning on the role of art and the artists, I believe the artist brings about a sort of censorship – they tell a story or an event in a disguised manner, and this makes the work of art more profound and definitely more interesting. Realising this ability to censor while also showing through, artists adopt a very personal style that becomes the vital essence of the work of art; an action that will remain forever in art. And it is thanks to the objective characteristics of style that the relation with art is made up of an attractive connection between the work of art – and therefore the private sphere of the artists – and the audience, which means the personality of every single spectator. Thanks to the style, a reciprocal exchange of sensations and feelings becomes is possible. The style of a work of art is the visual element that reveals the personal functions of the mind – it is not the manifestation of the artists’ psychic past times. Thanks to the style it is possible to notice those psychical ways that materialize content. It is for this reason that there are various styles: the subjective style, in which the author’s ego is prevalent; the objective style, characterised by the use of the 3rd person singular; the realistic style, often the sign that the creator needs to control his or her reality; the abstract style, which is the opposite of the realistic one. The work of art is the expressive means of the “repair method”, a way to solve psychic problems, but the style is the real help to control the effects of the trauma.

At the end of my current research, I think only the moment in which individuals feel safe, when they feel completely free, that is as a moment of pure catharsis. The same thing happens in the identification process – actors know that they are acting, and that it is not real life, therefore totally pour themselves into their performance, even if they are aware they are merely acting a scene. Both the actors and the spectators identify with the different characters in the play, but at the same time they know that there is a distance between their own identity and the fictions one belonging to the characters – they can feel joy, sorrow, anger with them without losing their real identity; they do not run any personal risk. This could be the reason why the most theatre therapy is indebted to the experimental theatre. As already outlined in the previous chapters the focus of experimental theatre, is on the actors and on their role and not on the performance, and on helping to achieve catharsis.

But as analysed, catharsis could be – or it is universally considered to be – the final objective of many areas: theatre, figurative and abstract art, cinema, play, tribal rites, certain western rites and hobbies, and some practices of therapy.

Reading the literature on catharsis I have investigated, I noticed that many authors use other terms rather than the word catharsis, though, despite the differences in terminology, the descriptions of all the experiences evidence a basic similarity: all the scholars agrees on the fact that humans use cognitive methods to solve their personal problems but they also agree that problems first arise at an emotional level, and only later at a cognitive level.

The process of pain shows the healing process of an emotional expression; in contrast, an emotional problem due to post-traumatic stress disorder shows, for example, how the emotional expression can be delayed.

Cathartic processes and cognition processes are human actions that are projected towards change; they are part of the process of natural self-healing and are important aspects in the evolution of the individuals, aspects that allow them to remain in peace with himself. The task of an art therapist (like that of any type of therapist) is to support and guide these natural processes: if catharsis is
achieved then the therapist is can support and can help the patient understand what is happening. Nichols and Zax (1977) describe catharsis as the blend of two components: the emotional part (which is the expression of emotions) and the cognitive part (which is the memory of the forgotten material).

This hypothesis is the negation of believes devised by Scheff (1979), in fact, he considers memories (therefore, the cognitive aspect) as useless for catharsis. I tend towards the same reasoning: our body and our mind have all the resources to regenerate their structure even without a conscious immediate awareness of a memory. I think it is possible that memories may reappear after a very long time through a cathartic experience and that catharsis may not be completed immediately (for example, even if the awareness of the link between a cathartic emotional discharge and a given event is conscious, the emotional discharge may still reappear in other contexts or therapy sessions).

Catharsis is only the result of pulling down the defences against the expression of emotions. In fact, catharsis can only exist when a subject decides to lose his or her rational self-control. The patient of the art therapist must, in fact, become free: arts therapies must help this process to take liberty and facilitate catharsis.

As a result of my previous research, arts therapies can be regarded as effective only because they allow for catharsis to occur. It is my belief that if I, as an “artist”, work hard to create an artistic object this will become powerful and important from a therapeutic point of view. This will be possible only if I am able to block out the flux of thinking, so as to allow my real ego to control the creation act.

Basically, the artistic creation is a dissociating process that can lead to catharsis only if it is total. Only then does it acquire an enormous therapeutic power. There are different fields that establish the success of the dissociation process. Of course, the success in the specific case of the analysis firstly depends on the professionalism of the art therapist and secondarily, on the setting in which the arts therapies process take place. For Guinagh (1987) and I agree with him, the consequence of catharsis is central to reducing tension: surprisingly the only therapy that does not mention a reduction of tension as a result of catharsis is that of Breuer and Freud. They report that the symptoms of patients disappear, but they do not describe any reduction in tension.

Two aspects in the therapeutic procedure seem essential: re-exposure (careful, gradual) and safe setting. For example, a therapist or a friend can have the person who is having a cathartic experience be safe. The re-enactment of a strong experience must take place in safe conditions and this can also add a positive aspect to the experience. The positive experience in a safe environment can decrease progressively and eventually eliminate the previous negative experience. From a therapeutic point of view, it is necessary to avoid re-experience as a re-traumatization.

Therefore an ideal distance is essential for the healing process. The distance can be reached by mediums that will gradually and carefully restart in therapeutic environments, utilizing art-related components as in our specific arts therapies cases: music, drama, play etc. (Alam, 2013)

After a few sessions of arts therapies in which my patients experienced catharsis, I noticed that my patients had other types of experiences as well, in fact they felt more at peace with the world surrounding them, they pleasantly felt the need to share their experience and felt more aware of their own history. Three other experiences more were notices: connecting with others, releasing emotional memories, and retrieving their own story.

Similar things, also given in Milne's writings (2006), occurred with my patients, even when the catharsis originated from an art object created by another person.
This process of cathartic dissociation starts from an already existing artistic object that particularly relevant for the spectator. Also in this case, for catharsis to be successful the setting and the professionalism of the art therapist are essential elements.

Of course catharsis is the ultimate purpose of arts therapies for the distinctive character that makes them what they are. During a fruitful session of arts therapies, patients must feel free to express whatever they want through the artistic medium of their choice. In the light of the analysis of the sources on catharsis and of the practical examples of catharsis cited in this research, it is possible to state that catharsis in arts therapies is precisely the recognition and legitimation of the healing power of art for a person who is able to use art to reach a dissociative cathartic state. Thanks to the aid of an arts therapist, therapy can integrate the cathartic state of the patient. In fact, arts therapists have to follow up the cathartic state with a moment of self-analysis and self-consciousness on the part of the patients themselves, helping them analyse and understand what has happened to them and about the psycho-physical repercussions that derive from the newly outlined cathartic state.

Personally I believe that the preambles from which one can start the arts therapies are decisive: in every experience I have had I adopted two basic principles: respect and honesty. If the therapy lacks these two basic principles, a positive outcome of the arts therapies process is very unlikely.

Respect and honesty are necessary first of all for the therapist, as when one initiates an arts therapies, they begin a new relationship with their personal ego too. A direct confrontation with the deeper levels of the ego without an honest and respectful relationship between oneself and their present and past experiences that have formed the personal ego is not possible.

Of course, honesty and respect are essential also in the relationship with other colleagues in the arts therapies sessions. Whatever happens during an arts therapies session must not be questioned or diminished. There is nothing wrong and everything is correct and useful toward the goal of the therapy if it is honest and respectful of the patient and the other figures involved in the therapy.

A further important aspect to bear in mind in a true arts therapies project is to underline the protagonism of the patient. It is the patient that creates his or her own therapy, even though helped and driven by the art therapist: catharsis is a process that starts from the inside and occurs if it is helped by the external elements of the ego.

In order to facilitate this process of consciousness regarding the central role of oneself and the personal protagonism, together with my patients I wrote a sort of list of “rules” to be respected during the arts therapies sessions. This method turned out to be very useful because it underlined the importance of respect and of the conditions in which the therapy was to take place.

Furthermore, it was really efficient because it underlined the equality, the equal level of the art therapist and the patients (even maintaining the focus on the role). The need for respect was decisive for the efficiency of my projects, especially when I worked with the more “unstable and unpredictable” patients, during my experience in Mestre where I work with homeless and in Gorizia in the C.S.M. (psychiatric daycare centre). In both cases, there were patients that explained their impressions about the positive and satisfying structure of the “setting” and the laboratories of arts therapies.
Here are the impressions expressed by a few patients at the C.S.M.

“*I feel confortable when I’m here*”,

“When we come here we leave indifference outside”.

“This work helps us to be aware. It helps to go out of the routines. It teaches that routine doesn’t exist because we are different in every moment.”

“*Art, theatre and everything give us boost. We need to feel this boost but sometimes we can’t because of depression.*

*We are crazy but we are just like all the other people, even if out there they don’t consider us as people. […] We have a whole world inside and it doesn’t come out because of the society. For this reason we are ill. Maybe the real crazy are the others, those out there, because they aren’t honest.*”

I want to conclude my dissertation with a thought by my current employer, a 100% disabled person who communicates through a computer thanks to the Facilitated Communication System.

“*Art can push you forward into another world, help you to feel alive and better understand things about your life.*” (Pellegrini, 2016)

I do think that even today a lot of people are still not clearly conscious about the importance of the arts therapies, and this is unfortunate. They still are not able to clearly see how catharsis and therapy could help the humans. Regardless I place great hope in this field and do particularly believe in the willpower of art therapists. They can and must be the vehicle that allows more and more people to discover the enormous potential of catharsis through art. Following a cathartic experience individuals are often more rational and are able to make better decisions.
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