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# Psychoanalysis, fiction, and cure: between Fields Theory and Theory of Aesthetic Response<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** This study intends to propose a reflection on the power of literature and the human need for fiction based on a first dialogue between Fabio Herrmann's Fields Theory and Wolfgang Iser's Theory of Aesthetic Response. We seek to outline some links between the status assigned to fiction in Herrmann's work and the discussion in Iser's work about fiction and imagination, which leads to a literary anthropology. This is an initial study that points to future research from Herrmann's idea of literature as an analogue of psychoanalysis. We propose, therefore, that the Theory of Aesthetic Response is a theoretical possibility for grounding that idea.

**Keywords:** psychoanalysis, literature, Fields Theory, Herrmann, Iser.

*A man is never so himself as when he intends to impersonate the other. (Herrmann, 1999a, p. 220)*

Readers commonly attribute a therapeutic function to the act of reading a literary text, and its repairing nature has been widely recognized over time. For instance, we can think about the role that literature has played for so many deportees in Nazi camps, in the Armenian genocide, and in the Stalinist exile, as Petit points out (2006). A good example of this is the moving testimony of Semprun (2002) about what he went through on the deathbed of Maurice Halbwachs in the Buchenwald concentration camp. Semprun, panicked by the impending death of his Sorbonne professor, and eager to invoke any God or prayer that could accompany him in agony, with trembling voice, but trying to dominate it, recites verses of Baudelaire: "*o mort vieux capitaine, Il est temps, levons l'ancre...*"

The look of Halbwachs becomes less faded and seems surprising. Semprun keeps reciting and, when he reaches "*... nos coeurs que tu connais sont remplis de rayons...*" he notices a feeble shiver on the lips of the dying man, which outlines a smile. And Halbwachs "smile, agonizing, with a fraternal look on me," Semprun completes (Semprun, 2002, p. 36).

How to explain the power of literature? Why do human beings need fiction; this pretense that is literature? To think about this issue, this study proposes starting a first dialogue between Fabio Herrmann's Fields Theory and Wolfgang Iser's Theory of Aesthetic Response, seeking to outline some links between the status assigned to fiction in

Herrmann's work and the discussion in Iser's work about fiction and imagination that leads to a literary anthropology.

Herrmann's entire work seems to reflect the importance the author assigns to the heuristic power of fiction, and this is why he considers it useful to the work of psychoanalysts, either in their clinical listening or their writing. For the author, Literature is the analogue of Psychoanalysis, which means that fiction plays the same role in Psychoanalysis as mathematics does in Physics. This idea, widely demonstrated by him when he analyzed the Freudian work, is heavily present in his own writing. In several of his books, he presents us with delicious exploratory fictions of the human abysses, such as in *O divâ a passeio*, *A psique e o eu*, and *A infância de Adão e outras ficções freudianas*. In these books, the author, in possession of the interpretive method (the field rupture), digs up and develops different issues that are important to the work of the analyst.

In his critique of the current state of psychoanalysis, Herrmann (2002) recognizes the enormous disproportion between Freudian work and that of his successors, especially in relation to its heuristic nature, and assigns this fact to the difficulty that analysts have in distinguishing method from theory and practice. For the author, psychoanalysis will only reach the autonomy of a complete science if and when it can differentiate its method from practices and theories, and use it in a way that suits it. Still noting the discrepancy between Freudian production and that of his successors, Herrmann draws attention to Freud's writing and concludes there is a thought in it that belongs to literature, and that psychoanalysis itself, its analysts, and patients are fictional products of that thought.

Herrmann reiterates this criticism about the sameness of psychoanalysis and the emphasis given to fiction in the theorization of the analyst throughout his extensive work, while defending the development of

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psychoanalysis as a strong candidate to the position of scientific theory of the soul, strategically placed between Philosophy, Psychology, Medicine, and Literature, and notes that psychoanalysis still does not occupy the whole space reserved for it by right and origin, not filling the horizon of its vocation.

In this sense, for psychoanalysis to meet its *vocation* and *horizon*, Herrmann (1999b) proposes three basic points to be achieved: 1 – a rigorous recovery of the psychoanalytic method, which after Freud was confused with clinical treatment; 2 – a generalization of metapsychological theories, so that they can handle not only the individual psychic conditions, but the real human ones; 3 – and finally that the spectrum of topics that are considered psychoanalytic can be broadened, that are today limited almost only to topics already treated personally by Freud.

Two derivations come from the psychoanalytic method (field rupture), and their acceptance is not always seen in a good light. The first of them concerns the recognition of the study object of psychoanalysis, that is, the psychoanalytic man. The psychoanalytic man, for not being a concrete man, but that of a fiction, induces the acceptance of fiction within psychoanalysis. The second derivation forces us to consider the amount of ignorance that the field rupture leaves uncovered. Our knowledge is always temporary and partial, built and rebuilt every session with our patient or with any other framework of the real human on which the analyst looks.

In fact, Herrmann's fictional speculation is broad and complex (indeed, as even he acknowledges that Freud's was) and occurs both from clinical and theory, as well as from different frameworks of the real human, which of course this study will not explore. However, there is in particular a extremely useful notion for the scope of this study, because it discusses exactly the issue of fiction, both in its heuristic and cure aspect. It is the notion of passion for disguise, an idea that, although present throughout his work, deserved a long and thought-provoking theoretical/fictional essay entitled "A paixão do disfarce" (Herrmann, 1999a).

## II

Herrmann (1999a) illustrates his notion of disguise referring to the Homeric figure of Ulysses. Ulysses, according to him, suffered a passion for disguise. He goes through all Odyssey disguising himself, denying his name, and pretending to be someone else. To illustrate this passion of Ulysses, Herrmann resumes the passage in which the hero and his companions are imprisoned by the Cyclops, the one-eyed giant. The giant, before consolidating his intentions, wants to know the name of the leader, promising a reward for such information. Odysseus pretends to agree, but disguises himself by saying he is called Nobody. The Cyclops then reveals his intentions and the promised prize: eating all and leaving Ulysses to the end, as a reward. The

Greeks then offer wine to the Cyclops, who did not know it was wine, becomes drunk and blind in his single eye. In desperation, the giant calls his friends: "Nobody is killing me." "Nobody has betrayed me." But his friends ignore him and think him crazy. Thus, everyone is saved by getting away from the cave disguised under the Cyclops' rams.

In the Homeric adventure reported here, there are two disguises: hiding under the giant's sheep and Ulysses lying about his name, saying he is called Nobody. Both were useful because they saved Ulysses from death. However, his lie in saying he is called Nobody is superior and economic in relation to the other because it is linguistic, for Ulysses takes the grammatical place of subject of a negative sentence: "Nobody has betrayed me." And, although every disguise creates a negative sentence about his own identity to the extent that pretending to be the other he affirms not being who he is, that used by Ulysses – hiding in a pronounced negative – is paradigmatic because it fixes forever the meaning of the disguise and of the passion for it. Herrmann then concludes:

In the sanctuary of a sentence that denies him, the man is protected from death and the unhappiness of his condition, as the actor is behind the character: this can suffer and die, the actor survives him untouched. This paramount "no," which saves him from misfortune and death, at least in imagination, will be endlessly repeated by every man, after Ulysses and Homer; their first condition, it is necessary to agree, lies in the passage from concrete existence to existence in language, which also leads us to conclude that the guise of Ulysses is fascinating because it represents the very language, fiction especially, with its power to create eternities, illusions, more durable and perfect beings than that in real life. (Herrmann, 1999a, p. 150)

Herrmann teaches that the passion of disguise revives the inaugural experience of identity creation and that it has its origin in the original lie, a process by which the psychological subject is created. In the words of the author:

In the process of creating the psychic subject, successive representations always take shape as a product of an original lie that dialectically surpasses the need, partially denying it, but preserving it within the new formation – desire. Such representations of the subject and the world – different versions of the mouth-bosom meeting, of thermal or painful sensations and the corresponding care, of children's wishes and maternal love, or of prolonged, desperate lack – are settled as fields of the child psyche, which develop without a final synthesis. A recognizable psychological tendency to represent oneself, as the best form of defense, comes from the fact that each representation brings

a certain amount of pleasure. There will remain, in the child and in the adult, a passion so strong as amorous or destructive passions, the passion of disguise. (Herrmann, 2001, p. 145)

Herrmann gives the disguise great “dignity and importance” because it represents a new step in the rupture with the *siege of things*, because, through it, the shackles of identity and the usual world break. Thus, the guise is not only defensive, but “a repetition, in the new version, of the act of self-creation through the *original lie*. . . . the guise is something more than just protection, is a disguised return to the source of identity formation.” Therefore, he recognizes that, when repeating the original process of formation of the “I,” the act of disguising is closer to the true self of the subject than the everyday identity he shows. And concluding: “Thus, the man who disguises is retrieving a most essential faculty that is apparently lost forever: the firstborn act of his life as an intentional being” (Herrmann, 1999a, pp. 161-162).

A concept of psychoanalytic cure according to the Fields Theory seems useful in this discussion. Wondering about the cure in psychoanalysis, Herrmann (1991) points out that the cure is not the final stage of the treatment, but its own course. For the author, “cured, the man is cured from desire,” and “being cured from desire is taking care of it, which always inspires care.” (Herrmann, 1991: 300). In this perspective, curing from desire is not an act of possession or control, but the possibility of a new position before desire. More desire to mellow than to eradicate or fix, curing indicates the precise position of the man who takes care of desire, “because it reflects the uncertainty of the subject of this action: it is not the radical subject of consciousness, but his crisis – torn between subjugating desire and being subjugated by it” (Herrmann, 1991, p. 301).

The movement towards healing and the analytical process restore the historical unity of the patients, “not so much for changing their opinion about the past, but for bringing the lost construction strength back to the current historical course” (Herrmann, 1991, p. 305). Because, having lived in the transference field and in the presence of the analyst, the symptomatic repetition loses its isolated nature, allowing the emergence of the symptom meaning, showing its field, which can now be broken.

And the rupture field promotes two effects: on the one hand, it makes it possible for the subject to do without his symptom, and, on the other, to try the confrontation between successive little known forms of being and realities that he feared testing. In other words, the passage from concrete existence to existence in language allows people to find themselves in endless possible lives. Continuing, Herrmann proposes:

Several possibilities are tested, some of which may prove to be effective and relevant, enriching the common life. It is the transit through possibilities that causes changes. The transit between new

versions of the past changes his own future, placing the subject in a conditional tense (future of the past), which is typical of the Psychoanalytic Man. (Herrmann, 1991, p. 305)

### III

Wolfgang Iser's theory of aesthetic response won international renown as part of the Constance School, with Iser and Hans-Robert Jauss being its main representatives. Strongly influenced by Husserl's phenomenology, by Ingarden's aesthetics, and Gadamer's hermeneutics, this theory aimed to radically change the conceptualization and orientation of literary studies, of theory and criticism and, more broadly, of interpretation and reading. (Schwab, 1999). According to Iser, his theory of aesthetic response is complementary to reception aesthetics, and both trends together correspond to the full realization of the reader-response criticism.

This new theory emerges as a reaction to historical circumstances and as a criticism to classical approaches to literary study, to the extent that these were insufficient to understand modern literature, and in it the pursuit of authorial intent has been replaced by the examination of the impact that a literary text was able to exert in a potential receiver. And, no longer focusing on the identification of the message of the work, it focused its attention to what, since then, is called text processing. Its study focus starts to consider what happens to the text during the act of reading and the relationship between author, text, and reader.

Based on this paradigm shift, represented by the reader-response criticism, Iser prefers to analyze a problem inherent in a theory of aesthetic response, namely: the fundamental asymmetry between text and reader and its results, which leads him, throughout his work, to propose a literary anthropology. According to him, “what language says is transcended by what it reveals, and what is revealed represents its true meaning” (Iser, 1980, p. 142).

By accepting that the text needs to be processed by the reader, the interval between text and reader acquires crucial importance. And, as no story can be completely told, the text itself has gaps and blanks that need to be negotiated in the act of reading. Such negotiation attenuates the asymmetry between text and reader and narrows the gap between them, to the extent that, through this activity, the text is transferred to the reader. As the structure of the text consists of certain segments interconnected by undetermined connections, the textual pattern reveals itself as a game, an interaction between what is expressed and what is not. The non-expressed boosts the activity of meaning construction, but under the control of the expressed, which also develops when the reader produces the indicated meaning. Thus, the meaning of the text results from a resumption or appropriation of the experience that the text has triggered and that readers assimilate and control according to their inclinations. Therefore, the reading proposal formulated by Iser is a work of interpretation, or

even meaning construction, held by the reader, although prefigured by the structure of the literary text.

Conceived in this way, the reader's relationship with the text is complex and "undetermined," in a game of fill in the blanks and denials. "The gaps and denials give the fictional text a characteristic density, revealing unexpressed traits through omissions and cancellations. To the text an unformulated, unwritten dimension corresponds to the formulated and verbalized text" (Iser, 1999: 31). Iser calls this "doubling" of the text a negativity, recognizing that it constitutes a fundamental boost in literary communication.

Iser (1999) also recognizes that negativity creates a process of determination that only the reader is able to supply, which gives a subjective theme to the meaning of the text. However, it also gives productivity to the meaning, since every choice made needs to be steady, in contrast to countless others that have been excluded. Continuing, he proposes:

Such possibilities arise both from the text and the peculiar inclinations of the reader: the text allows different options, the specific trends of the reader, different insights. And, as there is not a specific meaning of the text, this apparent shortcoming is actually the productive matrix that makes a meaningful text, which allows it to make sense in different historical contexts. (Iser, 1999, p. 33)

To investigate what literature can say about ourselves, and to understand the human self-interpretation that is done through literature, Iser recognizes as necessary outlining a new heuristics that could be sustained by human inclinations that, at the same time, could constitute literature. He recognizes this foundation both in fiction and imagination, since the two phenomena exist as human experience – either because we overcome what we are through lies and dissimulation or because we live our fantasies during daydreams, dreams, and hallucinations –, and constitute literature. But the author will also propose that what characterizes literature is the organized articulation of the fictional and imaginary in a complex game of possibilities. And, from this game, literature emerges.

With these ideas as the foundation, Iser develops a literary anthropology in which the act of reading is done as staging. For the author, the staging is more an anthropological mode than a cognitive category and is "a mode that gets its full function when knowledge and experience, while production modes of worlds, reach their limits. Because staging refers to states of things that can never acquire full presence" (Iser, 1996, p. 358). Thus, in literature, as the author thinks, "staging makes the extraordinary plasticity of human beings conceivable..." (Iser, 1996, p. 357). And in this scenario that is literature, the act of duplicating oneself through fiction creates a performative space in which humans can stage the

difference between "being who they are" and "having themselves."

Iser still proposes: "Staging is the tireless effort of the human being to confront himself. Staging allows, through simulations, shaping the transient of the possible and controlling the continuous revelation of human beings in their possible otherness" (Iser, 1996, p. 363).

#### IV

We now resume to the questions of the beginning – What is the power of literature? Why do human beings need fiction? –, and to the intention of this study in outlining an answer that can advance this reflection through a dialogue between Fabio Herrmann's Fields Theory and Iser's Theory of Aesthetic Response.

The fact that both theories are concerned with the power of literature and the human need for fiction justifies this intention, although each develops its research in different fields: one in Psychoanalysis and the other in Literary Criticism. Thus, without ignoring the difficulties of this enterprise imposed by the complexity of both thoughts and by the narrow space of this study's scope, we here develop something in that direction, proposing a dialogue between both.

To begin, we draw attention to the coincidence of the rise of both thoughts around the 60s and 70s of the last century, to their eminently critical position, and to their refusal in reifying concepts. Such issues deserve to be better explored, as does the belief that the roots of both thoughts came from the same source.

If one accepts that literature is the analogue of Psychoanalysis, as Herrmann teaches, a theory about literature will be indispensable; not any theory, but one that has an opening, a common field for dialogue, which we propose to find in Iser's theory. In addition, although it is not the case to develop this issue here, in both we can recognize a phenomenological basis, the use of operational concepts and negativity, thus avoiding the reification of their concepts.

Thus, the first point to be developed is that the place that the Theory of Aesthetic Response assigns to the reader – this being that requires the staging that literature offers – might be occupied by the man of passion for disguise of Fields Theory. Iser states that

human beings can only get out of themselves by perpetual self-unfolding, their possibilities cannot have a previously given form, because that would mean imposing preexisting standards to such an unfolding. But as these possibilities are not given in advance, they must be acquired through a staging that goes beyond such realities. (Iser, 1996, p. 77)

The man of passion for disguise, also, only finds himself in the multiplicity of disguises that he puts on. For Herrmann (1999a), the disguise is much more than a simple defensive measure; it is a return, a staging, perhaps

in a new version, to the source of identity formation. The disguise, in repeating the original lie, denies something that it preserves transformed.

Another point that reinforces this hypothesis is approaching the concept of negativity – that, for Iser, grounds the work of the reader by filling in gaps and playing with the denials of the text – to the unconscious. Not a substantiated unconscious, or closed in determination, which the author himself refuses to do, but that of the concept of field, or relative unconscious, as the Fields Theory proposes: unconscious that is, but does not exist, and that produces. In this case, a field, or relative unconscious, is also implied as belonging to the text.

Another point worth considering is attempting an approach between the concept of staging that fiction allows, and that of transference or transferential field as a space in which the analytical game takes place. In the transferential field, a place where one lives the analytical game, we are also many and live in different realities. In it “we are looking for a historical reality. . . . and we find this reality in the transference, without having to believe that everything that happens in life refers to the analyst, and not having to force his world into the session” (Herrmann, 1991, p. 297). Continuing the discussion, Herrmann (1991) points out that this world is already there in its entirety, being the purpose of interpretation putting it on stage, “unveiling in the patient’s speech the metaphorical description of his present condition, commemorated synthesis of the history of neurosis and of everyday life” (Herrmann, 1991, p. 297).

Herrmann (1991) claims that the transferential field is a experience of History. He stresses the importance of distinguishing between remembering and recollecting. If remembering has no curing value, recollecting may have. And recollecting does not entirely depend on remembering. Recollecting means “returning to the heart, in the sense of the Psychoanalytic Field, heading for the emotionally relevant “us” of our own history” (Herrmann, 1991, p. 298). And, in this transferential game, the analyzed recollects, bringing the important scenes of his history to the heart:

for then trying several combinatorial options of their meanings. In these combinations, the celebration of trauma enters repeatedly in crisis, and the analyst conducts experiences of alternative histories that surround the patient of a total history. This is the crucial difference between symptomatic celebration and psychoanalytic commemoration. (Herrmann, 1991: 298)

Such as the act of reading, which duplicates the subject through fiction (creating a performative space in which humans can stage the difference between “being who they are” and “having themselves”), the psychoanalysis duplicates the subject – who can express himself through language – through the transferential game.

Although these three points, only touched upon in this initial study, deserve greater deepening, and instigate

continuing reflection, their consideration seems to confirm the dimension of cure that belongs to literature. When we duplicate ourselves through fiction, we are dissolving ourselves to escape from the prison of historical, cultural, or psychological determinations. It cures man of his insufficiency of being that is mortal and desirous at the same time.

## V

Finally, we recall one of the last meetings [of the first author of this article] with Fabio Herrmann, who was already very ill and near the end. That day she heard from him, in answer to her question “How are you?,” the following: “Each day is a day. At night, the stars!” Perhaps, with these words, Fabio was expressing his anguish at being on the verge of death. But the thinker of the Fields Theory, a logical and lucid critic of psychoanalysis, was also putting in motion what is at the core of his theory: the interpretive method, the field rupture. And, surely, the Poet communed with what Octavio Paz has taught us:

Poetry is knowledge, salvation, power, abandonment. With an operation able to change the world, the poetic activity is revolutionary by nature; a spiritual exercise, it is a method of internal release. Poetry reveals this world, creates another. . . . Invitation to travel; return to the homeland. . . . Supplication to the void, dialogue with the absence . . . (Octavio Paz; 1996, p. 13)

With his answer “Each day is a day. At night, the stars,” Fabio opened other possibilities of meaning to the naive question “How are you?,” and, at the same time, added another meaning to the list of Octavio Paz: poetry and literary fiction can also be field rupture, and this is their curing power.

In this situation, in response to his own criticism on the omission of creativity that affects the field of psychoanalysis, Herrmann (2006) suggests the invention of an epistemology with the size of this field. When we resume his idea on literature as an analogue of psychoanalysis here, suggesting the approach with Iser’s Theory of Aesthetic Response, we propose an initial step for discussions regarding the invention of such an epistemology in future research. The essential character of fiction in the analytical field pervades its main lines of force, which brings up the need for a theory about literature that grounds an analogous for psychoanalysis, as mathematics is to physics. Therefore, literature, as a solution to the epistemological problem about which science corresponds to psychoanalysis, makes it possible to find a place of fictional creation to the extent of psychoanalysis. Before epistemologists raise their voices, we must say that “fiction does not mean false, it is not even scientifically less, but rather inserted in a kind of truth that is peculiar to literature, which is generally more appropriate for understanding man than regular science itself” (Herrmann, 2006, p. 63).

At the same time, such an approach allows a glimpse into the power of literature and its repairing character. We elaborate all we have inherited from previous generations, because our human condition depends on legacies and our ability to continue producing. When the reader produces a new meaning before the literary text, showing the provisional character of knowledge, he creates something similar to the cure: a field rupture. Thus, literature as a

human production allows a positioning of the subject before what he essentially does not know, unveiling a intrinsic knowledge that we do not know how or why determines our actions and thoughts.

Finally, we suggest future research from Herrmann's idea of literature as an analogue of psychoanalysis, proposing the Theory of Aesthetic Response as a theoretical possibility for grounding that idea.

### **Psicanálise, ficção e cura: entre a Teoria dos Campos e a Teoria do Efeito Estético**

**Resumo:** A intenção deste trabalho é propor uma reflexão sobre a potência da literatura, a necessidade humana de ficção a partir de um primeiro diálogo entre a Teoria dos Campos, de Fabio Herrmann, e a Teoria do Efeito Estético, de Wolfgang Iser. Procura-se esboçar algumas articulações entre o estatuto atribuído à ficção na obra de Herrmann e a discussão na obra de Iser sobre a ficção e o imaginário que desemboca em uma antropologia literária. Trata-se de um trabalho inicial que aponta para futuras pesquisas a partir da ideia de Herrmann da literatura como análoga à psicanálise, por isso, propõe-se a Teoria do Efeito Estético como possibilidade teórica para a fundamentação dessa ideia.

**Palavras-chave:** psicanálise, literatura, Teoria dos Campos, Herrmann, Iser.

### **Psychanalyse, fiction et guérison: entre la Théorie des Champs et la Théorie de l'Effet Esthétique**

**Résumé:** Le but de cet article est de proposer une réflexion sur le pouvoir de la littérature, le besoin humain de fiction à partir d'un premier dialogue entre la Théorie des Champs développé par Fabio Herrmann et la Théorie de l'Effet Esthétique développée par Wolfgang Iser. Nous voulions tirer des liens entre le statut donné à la fiction dans l'œuvres de Herrmann et la discussion sur les travaux de Iser à propos de la fiction et l'imaginaire qui se jette dans une anthropologie littéraire. Cet article, qui pointe au début de la recherche future de l'idée de Herrmann sur la littérature comme un analogue de la psychanalyse, il est proposé, par conséquent, la Théorie de l'Effet Esthétique qu'une possibilité théorique qui sous-tend cette idée.

**Mots-clés:** psychanalyse, littérature, Théorie des Champs, Herrmann, Iser.

### **El psicoanálisis, la ficción y la cura: entre la Teoría de los Campos y Teoría del Efecto Estético**

**Resumen:** La intención de este trabajo es proponer una reflexión sobre el poder de la literatura, la necesidad humana de ficción desde un primer diálogo entre la Teoría de los Campos, de Fabio Herrmann, y Teoría del Efecto Estético, de Wolfgang Iser. Se pretende establecer algunas conexiones entre el estado dado a la ficción en la obra de Herrmann y el debate sobre la ficción y la imaginación en el trabajo de Iser que desemboca en una antropología literaria. Es un trabajo inicial que apunta a estudios futuros de la idea de Herrmann en la literatura como un análogo del psicoanálisis, por ello, propone la Teoría del Efecto Estético como una posibilidad teórica para el razonamiento de esta idea.

**Palabras clave:** psicoanálisis, literatura, Teoría de los Campos, Herrmann, Iser.

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