

## Poslednji sprehod

Film 'Poslednji sprehod' sem prvič videl v prvem letu svojega izobraževanja iz geštalt terapije. Še vedno se živo spomnim svežine, ki sem jo čutil po svoji prvi izobraževalni delavnici. Počutil sem se prenovljenega in kot da bi znova zaživel. In občutki, ki sem jih imel, ko sem prvič videl film 'Poslednji sprehod', so bili podobni: dotaknil se me je zelo globoko in bil sem pretresen do svojega bistva. Danes, ko ga ponovno gledam, intenzivnost občutenja ostaja ista in še vedno odkrivam nove podrobnosti, ki poglobljajo pomen, ki ga ima zame. Zato trdim, da je mojstrovina.

Kako je ta film povezan z mojim razumevanjem in doživljanjem geštalt terapije? »Poslednji sprehod« ostaja z mano kot nekaj, kar me opozarja na preobrazujočo, zdravilno moč avtentične, spoštljive in predane komunikacije s sočlovekom. Prikaže, kako ostati ponižen in odprt v soočanju z zmedo in težavnostjo človeške eksistence. Spodbuja me, da ne zavzamem drže nekoga, 'ki ve' in ki bi bil lahko poslednji razsodnik drže in odzivov drugih ljudi v njihovih življenjskih situacijah. Predstavlja mi ponazoritev dialoške naravnosti, ki je vgrajena v geštalt terapijo. To je tudi razlog, zakaj bi ga priporočil svojim študentom geštalt terapije.

Dialoška naravnost je v filmu utelešena v liku nune, sestre Helen Prejean in v načinu poteka filmske pripovedi, ki nenehno premika točko gledišča na isti situacijski okvir. To spreminjanje perspektiv je omogočeno s pozicioniranjem sestre Helen: je protagonistka filma in obenem poslušalka osebnih tragedij, ki jih je sprožil brutalen umor dveh mladih ljudi, Walterja Delacroixa in Hope Percy.

Film se začne, ko se sestra Helen Prejean (ki jo igra Susan Sarandon) odloči, da obiše zapornika Mathewa Poncela (ki ga igra Sean Penn), s katerim si je prej dopisovala in ki je obtožen, da je umoril Walterja in Hope, ki je bila tudi posiljena. V zaporu je preživel šest let in je obsojen na smrt. Ker se bliža čas njegove usmrtitve, prosi sestro Helen, da mu pomaga pri končni pritožbi. Trdi, da je nedolžen in da je umora v resnici zagrešil njegov prijatelj Carl Vitello, ki je bil obsojen le na dosmrtno kazen, saj si je lahko privoščil boljšega odvetnika. Ne glede na to, ali mu verjame ali ne, se sestra Helen odloči, da mu poišče odvetnika pro bono, ki bi njegovo smrtno obsodbo pomagal spremeniti v dosmrtno ječo. A ta poskus je neuspešen in Mathewa naj bi usmrtili v šestih dneh. Prosi jo, da bi bila njegova duhovna svetovalka, ki bi ga usmerjala v zadnjih dnevih njegovega življenja, kar sestra Helen sprejme.

V svojem služenju Mathewu sestra Helen boleče spozna, da je prezrla nekaj zelo pomembnega. Obiskala je Mathewo družino in prepričala njegovo mamo, revno vdovo, ki živi sama s tremi sinovi, da se pojavi kot priča na Prizivnem sodišču kljub njeni globoki stiski zaradi sinove obtoženosti za umor in stigme, ki jo je to vtisnilo celi družini. V odmoru med sodno obravnavo se sestri Helen približa Walterjev oče, Earl Delacroix. Očita ji, da je pozabila na starše žrtev in na njihovo trpljenje. Polna obžalovanja se odloči, da obiše in se začne pogovarjati tudi z družinama Delacroix in Percy.

Od tu naprej film dodatno pridobi na kompleksnosti in globini. Srečanja s starši in družinama žrtev, ki sledijo, odpirajo nove možnosti razumevanja situacije. Ker je dolžina pričujočega teksta omejena z dogovorom, se žal ne morem dodatno posvetiti tej dimenziji filma, saj sem se odločil, da se bom osredotočil na osebno dramo Mathewa Ponceleta.

Ne glede na to, kako je prežet s kompleksnostjo in večznačnostjo, je moralno sporočilo, ki ga luščim iz filma, jasno: ubijati ni prav, ne glede na to, ali to počne posameznik ali država. Lepota in izrazna moč filma je zame vsebovana v načinu, kako je to sporočilo posredovano: ne preko ideološkega diskurza, temveč preko srce parajočih detajlov: fotografije Mathewa, Walterja in Hope iz njihovega otroštva, ki si jih sestra Helen ogleduje na obiskih družin; cvileči zvok, ki ga povzročajo superge Mathewejevega mlajšega brata, ko podrsavajoče hodi po zaporniški sobi, kjer je zbrana celotna družina na zadnjem obisku pred usmrčitvijo; prizori umora, ki se kot flashbacki pojavljajo tekom celotnega filma ... To sporočilo je vsebovano tudi v credu sestre Helen, povzetem v Jezusovih besedah: »Vsak človek je vreden več kot njegovo najbolj zavrženo dejanje.»

Tematika 'Poslednjega sprehoda' se dotika tudi duhovnosti. V enem od intervjujev je režiser filma Tim Robbins dejal, da je bila duhovna dimenzija filma zanj zelo pomembna, da pa ni želel, da bi bila poistovetena s katolicizmom. Zato je v njem uporabil pesmi pakistanskega pevca sufijske glasbe quawali Nusreta Fateha Ali Khana. Film je posnet po resničnih dogodkih, ki jih je v svoji knjigi »Poslednji sprehod« opisala Helen Prejean. Bila je prisotna na tem intervjuju in se je z Robbinsom strinjala, kljub temu, da je katoliška nuna. Menim, da njena drža, izražena tako v njenih intervjujih (ki jih je moč dobiti na You Tubu) kot tudi v liku nune v filmu, izraža univerzalno etično držo, ki je v različnih duhovnih tradicijah različno poimenovana in presega okvire religije. Ta drža je zame utelešena tudi v dialoški naravnosti geštal terapije.

Od njunega prvega srečanja je sestra Helen v odnosu do Mathewa pristna. Ne igra vloge nune, temveč je pripravljena razkrivati svoje doživljanje in biti transparentna kot človeško bitje. In čeprav je sočutna, ni vedno nežna. Včasih Mathewa zelo neposredno konfrontira in mu pokaže tudi svojo jezo, kot na primer v prizoru, ko ji skuša dvoriti. V geštal terapiji to imenujemo prisotnost.

Všeč mi je, kako (resnična) sestra Prejean v enem od svojih pogovorov na You Tubu govori o prisotnosti. Pravi, da je prisotnost, glede na to, da smo odnosna bitja, verjetno največje darilo, ki ga lahko kdajkoli damo drug drugemu. To je po njenem mnenju morda najbolj res prav v zaporu, zelo omejenem okolju, kjer »je vse, kar imamo, to, da imamo drug drugega«. Glede na to je kaznovanje s samico »eno od najhujših mučenj človeškega bitja«. Zanj osamljenost ni nekaj, kar doživljamo, ko smo sami, temveč bolj »tekanje naokrog v svojih lastnih mislih«. Prisotnost je po njenem mnenju natančen protistrup za to. Opredeli jo kot »ustavitev tega krožnega gibanja v meni in odpiranje navzven«. Izkusimo pa jo v vzajemnem odnosu, v katerem: »... oba prejemava, oba paziva drug na drugega in drug drugega učiva.« V filmu je vse to na ganljiv način vsebovano v prizoru, ko se sestra Helen in Mathew pogovarjata skozi stekleno, perforirano pregrado – ko se kamera osredotoči na enega od njiju, je obraz drugega viden kot odsev na steklu.

Čeprav ne verjame, da je Mathew nedolžen, sestra Helen v odnosu do njega ne zavzame superiornega položaja. V času, ko ga spremlja, se med drugim spominja, kako je kot otrok v družbi vrstnikov ubila majhno, nedolžno žival. Zaveda se zmožnosti krutosti, ki obstaja tudi v njej. Svojo vlogo duhovne svetovalke vidi v tem, da Mathewa vodi k prepoznanju njegove lastne

odgovornosti za svoja dejanja, da bi bil lahko odrešen. To počne na način, ki ohranja horizontalnost njunega odnosa. Ne skuša ga z manipulativnimi prijemi pripeljati do tega, da bi se spovedal, temveč odločitev za sprejetje odgovornosti vseskozi prepušča njemu samemu. Do njega ohranja odprt odnos, v katerem mu je na razpolago, nanj se odziva tam, kjer je, na takšnega, kot je, in doživlja tudi lastne krize. Če strnem: je polno predana. V enem od trenutkov, ko njun odnos postane težaven, ji Mathew, po tem ko jo odriva od sebe, reče: »Odšla boš.» Ona mu odgovori: »Tega ne bom naredila. To je odvisno od tebe. Če hočeš, da grem, mi to reci.»

Njena drža počasi, vendar globoko vpliva na Mathewa, ki do soočanja s tem, kar je naredil, goji zelo močan odpor. Preko različnih poskusov, da bi se opravičil pred drugimi in pred samim seboj, ostaja ujet v položaju žrtve. Da bi dokazal svojo nedolžnost celo zahteva preizkus z detektorjem laži. V tej drži vztraja vse do dneva usmrtitve, ko izve, da je Prizivno sodišče zavrnilo njegovo prošnjo za pomilostitev. Malo pred svojim 'poslednjim sprehodom' do celice usmrtitve sestri Helen prizna, da je ubil Walterja in posilil Hope. Svoje priznanje začne z besedami: »Nisem bil žrtev, bil sem prekleti strahopetec.» Sestra Helen ga vpraša, če sprejema odgovornost, in ko ji pritrdi, mu da poslednji zakrament.

Prepoznanje in sprejemanje odgovornosti za lastno eksistenco, ki temelji na zavedanju, je tudi končni cilj geštalt terapije, kot jo sam razumem. Opis zadnjih prizorov pred usmrtitvijo, ki dosežejo vrhunec v morilčevem opravičilu staršem umorjenih in ki se konča z besedami: »Ubiti je narobe, ne glede na to, kdo to počne,» presega moje zmožnosti. A brez senčice dvoma lahko rečem, da se to ne bi zgodilo brez dialoške naravnosti sestre Helen Prejean. S tem da je bila prisotna, predana in se je znala s pomočjo lastnih izkušenj živeti v Mathewa, je korak za korakom pridobivala njegovo zaupanje, ki je omogočilo, da se ji je odprl in sprejel svojo odgovornost.

Omogočila mu je, da se je polno doživel kot oseba. Oziroma, če si sposodim besede resnične sestre Helen: da se je doživel kot vrednega. »Hvala, da me ljubiš,» ji reče tik preden zapusti jetniško celico. In njene zadnje besede, ki mu jih nameni, so: »Hočem, da je zadnja stvar, ki jo boš videl, obraz ljubezni. Glej me, jaz bom tvoj obraz ljubezni.»

To je zame primer tega, kar je Martin Buber imenoval potrditev, eksistencialno srečanje med osebo in osebo. Ker gre za nekaj, kar presega besede, bom tudi jaz na tem mestu končal svoj poskus, da bi ubesedil globok učinek, ki ga ima 'Poslednji sprehod' name kot človeka in kot geštalt terapevta.

## *Dead man walking*

The period of my life during which I saw this movie for the first time coincides with my first year of training in Gestalt therapy. I can still vividly remember the freshness that I felt after my first Gestalt therapy training workshop. I felt renewed and as if alive again. In a similar way, I can still remember the feeling of having seen »Dead Man Walking« for the first time: I was deeply moved and shaken to my core. Nowadays, when I watch it anew, the intensity of feeling stays with me, together with discovering new details that add to the meaning I make of it. That is why I claim that it is a masterpiece. How is this movie connected with my own understanding and

experience of Gestalt therapy?

»Dead Man Walking« stays with me as a reminder of the transformative, healing potential of an authentic, respectful and committed communication of one human being with another. The film exemplifies what it means to remain humble and open in front of the perplexity and disturbances of human existence. It encourages one not to assume the position of somebody 'who knows' and can thus be the ultimate judge of other people's ways of being and responding to their life situations. To me »Dead Man Walking« illustrates the dialogical attitude embedded in gestalt therapy. This is why I would recommend it to my gestalt students.

In the movie the dialogical attitude is conveyed through the character of a nun, Sister Helen Prejean, and through the course of the film narrative, with its constantly shifting viewpoints on the same situational framework. This shifting of perspectives is enabled by Sister Helen's positioning: she is at the same time the protagonist of the movie and a listener to the personal tragedies that arise from the brutal homicide of two young people, Walter Delacroix and Hope Percy.

The movie starts when Sister Helen (played by Susan Sarandon) decides to visit the prisoner Mathew Poncelet (played by Sean Penn) with whom she has previously corresponded and who is accused of having murdered Walter and Hope (who was also raped). He has been in prison for six years, sentenced to death by lethal injection. As the day of his execution nears, he asks Sister Helen to help him with a final appeal. He claims that he is innocent and that his companion Carl Vitello, who received life imprisonment because he could afford a better lawyer, did in fact commit the murders. Whether or not she believes in his innocence, she decides to help him by finding him a lawyer pro bono in an effort to have his sentence commuted to life imprisonment. But this attempt is unsuccessful, and Mathew is to be executed in six days. He asks her to be his spiritual advisor and to guide him in his last days of life, a role she accepts.

In her service to Mathew, Sister Helen painfully realizes that she has neglected something very important. She visits Mathew's family and convinces his mother, a widow living in poverty with three sons, to appear as a witness in the Appeal Court in spite of her deep distress over Mathew's murder conviction and the stigma it brings to the whole family. During the trial sister Helen is approached by Walter's father, Earl Delacroix. He reproaches her that she has forgotten the victims' parents and their suffering. Filled with regret, she decides to visit and talk with Delacroix's and Hope's.

From that point forward, the movie gains in complexity and depth. Sister Helen's subsequent meetings with parents and families create different possible ways of understanding the situation. I don't have space to go into them all here; instead I will focus on Mathew's personal drama.

However steeped in complexity it becomes, the moral message I extract from the movie is clear: killing is wrong, whether it is done by an individual or by a state. The beauty and power of the movie for me lies in the way this message is delivered: not through ideological discourse, but through heartbreaking details: the photos of Mathew, Hope and Walter as children shown to Sister Helen during her visits to the families; the squealing noise that Mathew's youngest brother's shoes make when he walks across the room, interrupting the silence of the last minutes of the family's last visit before the execution; the scenes of murder which appear in flashbacks throughout the movie... This message is implied also in Sister Helen's credo, summarized in Jesus' words that: »Every person is worth more than the worst of his deed.«

There is also a spiritual theme in 'Dead Man Walking'. In an interview, its director Tim Robbins said that the spiritual dimension of this film was very important for him, but that he didn't want it to be identified with Catholicism. For this reason he used songs of Nusret Fateh Ali Khan, the Pakistani singer of the sufi quawali music in it. The movie is based on true events, described in the book »Dead Man Walking,» written by Helen Prejean. She was present at this interview, and she agreed with Robbins even though she is a Catholic nun. I think that her attitude, both in her interviews (found on You Tube) and as embodied in the nun's character in the film, demonstrate a universal ethical position, though named differently in different spiritual traditions, that transcends the framework of religion. This position for me is incarnated also in the dialogical attitude of Gestalt therapy.

From the first meeting with Mathew Poncelet Sister Helen is genuine with him. She doesn't play the role of a nun, but is willing to disclose her own experience and be transparent as a human being. And, while maintaining compassion, she is not always gentle. Sometimes she confronts him very directly, showing also her anger, as in the scene when Mathew behaves seductively towards her. In Gestalt therapy we would call this 'presence'.

I like how (the real) Sister Prejean, in one of her You Tube talks, speaks about presence. She says that presence is perhaps the best gift we ever give each other, because we are relational beings. This, according to her, is probably the most true in prison, a very confined environment where »all what we have is each other», with solitary confinement being »one of the worst tortures of human being». But for her, solitude is not so much something we experience when being alone, as it is »running around in your own thoughts». For her presence is exactly the antidote for this. She defines it as »stopping that circular movement inside me and open». And it is experienced in a mutual relationship in which: »... we both receive, we look out for each other, teaching each other.» In the movie all this is movingly depicted in the scene where Sister Helen and Mathew talk to each other through a perforated glass barrier - when the camera focuses on one of them, the other's face is seen as a reflection in the glass.

Even if she doesn't believe that Mathew is innocent, Sister Helen does not assume a superior position to him. While accompanying him she also remembers how as a child in the group of peers she killed a small innocent animal, so she is aware that the potential for cruelty resides in her as well. As his spiritual advisor, her function is to lead him to assume responsibility for his deeds in order to be redeemed. And she does so by keeping their relationship horizontal. She does not manipulate him into confessing, but leaves his taking responsibility to himself. She stays there with him, open and available, responding to where he is, going through her own moments of crisis herself. To put it succinctly, she is fully committed. In one of the moments of difficulty between them, after he pushes her away Mathew says: »You're gonna leave.» To which she responds: »I'm not gonna do so. It's up to you. If you want me to, say so.»

Her attitude slowly, but deeply affects Mathew. He is very resistant to facing what he had done. Through various maneuvers he keeps himself trapped in the position of a victim, even requiring to be tested with the lie detector in order to prove his innocence, until the very day of execution when he learns that his last appeal for clemency to the Federal Appeals Court was rejected. Just before his 'last walk', in their last conversation, he admits to Sister Helen that he killed Walter and raped Percy. He begins his confession with saying: »I wasn't a victim, I was a fucking chicken.» She asks him if he takes responsibility, and after he affirms this, she gives him the last sacrament.

Acknowledging and taking responsibility for one's own existence based on awareness is also the final goal of Gestalt therapy as I understand it. It is beyond my capacity to describe the intensity of the last scenes before the execution which reach their climax in Mathew's apology to Walter's father and Hope's parents ending with his last words: »Killing is wrong, no matter who does it.» Without a shadow of a doubt this would not have happened without Sister Helen Prejean's dialogical attitude. By being present, committed and inclusive with Mathew she step by step eventually gains his trust, followed by his opening to and finally accepting responsibility.

She thus enabled him to fully experience his personhood, which is, if I borrow the words of the real Sister Helen, to experience himself as valued. »Thank you for loving me,» he says to her shortly before leaving the cell. And her final words to him are: »I want you the last thing to see is the face of love. Look at me, I will be your face of love.»

For me this is an example of what Martin Buber called confirmation, the existential meeting between person and person. Because it transcends words, I will also end my attempt to verbalize the profound effect of 'Dead Man Walking' on me as a human being and as a Gestalt therapist.

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