P H O T O – M E T H O D S

How to use PHOTOLANGUAGE in group work

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PREFACE

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PHOTOLANGUAGE® AND "NEO-LOGIC"

A recently coined well-designed term is opening up a new area of fruitful exploration. The neologism "PHOTOLANGUAGE®", already enjoying a notorious development, has come at a most timely moment. It has become the "sesame" of an era of increasing excavations and restorations. The time has come to spell out the concealed possibilities of the hidden caves (from Ali Baba to King Ubu) once again available to feed our dreams and our discoveries. This is what the inventors of "PHOTOLANGUAGE®" are bringing forth, working on the threshold of our times, nevertheless carefully outlining the useful precautions.

The term PHOTOLANGUAGE®, and the documents that have been published under this title, evoke all that is expressive of light. There is in every picture a bewitching combination of shade, brightness and form. Each photograph can strike us, but there will be one that will touch someone in a more specific, profound manner. Specific, profound: these words indicate in what way certain photographs can suddenly become meaningful for someone, embodying in some way aspects of himself, "re-presenting" what was until then hidden.

Thus, images, in their stark nakedness, come back to us, with their array of emotions and feelings. They had been pushed aside by the marble heart printing press with its microscopical punctuations, where - our epoch is still trying to free itself from the aftermaths of a script-dominated era - language rhymed with spelling. But we are moving away from this "Gutenberg Galaxy" as McLuhan has commented. Language can become once more gestural and imaging. It can evoke ail sorts of signs, from the mineral, vegetal, animal as well as human world. From everywhere emerges a civilization fostering a plurality of expression methods. A unified Minerva is springing forth from our interwoven techniques and our Jupiterian belly or our polymorphic desire. This century has reinvented the dignity of form, whether figurative or non-figurative, while denouncing the meticulous formalisms. Yet form, "gestalt" can be evoked by any plasticity, and among others, by the plasticity of the plane picture.

To yesterday's engravings, Niepce's art has added the surging of impressions through shadows. Photography brings back to vision its enigmatic depth. Sensitive gelatine has taken over, pushing aside lead's faked hardness, or rather relativizing the script's omnipresence. And as has happened in the pedagogy for deaf people, the oral and scriptural tendency must acknowledge the importance of manual signs. "Total communication", "total language", is summoned from different directions. Thus we stand today pressed into using all forms of language: corporal expression, hand and facial gestures, shouts, whistles, clay sculpture, schematic images, camera "shots", and "montages" combine with the articulations of our lips, our throats and our alphabetical drawings. These are global hieroglyphs, anagrams of composite forms, horns of plenty, which allow us to explicate simultaneous meanings through numerous signifiers that have recovered the dignified status of language.

In this blossoming of signifiers, PHOTOLANGUAGE® occupies a distinguished place. It deserves this place, not only because of the global effect it induces, but also by

virtue of the emotional feelings it inspires, and because of the variety of attentions and imaginative projections it allows. Unorthodox domains are opened up to our expectations, allowing us to communicate with others through unencumbered channels. Finally, it retains this place because affectivity and social logic are sustained as much by imaginary as by experience and history. Through PHOTOLANGUAGE®, individuals come to know their differences in perception and sensitivity.

Furthermore, this means is not limited to restricted uses. It can be adapted to numerous orientations and correspond to a diversity of procedures. Such is the purpose of this book. to stimulate a wide range of applications and address a multiplicity of users. The different chapters teem with hypotheses apt to be put into practice with the rich photographic material organized in contrasted and condensed sets. Oral expression, thematic explorations, functional studies, evaluation of specific steps of collective work, communication medium, pretext for encounters, opportunity for development or relaxation, mediation for easing or strengthening interpersonal or group relationships. These are some of the many objectives or hypotheses made relevant.

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But the authors have taken the precaution of raising the requirements and the criteria for use of this material intended for the enjoyment as well as the unexpected discovery of individual differences. Two essentials conditions of its use must be taken into account: on the one hand, each person's choice of a picture is to be received with due respect and without restriction nor criticism, and on the other hand, the exchanges shall be protected from the vain attempt of interpretative judgements and analyses. The animator accompanying the group work of PHOTOLANGUAGE® has therefore the dual task of ensuring a qualitative and comprehensive listening, and of sustaining the liberation of speech of each individual. He has to organize the specific set of photographs to be handled and explain the detailed procedure for a coherent use. It is also his task to facilitate the activities of the sub-groups and the large group sharings.

Patient attention to persons and their developing relationships, unsuspecting acceptance of ail that is explicated, calm accompanying of the imaginative wanderings: one finds here the Rogerian precautions, inciting the animator to use the same language as the speaker, be it that of symbols or of analogous representation. This he does without yielding to the impatient unravelling of premature interpretations or to untimely elucidating of hypothetical hidden meanings.

Photolanguage proposes synthetic perceptive activities. It offers unexpected mirrors of oneself and of others. It favours quiet companionships. It gives the animator a basis for his observation, an opportunity to listen to people, and a variety of ways and means for research and encounter. Our heart goes out with gratitude to the creators of a language free from arbitrary conventional symbols and completely open.

A. de Peretti,

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