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Freedom Games: Gadamer vs. Winnicott – Approaches to Play

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The subject of this article is the examination of the topic of the freedom of the individual who uses play in therapy. The reference to the subject is built in a manner analogous to an interpretive point of view, and examines both therapeutic and literary texts. The subject is addressed by examining the philosophical and psychoanalytic issues at hand, focusing primarily on the complex relationship between the patient (the author of the text) and the therapist (his interpreter). The main question examined in this paper is: what is the definition of freedom, in the context of the individual who uses play in therapy? Additional relevant questions include: what is the relationship between the understanding of the therapeutic text and the intended message of the author? Is the author / the patient aware of all of the interpretations of his work, or does the interpreter / therapist have a better understanding of these meanings? Does the topic of the text in fact have only one meaning, which must be decoded or revealed; or does the interpretation change, depending on the therapist?

In this paper, I attempt to clarify what insights might be gained regarding the freedom of the patient in play therapy, by comparing the concepts introduced by the philosopher Georg Gadamer to the philosophy of the analyst Donald Winnicott. The process of comparison will be based on the terms defined by Foucault (2002), and an explanation provided for the choice of these terms as a method relevant to the examination of the freedom of the playing man.

The conclusions of this article address three issues that may inhibit freedom: (1) the attempt to use the patient's biography in order to connect texts which he presents during therapy; (2) ignoring the structure of the text and the conditions that enable the patient to reach an understanding independently; (3) the attempt to reach a definitive interpretation of the meaning of the patient's texts presented during therapy. Finally, an updated definition will be presented for the concept of play in therapy which expresses freedom; and the transitional space will be defined as an aletheic space.

Keywords: freedom, play, drama therapy, psychoanalysis, hermeneutics

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