THE ARTS AND PSYCHOTHERAPY

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By

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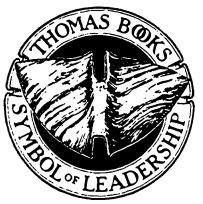

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OVERVIEW

TODAY'S arts therapists are practicing one of the most ancient forms of healing. They are in many ways reviving a lost art. Reinstated as a transmitter of curative activities, the artist is learning how to adapt proclivities for expression to the prevailing structures of mental health systems. Myth, ritual, and symbol making are entering the mental health clinic, not as objects of psychopathological analysis but as living processes. Clients are up out of their chairs and their couches, their therapists with them, and they are dancing, finding balance in kinesis. They are not only talking about conflict but finding it in their bodies, visualizing it, talking *to it*, and exorcising it. Theatre is returning to its point of origin, where dreams and emotional memories are enacted with sensitivity to affect life in the present, where we are distracted by our inability to see the obvious. We are learning again to appreciate the most familiar of our sensations, which are so taken for granted that they must be rediscovered together with the places we inhabit, our physical environments, and the people and things in them.

Those who have been convinced that unconscious forces rule their lives are believing again in *the will* and the life of the spirit inside of and between people. Empowered by a belief in themselves, people see that art gives form to changing outer and inner realities. Art provides a structure for being, for confronting what Keats called Negative Capability, the acceptance of ". . .uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason." The willful person has the power to focus, to concentrate and perceive selectively. Most importantly, however, this person can transform material existence. This is where the great

power of the arts in psychotherapy lies. Throughout time, art has shown that it can change, renew, and revalue the existing order. If art cannot physically eliminate the struggles of our lives, it can give significance and new meaning and a sense of active participation in the life process. This is offered as an alternative to passive resignation to self-fulfilling forms of emotional "illness," which will ultimately cripple the strongest personality. The arts in therapy are the return of the folk song in all of us. In group song and dance, we transcend the isolation of individuality and participate in the oneness of community enchantment.

Many of the problems that we face today grow from the multitude of distractions that interfere with our penetration of the moment. In 500 B.C., Heraclitus proclaimed that "man is estranged from that with which he is most familiar." I would imagine that the complexities of contemporary life have made this condition significantly worse today. Even concepts such as "becoming" and "actualization" can be neatly integrated with the production values of our age. These psychological constructs are useful as long as they do not negate and take attention away from *being*, the pure present which is the timescape of art. The cult of becoming can be problematic if it sets up expectations beyond the immediate reality of being, and the notion of actualization can suggest for some that one will one day be something *more* than one is now. We give too much attention to consequences rather than to the process of action and hence interrupt the completeness of the moment, pregnant with possibility.

Life offers each of us the challenge of creating ourselves within continuously changing yet unchanging time, and within an environment that is moving. To the extent that we enact this movement in psychotherapy, we are approaching the fullness of life. We respond to each emerging moment through the physical posturing of our bodies, the intelligence of our senses, and the expressiveness of our spirit. Our sensitivity to process must somehow be aligned with a culture that does not share these conceptions of time and in which unrealized goals dominate the mind with thoughts of acquisition and retention of what is acquired. Many refuse to accommodate themselves to this dissonance of values and consciously work toward the changing of the social order. Others cannot cope and lose their ability to cohere and live a self-sufficient and balanced life within the complexities and social contra-

dictions that surround them and confuse them.

Psychotherapy has grown to be a principal means by which the individual learns to reestablish the functional order of life with the help of one or more other human beings. The therapist fills the role of the listener/observer who helps people to hear, see, and feel themselves and the things around them. The therapist also assists in decoding the complexities of dreams and the cryptic or indirect messages people send to themselves and others. Perhaps most essentially psychotherapists strive to be present with their patients as completely within a given moment as is humanly possible. With their clients they learn to create an identity and a sense of who they are within the multiplicity of roles that they play within their work and personal lives.

The role of the therapist has grown as more traditional ways of finding support, self-validation, group inclusion, and guidance have either vanished or have become inadequate. With the integration of the arts and therapy, psychotherapists are harking back to the most ancient and time-validated methods of healing. Art allows for the expression of inner chaos and pain through a reassuring external order. The emotional scope of art is unparalleled by other modes of expression. The arts bring creative action to psychotherapy and break expressive boundaries. The full physical catharsis of the body and the more varied and far-reaching communication of artworks penetrate previously inexpressible places in people and further total expression and total perception.

By and large, the arts have been introduced separately to psychotherapy. Professional associations and the published literature on the subject have generally increased this separation. My own writing up to this point has been focused largely on art therapy because I had been trained to think of myself as a visual artist whose function was different from that of the actor, dancer, musician and poet. Work with clients in psychotherapy and artist colleagues has shown me that like most human beings, I have the ability to move forcefully within all of the arts and accompany students and clients in the varieties of their self-expression. Rather than refer to individual dance, drama, music, poetry, and visual art therapies, I will conceptualize them generically with the term "expressive arts therapy." If psychotherapists universally used

expressive modalities in their work, this term would be unnecessary. My objective is not the creation of yet another hybrid mental health profession; rather, I am working toward the inclusion of the arts into the psychotherapeutic or healing process. The term psychotherapy might itself someday prove inadequate because it perpetrates a mind-body split with its exclusive reference to psyche.

When the expressive therapist introduces action to psychotherapy, there is an acknowledgement of the fundamental kinesis and flux of the life process. Action within therapy and life is rarely limited to a specific mode of expression. One form of expression tends to flow from another. Thus, the expressive therapies of art, dance, drama, music, and poetry have an essential unity and complement each other in practice. In our work as psychotherapists, we find that people have different expressive styles with strengths and weaknesses. One person will be more visual, while another will emphasize the kinesthetic or verbal modalities. By opening the psychotherapeutic experience to the full range of expression, we augment the clinical depth and scope of the arts. An integrated approach to the arts in therapy allows us to respond to the client's emotional state, and it facilitates expression in the most direct and forceful manner possible.

The separation of the arts in therapy is rooted in the product orientation of technological culture. We are trained from childhood to perceive individual artworks as commodities, audiences as consumers, and artists as people who follow specific vocations and master a sequence of skills that enable them to develop a proficiency which will earn them "a living." The very notion of life is conceived economically. Our language in turn makes these ideas about art and artists permanent through linguistic categories and terms that continuously specialize the art impulse. The tendency of professional societies to secure a defined and financially viable place for their members within our modern maze of human service job classifications continues the progressive alienation from the emotional wellspring that gave birth to art. External economic pressures and the mind set of society have isolated art from its healing powers.

There is an indivisible dimension to the practice of the arts in therapy, however. When the human organism expresses itself with

complete authenticity, all sensory modes are in action. To perceive with total efficacy also requires this fullness of gesture, vision, sound, and touch. In ancient times and in societies not touched by modern mechanization, this integration of the senses in artistic expression was utterly natural. The arts were not only connected to one another but with life as a whole. A unified approach to the arts in therapy can begin to restore this forgotten balance.

Nietzsche, in his advocacy of the individual's power to transvaluate and renew the meaning of life through art, anticipated the reemergence of the arts as the primary human healing experience. In his *The Birth of Tragedy* (1871), he predicted that when the omnipotence of science was pushed to its breaking point, thus exposing its limits in explaining human phenomena, there would be a rebirth of tragedy. Nietzsche felt that existence "and the world seem justified only as aesthetic phenomena." In this scheme the tragic myth integrates "the ugly and disharmonic" as complementary parts of the eternal artistic context. Nietzsche's studies indicated to him that we reach exaltation through the full use of all our symbolic powers.

> We need a new world of symbols; and the entire symbolism of the body is called into play, not the mere symbolism of the lips, face, and speech but the whole pantomime of dancing, forcing every member into rhythmic movement. Then the other symbolic powers suddenly press forward, particularly those of music, in rhythmics, dynamics, and harmony. To grasp this collective release of all the symbolic powers, man must have already attained that height of self-abnegation which seeks to express itself symbolically through all of these powers. (Nietzsche, 1967, pp. 40-41)

Nietzsche would say that limited consciousness keeps this world of expression beyond our vision. He realized that throughout time not only art but the specific ritualistic and therapeutic uses of art have shown themselves to be an emotional imperative for all cultures with striking similarity. The actual behavior of today's expressive therapist parallels the methods of ancient predecessors in enacting and giving sensible form to dreams and conflicts. This book will attempt an integration with large continuities of culture and thus provide an alternative to those stories of origin which see the expressive therapies growing from twentieth century psychology and psychiatry. From an anthropological perspective, modern psychotherapeutic practices are but

a tiny dot within the universe of humankind's efforts to renew and heal the psyche. We have so completely accepted contemporary notions of time, space, life, and death that we have forgotton how these ideas were themselves constructed. Artists are generally more sensitive to our power to define and maintain concepts of reality. Today's psychological reality is but one of the myriad theoretical constructs that have been invented through history to justify and explain existence. If one is unhappy with life as it is perceived, it rarely occurs to that person that one's perception of life can be changed and reconstructed in a way that offers personal meaning. Art's greatest power lies in its ability to create, change, and sustain value.

In his *Letter to a Young Poet*, Rainer Maria Rilke confronts the reader with the merits of the inward search through art.

> If your daily life seems poor, do not blame it; blame yourself, tell yourself that you are not poet enough to call forth its riches; for to the creator there is no poverty and no poor indifferent place. And even if you were in some prison the walls of which let none of the sounds of the world come to your senses – would you not then still have your childhood, that precious, kingly possession, that treasure-house of memories? Turn your attention thither. Try to bring up the sunken sensations of that far past; your personality will grow more firm, your solitude will widen and will become a dusty dwelling by which the noise of others passes far away. And if out of this turning inward, out of this sinking into your own world verses come, then it will not occur to you to ask any one whether they are good verses. . .you will see in them your fond natural possesion, a fragment and a voice of your life. A work of art is good if it has sprung from necessity. In this nature of its origin lies its judgment: there is no other.

Rilke's instruction should not be construed as encouraging emotional complacency. The person living under oppressive social conditions will hopefully always strive to improve the quality of life. However, during the period of change, that person still has the power to focus creatively on inner resources. The artist understands the importance of working with the subject matter of your life. Wealth for the artist is to be able to interact continuously with a sensate world and to have what Blake described as the freedom to create his own system rather than "be enslav'd by another Man's." Faulkner spoke of how economic freedom was not needed by the writer. He did not know of any good writing that came from gifts or money. To him people are indestructible when driven by the "will to freedom."

To the extent that the literature on the arts in psychotherapy subordinates itself to traditional principles of psychiatry as it is commonly practiced, this literature is derivative and often unoriginal. What is needed today is a theoretical and operational approach that comes more from the historical continuities of art. We must go back to and restore the early art-life integration of the first artists and healers. The constructs upon which contemporary mental health systems are based must be questioned. We should also look critically upon the concept of *art as an entity unto itself*. The conception of "art objects" and "artworks" as separate from the lives of the people making them is antithetical to the therapeutic functions of art. Art therapy does not accept the belief that the artist is only a vehicle for what is to be created. Within the psychotherapeutic art experience, what matters is the person or the group of participants. Art is a means through which they intensify, clarify, elevate, and share their personhood.

The fixed commodity definition of art is in opposition to the dynamic process and constant movement of nature. We have been so completely schooled to think of ourselves as people who acquire things that the problem of acquisition presents itself in the training of therapists. Psychotherapists come to think of themselves as technicians skilled in the application of specific techniques to specific problems. The construct of mechanical, replicable, and technical action permeates professional life. An alternative operational mode is offered in the role of the artist who acts within a more conceptually open-ended, changing, and fundamentally emotional universe.

As a result of the ascendency of mechanical science as a paradigm for existence, the influence of art has been steadily diminishing. Psychology has not yet incorporated the space-time relations of modern physics, and perhaps the arts can be helpful in this integration. Transpersonal psychology, as an alternative way of viewing phenomena, challenges the perfunctory rules of psychological science that are in conflict with Einstein's description of a "finite" yet "unbounded" universe with *no limits*. Freudian and behavioral theories of psychological determinism, with their chains of causation extending in a linear progression, are related to Newtonian principles of fixed positions in space as the measuring point of reality. For Einstein, "the fictitious rigid body of refer-

ence is of no avail in the general theory of relativity" (Einstein, 1961, p. 98). Our movement through, or more accurately *in*, life is nonlinear. The step-by-step principles of developmental psychology are distinctly western constructs. Humanistic psychotherapy and art have in common a commitment to give order to changing experience by understanding the relationship of one dynamic occurrence to another. Their field of reference is open, and all participants move in relation to each other. The illusion of the therapist as fixed to a constant position of observation is removed. With this unmasking the therapist's personal process and changing observations within the therapeutic moment are as vital as those of the client. Skill and experience come into play through an ability to maximize the healing potential of the relationship. Just as actors determine the form and intensity of expression through their interaction, so, too, the psychotherapeutic relationship is based on the dynamic of exchange.

The rigidities of psychological determinism have alienated us from artistic and mythic explanations of existence. A one-sided adherence to "empirical truth" would lead us to think that imaginative realities have no "validity." Through the use of the arts in psychotherapy, behavior does not necessarily fit into a dogmatic cause and effect schema but rather *participates in* a timeless human drama. The artistic mode of perception keeps the mind in touch with a world possessing both archaic continuity and infinite novelty. The arts offer a valuable operational polarity to the use of discursive language in psychotherapy, and they allow us to communicate with the emotions in their own language. Their multisensory rhythms must be kept intact rather than be absorbed within the more conventional verbal exchange of psychotherapy. The importance of emphasizing and supporting the distinctness of these polarities is reinforced by brain researchers who distinguish the more imaginative and nondiscursive hemisphere of thought from analytic and verbal thinking. Those of us engaged in the therapeutic use of the arts have learned much from the more established psychotherapeutic disciplines, but rather than place too much effort on adopting their style, expressive arts therapists should maintain an identity that is unique to them.

From a more practical standpoint, I have learned from my experience as an expressive therapist that within the context of psychotherapy there are many things that can be communicated more effectively through the arts than through a verbal exchange. I would like to provide an initial overview of the therapeutic concepts that will be discussed in the following chapters. I do not wish to downplay the importance of language in the expressive therapies. Spoken language is a unifying medium that is used to facilitate and clarify expression in other modes.

TRANSITIONAL OBJECTS AND THE THERAPEUTIC RELATIONSHIP

All of the art forms provide a focus for sharing between the therapist and client. Poems, drawings, dramatic improvisations, and the like are tangible representations that can be discussed with the goal of discovering the motivation for the expression and how it relates to one's life as a whole. Participants in an expressive therapy experience might simply wish to share how they perceived an artwork and the feelings it provoked. Preliminary dialogue of this kind inevitably brings up issues that can precipitate the further association of feelings. The stimulation of artworks supports the exchange of energy between therapist and clients. When the therapist and client are finding it difficult to relate directly to one another, the artwork may be a bridge between them, a third object, or what the psychoanalysts call a transitional object, which gives them a safe middle ground through which they can be together. For one person, the intermediary might be a drawing, for another a poem or perhaps a series of improvised movements. All of these principles are equally applicable to individual or group therapies.

Artworks might be first discussed from a formal point of view as a warm-up to more personal sharing. The analysis of color, sound groupings, the shape and texture of movements or the placement of bodies during a drama exercise will draw attention to the many different qualities of an artwork and expose different levels of meaning. Preliminary discussion provides participants with an opportunity to become acquainted and discover how they might best communicate what is on their minds without jeopardizing personal needs for safety. Trust, together with stimulation, can

grow from this process, which helps to prepare the therapeutic relationship for the sharing of more private and conflict-laden feelings. When working with seriously disturbed or withdrawn persons, the therapeutic experience might be exclusively focused on the sharing of concrete perceptions, since they might not be capable at that point of discussing anything other than the physical qualities of the environment.

PERCEPTUAL FOCUSING

The arts fully utilize physical objects in psychotherapy. As attention passes from one object to another, therapists have the opportunity to chart the selective course of a person's perceptions. Why does one object hold someone longer than another? Why does a person constantly choose one type of object first and avoid others? Is attention constant in moving from object to object? Consciously performing these actions with real objects in therapy can help a person to interact with the environment in a manner characterized by more care and concentration. The mundane can be elevated through aesthetic perception, and surroundings can begin to take on new significance. During therapy concentration can be focused on absorbing the essence of an object and those qualities which make it unique. Continued observation of an object will deepen an individual's relationship with it and the understanding of its properties. All of these object-oriented exercises can be applied to relationships with other people.

SAFE EXPRESSION

Expressive action with objects may allow for the venting of emotions that would either be too threatening or inappropriate to act out in a situation other than a therapeutic dramatization. One of the great advantages of the arts in therapy is that they allow for the cathartic expression of anger, fear, and painful memories through all of the senses, thus maximizing the effects of expulsion. For the person who cannot directly communicate threatening feelings through language, the nonverbal arts provide an opportunity for their expression in a less intimidating form.

ENACTMENT AND EMOTIONAL CLARIFICATION

The enactment of conflict through dramatic experiences provides a second chance to relive a troubling situation. When self-consciousness has been minimized and the person has become completely absorbed in the dramatized role, penetration to the deepest levels of the pysche is possible. Feelings are aroused spontaneously and in response to the surrounding action. People observing the enactment make every effort to take in the feelings and thoughts of the actor and provide support for further revelation through their engagement. Without this "communion" of feelings, the actor is alone and will be distracted by viewers as opposed to being transformed and elevated by their energy.

The arts are not limited by the time-space restraints of verbal discourse and are ideal for the enactment of dreams and feelings that provoke disassociated mental imagery. Art orders emotion at the deepest levels of consciousness, and it has a scope that can contain the most complex feelings. In addition to being able to express contradictions of emotion, the arts have the power to clarify and bring emotion into focus. Through therapeutic enactments we can try out new roles and learn more about our impact on others within an environment that supports confrontation and the sharing of feelings.

AESTHETIC ORDER AND PERSONALITY BALANCE

A dimension of therapy unique to the arts involves the way in which the perception of aesthetic equilibrium can directly affect the functioning of the whole person. When order is perceived in the environment, there is a corresponding feeling of order within the mind and body of the perceiver. The same applies for feelings of beauty, dissonance, and physical stress. The expressive arts therapist can help in attaining this correspondence of inner feelings and perceptions of the environment through art experiences and forms of meditation that assist in giving order to the varied stimuli which vie for our attention. Feelings of competence in controlling emotion in this manner, together with all successful encounters with art, will in turn build a more complete sense of self-confidence and self-esteem.

SUBLIMATION

Perhaps the best known therapeutic quality of art is the process of sublimation through which the artist channels potentially harmful emotions into socially acceptable expression. The motivation for much great art comes from deeply rooted anger and psychological discomfort, which could otherwise have had a destructive effect on the person. Artists repeatedly discuss how "psychic disease" is often the drive behind their creative urge. Through creating, they cure themselves and grow strong in their ability to deal with stress and emotional upheaval.

TRANSVALUATION

> *Tis a dangerous moment for any one when the meaning goes out of things and Life stands straight – and punctual – and yet no content comes. Yet such moments are. If we survive then they expand us, if we do not, but that is Death, whose if is everlasting.*
>
> – Emily Dickinson

An all-inclusive property of the psychotherapeutic art experience is the alteration or intensification of perceptual reality. Depression and anxiety are for the most part characterized by the absence of life-building forces in the individual. The depressed child does not take delight in the construction and reconstruction of imaginary environments with blocks or sand. Children actively engaged with play find pleasure in process and have little concern with physical permanence. A stone or piece of paper is easily transformed to serve the purposes of imagination. Art offers the emotionally estranged person the power to change the course of the passions from the denial of life to its affirmation. Transvaluation can begin in simple processes that might include a focusing of attention on the rhythms of breath, speech, and walking. This validation of experience is not necessarily built upon illusions of optimism or one-sided positive thinking, nor does it encourage withdrawal from conflict or negation of the will.

Art strives toward an honest and full evaluation of life, and its ability to encompass the polarities of emotion are acknowledged in tragedy. It seems that the ultimate transvaluation of experience involves the transformation of human suffering into a dramatiza-

tion of the endurance and compassion of the human spirit. "Here, when the danger to his will is greatest, art approaches as a saving sorceress, expert at healing. She alone knows how to turn these nauseous thoughts about the horror or absurdity of existence into notions with which one can live: these are the *sublime* as the artistic taming of the horrible, and the *comic* are the artistic discharge of the nausea of absurdity" (Nietzsche, 1967, p. 60). Nietzsche stresses that the "redeeming vision" of humanity has always emerged from suffering. In the face of tragedy, art continues life with a sense of appreciation for, and an acceptance of, its intensities.

RHYTHM

Poets and philosophers from Confucius to our contemporaries and perhaps many who preceded written history have realized that the person who has rhythm has the world. They see that the perception of the kinetic flow within the self is a continuation of the movements of nature and the universe. As actors and movers, we participate in the divine order of kinesis. Beginning with a process of centering on our individual organism's perpetual movement, we prepare ourselves to connect with other people and extend individual rhythms to the collective. In psychotherapy groups the process is often reversed for those people who need the support of the group and its rhythmic pulsations before feeling their own. The dynamic harmony of rhythm underlies all of the arts in therapy.

COMMUNITY

The verbal exchange in therapy cannot reach the primordial levels of group unity and rhythm that are achieved with relative ease through chant and collective movement. Music, dance, and drama lend themselves naturally to the formation of a collective artistic identity in groups. The common practice of expressive art therapy in groups is an indication of our needs for group inclusion and ritual. Within psychotherapeutic settings even the more individually oriented modes of the plastic arts, poetry, and creative writing are frequently adapted to group activities. Through

the enactment and sharing of their art expressions, individuals have the opportunity to receive both the benefits of the private artistic search and the support and validation offered by a group. Engagement in a therapeutic artistic community allows the person to transcend individuality through a celebration of group expression. Group consciousness does not have to imply the absence of individual differences. A sense of the collective can embody the individual and highly differentiated expression of group members. Feelings of inclusion and group identity are often most complete in the knowledge that the individual differences are accepted and encouraged.

ENVIRONMENT

> *He who is seeking to know himself, should be ever seeking himself in external things, and by so doing will he be best able to find, and explore his inmost light.*
>
> – Amos Bronson Alcott,
> from his journals of 1834

The healing power of immersion into nature has been stressed by artists like Wordsworth who felt that in rural life "the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain maturity." A sense of place orders consciousness. Just as the expressiveness of a particular painting or sound experience has a parallel effect on the inner psyche of the perceiver so, too, the evocativeness of place has a corresponding effect on emotion. Thoreau has given our most illustrious example of the healing power of absorbing oneself in nature. "To him who contemplates a trait of natural beauty no harm nor disappointment can come. . . When I detect a beauty in any of the recesses of nature, I am reminded, by the serene and retired spirit in which it requires to be contemplated, of the inexpressible privacy of a life, – how silent and unambitious it is" (Henry David Thoreau, "The Natural History of Massachusetts," July, 1842).

The physical environment of psychotherapeutic sessions has a definite effect on the range of feelings of participants. A stimulating and pleasing environment will help to motivate participants in artistic expression, whereas an uncomfortable space will create obstacles to expression. My experience with conduct-

ing expressive therapy groups in cultural institutions and what might be referred to as supportive art environments has shown that participants are more quickly apt to feel the arousal of artistic impulses in these settings than within a more clinical context. However, even the most oppressive environments lend themselves to transformation through art. Strong negative emotion can provide the fuel for the transfiguration of this energy into powerful artworks. It also goes without saying that the presence of art helps to humanize and soften the harshness of institutional environments.

TOTAL EXPRESSION

Each of the arts has its distinct value in psychotherapy and together, to use a classic axiom from Gestalt psychology, they are greater than the sum of their parts. The visual arts and poetry lend themselves naturally to contemplation of self and nature. They have been more widely used by psychotherapists in the past because of their ability to represent mental imagery concretely. Drawing and poems have a physical permanence that is absent in the more temporal art forms of music, dance, and improvisational drama. However, with the increasing accessibility of audio and visual recording equipment, performing arts experiences can be played back to therapists and clients to be evaluated and discussed. All of these art modes can be approached in a way that either encourages individual self-analysis or group interaction or a combination of both.

In my work, I usually first engage the client through the mode that is most comfortable and least threatening. In a more nondirective context, the client will usually begin to communicate with a familiar art form without suggestion from the therapist. As the client's spontaneity increases, the therapist can encourage what Paul Knill refers to as a "transition" to another mode of expression. This change might be introduced if the client is beginning to grow restless or if the transition has the potential to "amplify" the vein of expression (Knill, 1978). Changing to another form of expression can also serve the purpose of emotional clarification or sharing with others. Yet transition may in certain cases be perceived as avoidance which can be as therapeutically significant as expression itself.

When working with young children in a nondirective play therapy environment, structured forms of intervention may not be needed because the child tends to move freely from one expressive mode to another. "Intermodal transitions" and "amplifications" are common to childhood expression. Although adults regularly express themselves through the various modes of expression, they generally need more structure and support from a therapist in learning to communicate with intermodal spontaneity. The structuring of the therapeutic process as a dramatic enactment generally facilitates all forms of expression in that theatre is the art form that includes all other modes. Role-playing exercises and the enactment of conflictual situations are processes that most closely parallel traditional psychotherapy. However, within the theatrical event there is the potential for communication through the full expressive apparatus of the body and imagination. In the creation of therapeutic theatre, we will discover the complete and natural integration of the arts. J.L. Moreno advocated this integrated theatrical principle, and through his action-oriented psychotherapeutic enactments, he provided a link between modern psychotherapy and its ancient roots. Moreno, a psychiatrist, established the Viennese Theatre of Spontaneity in 1921 and began what was to be a revolutionary force in both theatre and psychotherapy in that he brought the two back to their beginnings. Before he formulated the principles of psychodrama, Moreno's explorations were focused on the complete spectrum of the creative act and its relationship to psychotherapy.

> In the spontaneous-creative enactment emotions, thoughts, processes, sentences, pauses, gestures, and movements, seem first to break formlessly and in anarchistic fashion into an ordered environment and settled consciousness. But in the course of their development it becomes clear that they belong together like the tones of melody; that they are in relation similar to the cells of a new organism. The disorder is only an outer appearance; inwardly there is a consistent driving force, a plastic ability, the urge to assume a definite form: the strategem of the creative principle which allies itself with the cunning of reason in order to realize an imperative intention. . .It was the error of psychoanalysis that it failed to understand the processes going on in artists as specific phenomena of the creative ego – but derived its forms and materials more or less exclusively from the sexual or biological history of his private person (complexes). (Moreno, 1973, p. 43)

Moreno placed value on art expressions that honestly and directly expressed feeling. He laid the groundwork for the expressive therapies in deemphasizing the importance of the technically perfect and finished product in the arts. Spontaneous expression was what mattered to him. He saw significance in unfinished artworks and unconventional statements as long as they followed the flow of the person's feelings. Moreno's concern was the inner adventure of the creative individual, and finished products were valued only to the extent that they facilitated this process. The Theatre of Spontaneity has given the expressive therapies an alternative psychotherapeutic construct, viewing human beings as "actors." At every moment we are actively or passively engaged in the action of creating our lives. Through the supportive environment of therapy, we attempt to become more aware of this reality and the ways in which we can increase the value of life process for ourselves and the people we inter*act* with.

ART AND UNDERSTANDING

I have attempted to write this book as an artist fully engaged in the process of psychotherapy practice and training. The themes that unify my work have been largely adapted from the world of art and the statements of artists. In an attempt to reintegrate the artistic and healing consciousness, I have relied heavily on the contributions of artists to psychological understanding. Psychotherapy must complement its scientific dimensions with the artistry of relating to other human beings and the physical environment. In this respect, I hope that the following pages will provide an artistic alternative to more traditional conceptualizations of psychotherapeutic relationships. We will find within the arts many examples of the artist's sensitivity to the psychodynamics of the interpersonal process. One of the best passages I know is a poem written by Vincent Ferrini.[1] The poem, entitled "Folksong" reveals what I believe to be the essence of the psychotherapeutic relationship for client and therapist alike.

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[1] From Vincent Ferrini, *Selected Poems,* George F. Butterick (ed.), 1976. Courtesy of University of Connecticut Library Special Collections Department, Storrs, Connecticut.

I pass
by day
and night
no one has
seen me

If you ever
want to find
me
and know me
leave behind
yourself
and enter
the caves
of other
people

there you
will find
me
who is
yourself

The artist offers an inscrutable spirit of inquiry and a *faith* in the value of a threefold dialogue with nature, others, and the self. These contributions are major gifts to the mental health of the world. The teachings of the arts in relation to emotion tend to have very little to do with orthodox medical practices in the mental health field. I have a definite semantic difficulty with the terms, "therapy" and "psychotherapy" in that they represent a medical tradition that stresses the assessment and treatment of psychopathology. However, I trust that these concepts will eventually evolve into more holistic descriptions of healing relationships.

I believe that our work in the arts is more closely allied with the larger continuities of religious belief and faith. The arts can, in this sense, be viewed as sacramental actions that symbolically represent the mysteries and intensities of inner experience. They are "sensible signs" of the psyche's efforts to become transcendent, and this kinship with religious ritual explains much of their potency.

This book will begin with a description of shamanism as practiced in various regions of the world. The shaman is for us a

vital teacher in that this person is able to bring together the various functions of artist, priest, and healer. As we grow critical of the narrowness and separateness of contemporary professions and the negative associations to concepts such as therapy, the shaman demonstrates new possibilities for action.

The truth of the shamanic enactment lies in its continuity through the ages. All of psychotherapy, and even its most traditional forms, is inherently ceremonial. The ceremonial enactment focuses energy. As a result of this focusing there is a transformation of emotion. United with psychotherapy the arts revive lost rituals of healing that lie dormant in all people. Healing ceremonies relating to the "whole of one's being" through total sensory expression, will draw together many sources of energy, and will result in a comprehensive emotional transformation. I like to think of this book as not only a description of the work I have been fortunate to experience in the arts and psychotherapy but also as an archeological study, uncovering the way in which this work relates to ancient continuities of healing ceremony and enactment. I will begin with the shaman and then go on in successive chapters to relate how the arts and psychotherapy can rediscover what Yeat's described as "the rituals of a lost faith".

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SPECIAL thanks are due to my fellow faculty members and graduate students at Lesley College with whom I have been exploring and testing the ideas and methods presented in these pages. Our Lesley community consists of people coming together from throughout the United States and many foreign countries to research the psychotherapeutic use of the arts. The sharing and teamwork is at times so complete that it is difficult to determine whether I am describing an idea that is my own, that is an associates or one that originated from the collective that we are together. The international nature of our community has been a significant factor in my growing commitment to the universality of the artistic healing process. We are a group of artists and therapists coming together with diverse backgrounds in the arts, psychiatry, clinical psychology, education, and the various expressive art therapies to learn from each other how we might best contribute to a unified approach to the arts in psychotherapy.

I am indebted to Paul Knill, Norma Canner, Joseph Power, and Peter Rowan for their contributions to deepening my understanding of action and enactment in therapy; to Rudolf Arnheim for his many years of theoretical and psychological guidance; to Truman Nelson and Vincent Ferrini for their friendship and their support of my work as an artist; to Christopher Cook at the Addison Gallery of American Art for giving me the opportunity for five years to create a utopian expressive therapy program within the art museum; and to my wife Karen for sifting and struggling through every particle of this work with me over the years.

CONTENTS

THE ARTS AND PSYCHOTHERAPY

I tell you: one must still have chaos in one, to give birth to a dancing star.

– Friedrich Nietzsche,
Thus Spake Zarathustra

Chapter 1

THE ENDURING SHAMAN

THE ancient predecessor of the expressive arts therapist can be found in every region of the world in the person anthropologists call the shaman. In many ways an early group therapist, the shaman's work is a response to communal needs. The shaman serves as the intermediary between people and "forces" that must be engaged in order to influence the course of community life. Shamanism is characterized by a belief in the power of human beings to participate in a direct and personal relationship with the supernatural dynamic of life.

The shaman generally strives to create a psychologically charged group environment. As the emissary of the group, the shaman is *propelled* into a condition of altered consciousness that makes dialogue with "the spirits" possible. The group projects power to the shaman, which can be measured in relation to the intensity of their collective spontaneity and enthusiasm. Their chanting, movement, and musical accompaniment takes on hypnotic dimensions as they transmit energy to the protagonist. This emotionally charged atmosphere of the shamanic enactment in turn engages all participants and strengthens their resolve to achieve transcendence and the neutralization of emotional conflict.

Shamanism was, and still is, most firmly rooted in communities where there is a high degree of uncertainty in daily living. The shaman expresses and embodies the fears and emotional conflicts of the community and in this way vents potentially harmful feelings through ceremonial enactments. These rituals have as their

goal the maintenance of social balance and control in relation to the elements of nature. Early societies were keenly aware of the need for their communal life to reflect the harmony and rhythms of nature. The Hopi world view embodies this vision of a dynamic and nonstatic balance as the underlying structure of all life. "The living body of man and the living body of the earth were constructed in the same way. Through each ran an axis, man's axis being the backbone, the vertebral column, which controlled the equilibrium of his movements and his functions. Along this axis were several vibratory centers which echoed the primordial sound of life throughout the universe or sounded a warning if anything went wrong" (Waters, 1969, p. 11).

Within aboriginal communities religious and spiritual life are completely embodied in the rituals of the shaman. Spirituality has a practical and direct link to the everyday lives of people. The community gathers to engage the supernatural collectively in response to specific problems. The shaman is regarded as a spiritual leader, or guide, who is empowered to communicate with transcendent forces. Shamanic practices are always part of a more general cultural belief system that explained the workings of nature. The acceptance of these beliefs by the community is the source of the shaman's sacramental power. Through the use of culturally accepted images, rituals, and other "sensible signs" the group participates in the sacred spheres of life, which are perceived as the origin of psychic wholeness. The expressive art therapists who are reviving the role of the shaman in contemporary society must function in an environment that does not offer a supportive mythology of this kind. The dissonance between the values of the expressive therapies and the technological belief systems of society is the primary distinguishing feature between therapists' work today and the historical continuities of shamanism. Where the shaman's power was invariably created by the collective support of the community, today's expressive therapist usually must work individually to resurrect these primal instincts in groups. Hence, the expressive therapist often feels this work to be of a revolutionary order in that the values of the social system must be realigned in order to accommodate the realities of nature.

Shamanic enactments provided the beginnings of theatre,

religion, and, to a great extent, culture, because group identity and feelings of the transcendent "oneness" of humanity were evoked through these ceremonies. The mythology expressed through ritual and healing experiences gave a consistent order and unity to the perception of the universe. In shamanism were the first psychological theories and the first metaphoric explanations for life. From these early points of origin, the continuation of the fundamental human motive for conceptual certainty can be seen. Shamanism's elaborate myth systems prove that speculative thought and transpersonal ways of perceiving the world were present in early humanity.

The shaman's operational mode is characterized by reliance on poetic and mythic explanations of life. The metaphors used to explain existence are directly tied to the patterns of nature, and they are in harmony with the flux and constant motion of physical matter. Ideas of permanence are conspicuously absent in shamanic belief systems in which the community must repeatedly reestablish a balanced relationship with the forces of nature. This approach to life and time is distinctly cyclical and antithetical to the values of technological culture. It has been maintained that shamanic healing is "predominantly a right hemisphere phenomenon." The individual must take responsibility for the healing process by engaging in an imaginative dialogue with illness, which is perceived as a "teacher" or a voice within the self. The organism must communicate with itself in order to reestablish a functional balance (Villoldo, 1976).

The evolution of ideas and explanations for existence has seen a transformation in our society from mythic theories to formalized psychological principles. According to the evidence of anthropologists, it would seem that the spiritual or mythic constructs of the shaman, together with their healing enactments, have had a far greater curative effect within their communities than the methods of modern psychiatry. Perhaps much of this success has to do with a collective atmosphere of trust and belief that existed in early communities. This contrasts with the fragmentation and disillusionment of contemporary life. It seems that the shaman's and the psychotherapist's effectiveness is determined by the intensity of group support. Early healers also fully appre-