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Łukasz MICHALSKI

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2863-289X>

University of Silesia in Katowice

e-mail: lukasz.michalski@us.edu.pl

Trans-action! Seminar as an event in the light of transactional analysis

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Abstract

This paper is a result of analyzing the academic phenomenon of research seminar in order to find elements of its structure (a set of invariable traits). Especially the historical origins of academic seminar and its institutional background were the essential subject of conducted considerations, as a result of which the specificity of seminar as such was shown and examined with the help of terminology taken from Transactional Analysis. The paper in its primary goal reveals how the root elements of the seminar become the subject of games (within the meaning of TA), but names a few seminar games and discuss the issue of the very seminar description boundaries.

Keywords: Transactional Analysis, seminar, psychological game, Eric Berne.

Introduction

There are a few reasons why one should look at a seminar from the perspective of transactional analysis. The situation of a seminar is quite peculiar and sensitive to changes as far as submission/equality of its participants is concerned. To describe it, Eric Berne offers quite a “useful” tool in the form of ego states (Parent/Adult/Child). The issue of communication is similar – it is an area crucial for each seminar, hence the transactional key to describe interpersonal relations seems to impose itself here. Finally, a seminar – but also education in general – as a form of time structuring is by rule a ritual, motivated by tradition, a structure

of a series of socially programmed complementary transactions, i.e. such ones in which a reply to a message is expected by its speaker and complies with a healthy image of interpersonal relations (Berne 1964, p. 29). Although education's nature is presented in its definition in such a way, it does not change the fact that it also becomes an area of games, i.e. hidden transactions based on a ruse (Berne 1964, p. 48). Certainly there is little play in this game – anyway in the school environment these are mainly war games. Contrary to military training, these games are not a simulation and they have their victims, which was highlighted by Maria Dudzikowa who showed how much school narration is dominated by military metaphors (cf. 2006).

This text is an effect of focusing on the tradition of an academic seminar, the phenomenon analysed with the help of tools offered by transactional analysis, which helps to describe its topography (a set of invariable elements). As it turns out, only in the light of the research within the framework of archeology dating back to the origins of the seminar phenomenon can one track down what becomes the object of a psychological game. Some such seminar games shall be described here, yet composing their vast array like *Thesarus of Games* from the classic work of Eric Berne, though scientifically interesting, is not the aspiration of this article. Such a design should be rejected not only due to the modest length of this text. As it will turn out, there are also quite serious reasons why a seminar should not be described in the language of transactional analysis¹. The costs of using this perspective may be hard to incur by seminar participants.

Semen

The etymology of the word 'seminar' does not surprise. The term comes from a Latin word *seminarius* meaning 'seminal' or *semen, semenis*, i.e. 'semen'. Initially that word referred to a seedling nursery, a place where plants sprouted and from where they were replanted to a place suitable for their species and destination, usually their final rooting area. The soil in the seedling nursery should be good for plant growth and allow for yielding a good crop. The crop serves not only the gardener's needs but is beneficial for all those belonging to their community.

For a university as an institution, the metaphor of the seedling nursery seems accurate and fecund. The academy introduces students who enter its doors to circumstances which are limited in comparison to the variety of possible social practice but can be regarded as representative and preparatory for students' professional activities once they have graduated. This life simulation which takes place

¹ I let myself assume that the axioms of transactional analysis – for example, presented in *Games people play* by Eric Berne – are known to the readers. Thus, the theoretical bases of this approach were described in this text only perfunctorily – which I hope shall be beneficial for the argumentation demonstrated.

at university – even strangely better than the thing it simulates – is equipped with the whole set of fuses and igniters, which in the educational dimension facilitate personal development.

The aim of academic teaching could be brought down to the tasks which were described by Stanley Fish in the following way: “College and university teachers can (legitimately) do two things: (1) introduce students to bodies of knowledge and traditions of inquiry that had not previously been part of their experience; and (2) equip the same students with the analytical skills – of argument, statistical modeling, laboratory procedure – that will enable them to move confidently within those traditions and to engage in independent research after a course is over” (2008, pp. 12–13). In the context of these tasks, the seminar situation seems to be singled out – especially the second task might be achievable in some cases only in the seminar situation. Hence the gravity of the seminar is demonstrated among others in the fact that it is not accessible to students straight away. The seminar requires university sophistication, which I think can be dominated by one of two ways of obtaining it: domestication and familiarity. The first comes down to learning the rules of a dome. The latter one stems from the experience of close relations with the academic community based on complicity. Both the first one and the latter one allows for seminar participation, yet the difference between them is that while the first one is about fulfilling formal standards binding at university and seminar practice remains within university walls, in case of the latter one what happens at seminar time is to be rooted in its participants’ way of life and cross the threshold of inside/ outside university walls. The seminar resembles a laboratory in its traditional understanding. It would be a defined space of the institution where elements of the external world are “imported” to let them exist “more”, in the state of greater condensation. During the next stage the fruit of experiencing this condensation of traits should somehow come back to what is extraterritorial for the laboratory. As Bruno Latour claims, focusing on the nature of Louis Pasteur’s first attempts, the laboratory is an institution whose domain is a game of interests – that is desires – and where insignia of power are born. Pasteur’s lesson teaches us that the game is not only about convincing the world that it needs the laboratory, but also about the world accepting the rules of the laboratory (Latour, 1983). The key is thus arousing, maintaining, developing and exporting desires for the sake of the quality of particular places where we are supposed to live. Similarly, the seminar becomes a recommended way of life. We shall mention this context considering Roland Barthes’s deliberations occupying the following few paragraphs.

Das Seminar

Marc Aymes points to three academic traditions of the seminar. He locates them in definite places and times. These are 18th century Prussia, the Unites States

from 1869 to 1890 (though, one can discern here a variant of the Prussian model) and France in the 50s, 60s and 70s of the 20th century (2007)². Despite differences among these traditions, the aforesaid researcher succeeded in forming quite a stable definition of the seminar – what is important, it avoids being too precise as it would place it solely in the area of humanities or sciences. What are the seminar's designates? First of all, this is its situational nature. The seminar happens and this eventfulness constitutes its main sense. We deal here with an event of orality and a conversation event. These two accents are put within the framework of collective being, related to the development of an ideal of research and are accompanied by an academic setting. Yet, that is not everything. Aymes mentions one more important dimension of the seminar. It is its certain gratuitous and original character, which does not yield to training but is an area of creativity. Let us try now to show how these accents have been present in the seminar history from the very beginning. "The form of a ritual is parentally determined by tradition", claims Berne (1964, p. 36).

Thus, the beginnings of a scientific seminar can be found in 18th century Prussia. In 1938, at Protestant Georg August University of Göttingen, there is a seminar created – and although the word had been used before, the academic form it is then attributed is new. First of all, it is a state institution and as such though related to the university, is a subordinate to the ministry of education and is financed from the state budget (which was justified by the need to educate well-qualified teachers). Secondly, it combines the features of private science associations and pedagogic seminars (Clark 2006, p. 159). Such a creation gets successfully propagated. Although during the first years the seminar in Göttingen was a rather local phenomenon, in the second half of the 18th century its formula becomes widespread.

Seminars gained the interest of new environments not only due to the beneficial way of their financing. Moreover, growing renown of professors running them also contributed to it. These researchers were granted the title of director – so it was not a university degree and it emphasised the link between the seminar institution and state administration (university senates did not appoint directors and did not manage seminar finances, whose bigger part was devoted to seminarists' scholarships). Another thing was that this bureaucratic regime and professor charisma tangled up more than once made itself felt in a turbulent way. Taking this aspect into account, one should mention mishaps concerning the establishment of a seminar in 1787 at university in Halle. When the director and seminar founder, Friedrich August Wolf, filled in the first informational report, required by the then minister of education in Prussia, Friedrich Gedike, he got a reply from the ministry, suggesting the need to complete the seminar. Wolf was

² I make use of a preprint in English placed in *Archive ouverte en Sciences de l'Homme et de la Société*. The French version of the text was published in the journal *Labyrinthe* (2/2007, no 27).

supposed to determine “judgment of the aptitudes, abilities and talents of each and every seminarist” (Clark 2006, p. 127). Such assessment was to be sent to the ministry after each semester so as to monitor seminarists’ progress and see what could be expected of them. Wolf protests. In his letter to the ministry he replies that he does not want to assess students in this way so as not to discourage them from seminar participation – especially those who might get a negative mark. Gedike keeps repeating his order in the following correspondence, claiming that such assessment shall promote seminarists’ diligence and, in the future, facilitate their promotion in civil service. Wolf considered the minister’s reply reprehensible. In his reply, he referred to the seminar group as a whole, proved its diligence and stated that if individual assessment was needed, he wanted to assess a few best students. In his report he writes, “Since judgment of knowledge and ability is something very relative and, thus, if not supported by a sufficient series of data of all sorts, it can make quite different impressions on different readers” (Clark 2006, p. 127). Finally, Gedike agreed to such a form of assessment.

Therefore, the very beginnings of research seminars are defined by outstanding personalities and resistance to administrative norms – including seminarists’ assessment. It is not without significance that Wolf wants to perceive seminarists rather as a group, not individuals. It is even more significant as the originality of seminarists in Halle could be allegedly noticed in their way of living, manners or appearance (Clark 2006, p. 172). Friedrich August Wolf’s seminar is important for one more reason. As William Clark writes, “Although (or perhaps because) given a pedagogical mission, the seminars soon inculcated disciplinary self-consciousness in the seminarists. Wolf’s seminar in Halle announced the change. Explicitly intending a secularization of the teaching profession, Wolf admitted theology majors only with reluctance” (2006, p. 170). In this way, a research seminar is simultaneously a place of specialist considerations about the functioning of knowledge as such and it contributes to initiating the process of crystallization of pedagogy as a branch of science and its secularisation. As a matter of fact, the origins of research seminars related to teaching seminars explain that focus not only on a given object of knowledge, but also on knowledge itself as the object of cognition. The model of the French seminar practised by Roland Barthes presents this emphasis quite well.

Séminaire

In 1974, before the beginning of the seminar devoted to love discourse, which resulted in one of the most renowned post-seminar publications (Barthes, 1978), Roland Barthes published a text on the idea of a seminar (1989). Its very title, *To the seminar*, is like a guideline, but also a dedication (the translation does not completely render the play of word meanings in the French version *Au*

Séminaire). The article distinguishes three overlapping spaces of the seminar. The first one is institutional, the second one transferential, and the third one textual. Whereas not very specialized names of these spaces might give us a room for speculations about their meaning, the idiomatic nature of Barthes's language quickly deprives us of reasons to trust our own associations. Let us look at details. An institution for Barthes is not only the vehicle for a timetable including the seminar, but it is above all complicity of language, which is synonymous to a desire for Text (1989, p.332). What is transferential defines a relation between the seminar and its participants. Nonetheless, for Barthes, the director does not speak in the "I know" mode but exposes his own actions, seminar practice. What does he do then? Here is one of the answers: "My role (if I have one) is to clear the stage on which horizontal transferences will be established: what matters in such a seminar (the site of its success), is not the relation of the members to the director but the relation of the members to each other. [...] the famous «teaching relation» is not the relation of teacher to taught, but the relation of taught to each other" (1989, p. 333). That is why Barthes juxtaposes the vertical model of education – based on hierarchical relations and evaluating what one knows – with the horizontal one. This one is based on knowledge circulation, and more precisely speaking on the "circulation of a desire for Text" (1989, p. 332). Finally, Barthes defines the area of text as something written (a book, a dissertation), but he also discerns here the birth of text which "does not appear in writing", but is a practice of "a certain way of being together" (1989, p. 333).

If we were to make theses based on the aforesaid considerations (not without loss) devoid of the idiomatic nature of Barthes's expression, they may be formed in the following way: the seminar is, above all, a group whose size allows for personal relations among its members; the group formed by a communication community and a lively and limitless interest in its research subject matter; there is no hierarchy of roles and transfer of knowledge "from top down" and the context of assessment is limited; the seminar's outcome is its text on its subject matter, but even more text constituted by events and relations existing among its participants. Over three centuries after the birth of the idea of the seminar, Barthes does not reject but seems to radicalize its first assumptions.

From a ritual to a game

The essential theoretical background for the following considerations are Berne's findings regarding *ego states* (perceived as a „coherent system of feelings" or „a set of coherent behavior patterns"). Here is a slightly longer passage in which the author of *Games people play* explains clearly whole concept: "Each individual seems to have available a limited repertoire of such ego states, which are not roles but psychological realities. This repertoire can be

sorted into the following categories: (1) ego states which resemble those of parental figures (2) ego states which are autonomously directed toward objective appraisal of reality and (3) those which represent archaic relics, still-active ego states which were fixated in early childhood. Technically these are called, respectively, extero psychic, neopsychic, and archaeopsychic ego states. Colloquially their exhibitions are called Parent, Adult and Child, and these simple terms serve for all but the most formal discussions” (Berne, 1964, p. 23). Later on Berne comments on the implications of these assumptions:

1. That every individual has had parents (or substitute parents) and that he carries within him a set of ego states that reproduce the ego states of those parents (as he perceived them), and that these parental ego states can be activated under certain circumstances (extero psychic functioning). Colloquially: „Everyone carries his parents around inside of him.”
2. That every individual (including children, the mentally retarded and schizophrenics) is capable of objective data processing if the appropriate ego state can be activated (neopsychic functioning). Colloquially: „Everyone has an Adult.”
3. That every individual was once younger than he is now, and that he carries within him fixated relics from earlier years which will be activated under certain circumstances (archaeopsychic functioning). Colloquially: „Everyone carries a little boy or girl around inside of him” (Berne 1964, p. 24).

The next few paragraphs are based on these assumptions.

After this brief addition let us come back to the university mission quoted by Stanley Fish. The store of knowledge and the way of dealing with it – including the paths of its re-/de-/ construction discussed here, calls for someone who has that knowledge and someone who is devoid of it. One may provisionally bring it down to the two symbolic roles of the “professor” and the “student”. From the perspective of transactional analysis, the first role seems to be equipped mainly with the Parent ego state, while the latter one with the Child or Adult ego state. Why does the professor not assume the Adult ego state? They are “pushed” into the Parent ego state by the fact that the “professor’s” resources of knowledge and analytical skills are supposed to be conveyed to the “student”. Whereas the nature of this relation does not have to be limited to knowledge transfer “from top down” or an imperious approach, it is defined by the responsibility approach. The “professor” is responsible for the “student” and usually it is not reciprocal. Certainly, despite this asymmetry, a satisfactory complementary transaction and understanding are still possible. Another thing is that the “student’s” ego state dominated by the Child ego state entails a rebellious approach in its set of possible scripts. Nevertheless, the aforesaid “professor’s” responsibility works even in the situation when the “student” does not accept either their task or their “professor”. The “student” might also take on a role of an overadapted individual, realising themselves in the situation of exaggerated submissiveness. Especially the second task of university education formulated by Fish favours it. It has a big potential of triggering deeply corrective activities as it comes down to forming one’s way

of thinking. Thus, such circumstances facilitate the consolidation of the Child ego state in the “student”.

Taking into account the last remarks about university education, one may think that seminar methodology could have a therapeutic dimension, liberating from the effects of institutional oppression (actually this potential can be reasonably related to the special institutional status of first seminars). The task would come down to developing anti-scripts (Grzesiuk, Jakubowska, 1994), as both resistance addressed at university and complete submissiveness towards it are not desired in the context of academic development. Therefore, what kind of perspective would be possibly healthy and generated by the Adult ego state into the “student’s” ego state? It might be understanding of a social function of university and estimating benefits coming from achieving professionalism, which potentially outweigh incurred costs related to finances, time and work.

As it seems, it is only the seminar as the final form of studying that promotes the complementary Adult-Adult transaction. However, it should be assumed that it happens in the situation when the “professor” acknowledges that university’s tasks of educating the “student” are satisfactorily realized. If that is so, their effect is a researcher’s personality that the “professor” who also has it can enter into a transaction too. Yet, although it is difficult to talk about any statistical data – and a given scientific discipline and the educational system of a given country would generate significant differences – it can be suspected that the seminar is more often based on Parent-Child transactions. And this statement does not derive from any dislike or lack of “faith” in the “student”. It is rather about the fact that primary and secondary education is mainly based on socializing education that permeated also the university idea. For example, as a result of the Bologna process, which vocationalised first-degree studies and decreased their share in general academic education, raised the status of utilitarian benefits deriving from higher education at the cost of opportunities for mature autonomy of academic personality and personal development. I think that this state of affairs contributes to consolidating scripts acquired during childhood, based on parents-children relations. Thereby, there is a bigger possibility of initiating games within university walls than in the case of an Adult-Adult relation. There are other reasons, too. The authors of the synthesis *Into TA: A Comprehensive Textbook on Transactional Analysis* write straight about classroom event participants: “When they meet in the classroom the scene is set for games” (Cornell et. al., 2016, p. 108). On the other hand, Sandra Newell and David Jeffery listed more precisely a few intentions that provoke students’ games and that do not seem to disappear when one gets to a higher level of education. The following sources of games emerge: defence against feelings that one does not want to experience; initiating procedures because they are familiar; strengthening other, more general references; simulation in a situation of reduced intensity of stimuli; satisfying

basic needs; structuring free time; generating feelings concealing those that are to remain not revealed (Newell, Jeffery, 2002, pp. 97–98).

Incorporating everyday expressions into scientific language, which Eric Berne used in his classic work, certainly contributed to his success with a broad spectrum of readers. However, scholars writing scientific texts might succumb to the allure of this temporary “relaxation” of the rhetorical discourse and might want to repeat Berne’s gesture. These are usually secondary motives as above all “TA’s theory of games is also useful in educational settings” (Cornell et. al., 2016, p. 108). Thus, let us use this context to describe educational reality. Here is a proposal of a few seminar games – destructive and therapeutic – played in particular spaces of topography described by Barthes.

Destructive games

The first game can be called *I am the way you used to be* or *I am attracted to what is important to you*. Let us bear in mind Barthes’s “institutional” remark saying that the seminar’s tissue is composed of relations among its participants, minimizing the director’s distinguished position. A ruse used in that game goes against that rule, intensifying the relation with the “professor”. It might go unnoticed by the director. The „student” initiating gesture would be feigning their interest in the area that used to be within the seminar director’s interest – especially at the beginning of their academic career. The game situates the “professor” in the position of the praised Child, who can spontaneously suspend seminar rules on the wave of oversentimentalised relation. The benefit would come down to lessening the effort concerning all the formalities i.e. validating a course by the “student”, graduating, etc. What is more, potential lacks in their scientific approach might be compensated by the “professor’s” illusions evoking the memory of his own academic beginnings. Of course, the game is subject to some risk. If the “professor’s” Adult ego state, in terms of antithesis, uses the saying *noblesse oblige*, what was supposed to be an opportunity to reduce seminary efforts (payment) for the “student” might turn out to be the threat of something opposite. Finding an ally in the “student” for researching “the most important” fragment of the scientific world creates a situation in which there are no requirements but the work is triggered by eros of knowledge that does not care about such mundane and trivial things like tiredness and lack of time. There is also a third, maybe less probable option. Having revealed the ruse, the “professor’s” Parent ego state would draw consequences e.g. in the form of a test of knowledge, whose lack was to be hidden by means of the “student’s” pretended interest.

Meanwhile, the game geared towards the transference space, let us call it *I agree with my interlocutor*, would come down to simulating seminar activity.

Understanding a unique nature of those meetings, where an active relation among participants is valorized, or the way in which the participants take notice of the topics to be covered, the “student” may artificially generate such an activity. How? For example, processing or *de facto* repeating others’ answers in order to create an impression of their engagement in the discussion and an impression of agreement among the participants (by the way, for Barthes, the seminar is rather a celebration of difference than similarity). The game would require certain narrative skills but if the “professor” does not discover bad intentions, the “student” will contribute to perceiving the seminar as a successful one. This may influence assessment and may lead to lowering the scale of imposed requirements, decreasing the possibility of additional “uncomfortable” questions. Of course, there is quite a high risk of unmasking the narrative game. However, what could the “professor” reply, “the professor” suggesting that the student is playing “I really agree with the preceding speaker”?

The game played in the textual space, called e.g. *This is my text*, could come down to simulating problems with the text that one has not written or – and this is a less harmful version – to multiplying problems with the text just to rely on the group’s or the “professor’s” conclusions. Then, on the strength of certain naturalness of seminar discussion (or the participants’ or the “professor’s” impatience) what is the answer to the “student’s” problem is actually writing their text. In each of these variants – despite assurances – the “student” is not the author of the text. One may find here a variant of another game *I don’t get it*, where the authors of its description notice such a mechanism: “the more the teacher allows herself to be tempted to do most of the work, the less energy the student will put into examining what he does not understand” (Cornell et. al., 2016, p. 108).

In the textual space of the seminar, another game, *Look How Hard I’ve Tried*, described by Berne might occur. In this game, one’s attitude is the “cover” for opposite intentions. The author of *Games people play* describes its mechanism in the following way: “In its everyday form this is easily observed in children as a two-handed game with one parent. It is played from either of two positions: «I am helpless» or «I am blameless». The child tries, but bungles or is unsuccessful. If he is Helpless, the parent has to do it for him. If he is Blameless, the parent has no reasonable grounds for punishing him” (1964, p. 106).

As a reaction to the aforesaid games, another game called *Santa* might be activated. Its thesis would be as follows: Both I and you know that your text/research engagement/seminar activity, etc. has only the appearance of work, but we behave as if it was otherwise so that “presents” appear anyway (the figure of Santa used here is an example of a mediated belief – cf. Žižek, 2008). In this way, to calm the “professor” and the “student” down, the educational essence of the seminar is sacrificed on the altar of formal academic requirements (writing a research work).

Another thing is that children really believe in Santa... In a possible variant of this game, the “professor’s” Child ego state can naively believe the sincerity of intentions and sentimentalise the relations or engagement feigned by the “student” into text. In case they are really sincere, the reaction is appropriate. In case it is different, the possibility of a good pay appears as well. It would come down to maintaining a neutral or good, not disturbed by conflicts or patent oppression, seminar’s aura, but also to reducing the “professor’s” amount of effort (e.g. giving up proving lack of knowledge that the “student” masks by their engagement or developing their scientific curiosity). It is a lot.

From the “professor’s perspective, one may want to quench the „student’s” scientific curiosity as a matter of principle. Let us notice, it has a form of a research question, for which the seminar tries to develop the strategy of solutions. These are ideal conditions for a classic game *Why Don’t You – Yes But* (Berne 1964), in which the student’s solution ideas are bombarded by the “professor’s” “Yes, but...” Payment? A slightly engaging research project complying with the requirements of a given institution.

Therapeutic games

The game played by the “professor” – let us call it *Mission* – can be played according to the pattern of Lawrence Kohlberg’s triad of moral development read by Jürgen Habermas. Within its frame, the lowest, first level of perceiving the social world – preconventional – makes it possible to see the world as naturally given, whereas the second one – conventional – lets one notice the rules and adjust to them. The third level – postconventional – presents the world in the task of its creation (also by way of conflict if it can be devised otherwise). These levels are characterized by the fact that an individual, once finding themselves at a higher level, does not want to go back to the lower one. What is more, a desired developmental tendency can be described as obtaining ego autonomy, which assumes a developmental function of conflict and shall not be necessarily achieved by everyone (cg. Habermas, 1975, Witkowski, 1988). Of course, if the “professor’s” game is to be played against this background, there arises a basic question about a ruse and a payment. As it seems, the ruse is that the “professor”, taking a role of an “official” in the building of canonical i.e. conventional knowledge, who is perceived as responsible for the reproduction of this knowledge in a group of students, should really strive to teach their students various styles of conflict with this convention. The “professor’s” payment is the realization of a deep sense of the seminar’s educational task (mission) and facilitating the development of academic identity. The “student’s” payment is a higher level of moral development within the aforesaid triad.

The „professor’s” game can be described in a different way. In his article of 1971, entitled *Writers, Intellectuals, Teachers*, Roland Barthes wrote: “How can the teacher be assimilated to the psychoanalyst? It is exactly the contrary which is the case: the teacher is the person analysed. Imagine that I am a teacher: I speak, endlessly, in front of and for someone who remains silent” (Barthes 1982, p. 382). According to Barthes, the game played by the “professor” – as a rule in a hidden manner – is a game in psychoanalytical therapy (maintaining the reference to Berne’s style, let us call it *the Couch*). Let us look for a moment at the lecture situation. The “professor” and their audience constitute a talking-listening system. It is the “professor” who speaks, that is why they have got an advantage over the audience – they have knowledge and skills that are probably not available to the listeners. The audience listens in order to decrease that advantage – education is mainly based on this model and here we can notice an analogical description of its tasks formulated by Stanley Fish. Thus, if someone in that model displays any lack, it is the “student.” The “professor” knows how to localize that lack and strives to eliminate it. Thus, they write a prescription – a set of texts/content that one must absorb. They set a date for a check-up – an exam. The seminar would be specific as it would make the rules of the game more open. Is this therapy?

No. Barthes sees the issue quite differently. The therapeutic situation takes place when someone who is subject to therapy talks. Of course, the patient talks and the analyst listens. The patient tells a story made according to the principle of a challenge and desire. Discussing the issues which preoccupy them in their subject matter (does not a lecture look like this?), at the same time they expose themselves. In fact, it is the “professor” who lies on the couch. Meanwhile, the “student” analyses. They focus on the main thread of the narration, but not only. They pay attention to the “professor’s” every slip of the tongue and gaffes in their speech, seemingly official information on the subject. The corridor leading to the lecture room shall be first of all filled with comments on these very mistakes and exposing the “professor’s” privacy, and later they may pertain to the subject matter, the substance of the lecture. A lecture is the “professor’s” therapy. If it is so for the „student,” it is mainly when they recognise their own desire in the lecture’s narration.

So this is a game. The game as understood by Eric Berne, the game whose rules are almost secret and it is possible to predict payment. The latter one is in the form of benefits of the therapy, that is narrative “taming” of issues i.e. relation with what is the object of the “professor’s” desire. And, as it turns out, not only his: “Whether the teacher speaks or whether the listener argues the right to speak, in both cases we go straight to the analytic couch” (Barthes, 1982, p. 382). The stake of this game is the act of mutual acknowledgement of adopted roles, so hard to become aware of.

At the seminar time this event also takes place but any participant could be the “master of ceremony” – the “professor” lying on the couch. Reading Barthes, Michał Paweł Markowski writes that „it is about acknowledgement and mutual acceptance of appropriate roles, i.e. mutual constitution. A professor becomes a professor when their desire [...] is given back to him by the Other. The Other becomes a student when their desire [...] is reflected in the professor’s discourse.” Later on, he comments on the seminar itself that it is “the space of working unawareness that should literally *speak out*” (Markowski, 1999, p. 11). If the hidden stake is mutual constitution, it is very high.

The aforesaid seminar games described as therapeutic can be regarded as desired – due to their positive results but also due to the fact that the seminar is a game playing field and the “professor” is responsible for leading it. Finally, when Barthes thinks about his role in the seminar, he writes that “I am neither a sacred (consecrated) subject nor a buddy, only a manager, an operator, a regulator: the one who gives rules, protocols, not laws” (1982, p. 333). As a matter of fact, the research in the area of transactional analysis mentions positive games much less frequently... Paradoxically, it could be an advantage in this case.

The unbearable lightness of description

If we wanted to make Marc Aymes’s definition of the seminar more precise for methodological purposes, it could read as follows: the seminar is a conversation of a group of people complying with the rules of academic discussion, taking place in a university building or other institution of an academic nature, carried out in order to work on an important scientific issue. The last dimension of the seminar mentioned by Aymes, namely its certain gratuitous and original character, can be methodologically specified in the following way: during the seminar, there are discussions not linked with a researched scientific issue and these which probably have never taken place before during other seminars. Well... this is a caricature of the seminar’s definition that can only satisfy official documentation. Of course, I take into account the fact that this caricature can be an effect of my mistake, my imperfect translation of how Aymes took advantage of seminars and methodological guidelines that could be used in a seminar room. Nevertheless, not for self-excuse, I would like to suggest a different justification.

The theory developed by Eric Berne and his continuators seems to be particularly fruitful when it is implemented in the educational context. Especially when it organizes analyses that talk about education. Combining the perspective of general human goals and the personality theory with the perspective of everyday life and communication styles, it seems to offer tools of particularly suitable scientific sensitivity for education analysis. It is favoured by the

appreciation of the importance of example and multiplying separate cases selected from practice, which is characteristic for the perspective of transactional analysis. I have an impression that the seminar phenomenon quite easily yields to the description provided from this perspective. Certainly, more profound research would generate a thesaurus of seminar games, similar to Berne's classic game set. Yet, there is a certain obstacle to such projects. Michał Paweł Markowski, pondering upon Roland Barthes's seminar topology remarks that "All those spaces [...] should not be subject to methodological reflection" (Markowski, 1999, p. 9). Barthes himself would say the same in a different way: "In seminar, there is nothing to represent, to imitate" (Barthes, 1989, p. 336). In another place, he would evocatively give a warning against a descriptive approach to the seminar phenomenon: "Orpheus does not turn to look at his delight; when he turns back, he loses it; if we turn back to look at knowledge, or method, or friendship, or the very theatre of our community, this whole plurality vanishes; nothing is left but the institution, or the task, or the psychodrama" (p. 334). The point is that it is very hard to resist such a look. To look, to describe, to determine frameworks, boundaries, methodological rules, didactic guidelines – finally: to have it under control. Meanwhile, as Michał Paweł Markowski writes in his commentaries on Barthes, "If I named an object, I would lose it, closing it in the amber of language, if I named my desire, I would not desire any more" (Markowski, 1999, p. 18). It is not only the researcher's "desire" – the very subject cries: Who am I? Do seminarists not ask exactly about that when they select and name their (desirable) subject of research?

One of the most frequently quoted Barthes's opinions on the seminar reads as follows: "The (real) seminar is for me the object of a (minor) delirium, and that my relations with this object are, literally, *amorous*" (1989, p. 332). The painting by Frederic Leighton of 1864 shows a dreadful scene from the myth of Orpheus. In this vision, it is not Orpheus but Eurydice who actively seeks her lover's glance! If one agrees to look at what is desired, to develop strategies, tactics, games – maybe the subject of that desire will vanish like Eurydice. Or even worse, it will turn into the "crude parody of difference" (Barthes, 1989, p. 334). In one of his essays, Czesław Miłosz writes a sentence which is a sign of exceptionally fragile awareness: „There are such delicate mechanisms in culture that once they are pointed to, they immediately change into something else due to the very attention paid to them" (Miłosz, 1996, p. 146). Maybe thanks to Miłosz we shall become more careful about providing the final descriptions of the world and our games in it. I only wonder in this last sentence of my paper on the seminar if this carefulness comes in time.

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Trans-akcja! Seminarium jako wydarzenie w pryzmacie analizy transakcyjnej

Streszczenie

Niniejszy tekst jest efektem pochylecia się nad tradycją akademickiego fenomenu seminarium badawczego w poszukiwaniu elementów jego topografii (pula cech niezmiennych). Do efektów tych poszukiwań „przyłożone” zostało oprzyrządowanie badawcze analizy transakcyjnej, co pozwoliło na nazwanie kilku gier seminaryjnych, ale także na sproblematyzowanie kwestii granic samego opisu seminarium.

Słowa kluczowe: analiza transakcyjna, seminarium, gra psychologiczna, Eric Berne.