RE-ENCHANTING ART THERAPY

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Dr. Kapitan holds a master's degree in creative arts therapy from Pratt Institute and a doctorate in Community Art Therapy and Leadership from the Union Institute. She enjoys painting in pastels, fabrics, and artist bookmaking with a particular interest in the practice of meditative art-making. Her twenty years as an art therapist began as one of the first school art therapists in her state and grew to include art therapy for youth in alternative education and other settings. Currently, she is a consultant to Capacitar, an international network of women's empowerment and solidarity, and is also working to establish internships and service opportunities in Central and South America.

RE-ENCHANTING ART THERAPY

Transformational Practices for Restoring Creative Vitality

By

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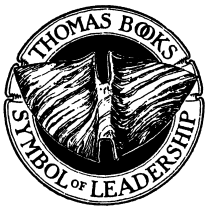

CHARLES C THOMAS • PUBLISHER, LTD.
Springfield • Illinois • U.S.A.

Published and Distributed Throughout the World by

CHARLES C THOMAS • PUBLISHER, LTD.
2600 South First Street
Springfield, Illinois 62704

ISBN 0-398-07371-6 (hard)
ISBN 0-398-07372-4 (paper)

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 2002032352

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Printed in the United States of America
SR-R-3

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Kapitan, Lynn.
Re-enchanting art therapy : transformational practices for restoring vitality / by Lynn Kapitan.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 0-398-07371-6 (hard) -- ISBN 0-398-07372-4 (paper)
1. Art therapy. I. Title.

RC489.A7 K357 2003
616.89'1656--dc21

2002032352

PREFACE

Re-Enchanting Art Therapy is written in response to a growing anxiety coming out of recent, rapid changes in the field of mental health care. As contact with patients or clients decreases, case loads grow, and health care organizations downsize, upsize, and reorganize, therapists find themselves having to cope with often chaotic and sometimes toxic work environments that drain them of the vital creative energy they need to perform their work. In the field of art therapy, it is a crucial matter for therapists to be able to access their creativity, for without it they cannot offer the very knowledge and tools they have that are unique to their profession, critically needed in the world. Without free access to creative vitality, they become deskilled and disenchanted with their work lives. Many disenchanted art therapists leave the field, looking for better conditions in what is perceived as less risky, more prestigious professions; others look for ways to leave clinical practice while still maintaining their professional identity as art therapists. But the world suffers their leaving, for it is in these dispirited places and people where the gifts of art therapy are most needed to do their work of transformation.

This book is intended to be useful to art therapists, supervisors, students of art therapy, and colleagues in the related fields of mental health care who seek to approach their work with a degree of personal therapeutic artistry but find it a struggle to do so in the kinds of environments or populations with which they work. An understanding of toxic work environments, while a common experience among art therapists, has not been given much, if any, attention in the professional literature. As such, this text will be a useful companion to supervision texts or population-specific studies. But even more useful, I believe, would be as a different sort of companion: something pulled off the bookshelf when the time has come to reach beyond pragmatism and

contemplate why the struggle, why so alone, why certain things have fallen apart or gotten stuck, or why that deadening feeling accompanying the casework or the work environment. For there is value in approaching these questions less directly than as problems to be solved. They are also invitations: openings or doorways into the deeper territories of our hearts, minds, and soul that are stirred by wounding. There is an angle in every supervisory or practice question that can't quite be pinned down and isn't satisfied with explanation or theory. A shift to contemplation of its deeper mystery, accessed through imagery and story, can awaken new and different insights, and put the questioner on a different path.

Beginning with the question, "What is killing the creativity of art therapists?" I formalized research to discover the roots of art therapist disenchantment in order to see and accurately know what we are dealing with as a phenomenon. Much has been written recently by art therapists about the need to pay more attention to their own art-making but the topic until now has been informed mostly by opinion and speculation. To further the research, I investigated the art, story, myth and dream imagery of art therapists who felt various degrees of disenchantment with their work. That art therapists do not value or have forgotten the importance of their own art-making was not found to be true. Instead, their art and stories revealed a larger concern for the pollution and sealing off of the creative function, disabling their ability to create or act in their work environments and making them toxic to others. They all sensed something was wrong, feeling cut off from the sources of creative vitality that their artistic and therapeutic practices depended upon, leaving them feeling dried up and gasping for creative energy. They were suffering various forms of "creative death" signally to them that what is not growing is slowly dying. If, as Eliade (1958) wrote, creative death is a call to initiation into greater life, then learning ways to welcome and embrace what most disturbs us, it would seem, is a valuable practice for restoring creative vitality and transforming our work as art therapists.

Re-Enchanting Art Therapy presents these findings and explores ways in which art therapists can develop a sustained relationship to the sources of their creativity. It re-examines what it means to "practice" art therapy and links practice to *vitality,* a word that imparts a sense of sustainable life or, in its absence, the ever possibility of dying. It situates art therapy as a living artistic practice, a socially responsive art form,

broadening it beyond traditional categories of art and therapy in order to address a wider, more inclusive range of theories. It introduces the practice of "transformational rehabilitation" which links modern art therapists to the legacy of craftspersons living in partnership with a dynamic, reciprocating world that is alive with shapes, colors, textures, and expressive forms demanding artistic seeing and action, attention and response. The legacy we give to ourselves and others is this restored ability to create the vital connections needed in which to live and work, and thus claim our place among the world's *animadoras:* practitioners in the broadest sense of the word who "awaken and restore," breathing new life into and out of form.

Although I describe such practice, readers may find it objectionable to have to locate my methods of transformation in the slower-paced telling of stories, the witness of dreams, or the poetic offerings of unanalyzed artworks. We are used to measuring life according to the efficiency and pace of technology; we expect information to be presented in ways that are immediately functional, rational, and instrumental. But for the return of life's vital energies, it is imperative to slow down. As one of my companions told me, there is nothing wrong with efficiency but it will come to feel empty and sometimes corrupting if we don't also allow the contemplative pace of a walk of life. Slowing down, I am given room to attend more closely and care more completely for the world that is calling out for my response.

I am also aware that it will not be difficult to demonstrate the absurdity of this text and my belief in the vital life of images, stories, and dreams to re-enchant art therapists. It never is. We have a long habit of re-interpreting images as literalized history, psychology or science and, in the process, killing them. So I know that as others write practical, how-to texts on art therapy theory and methods, I may well be cast as a fuzzy-headed day-dreamer, not exactly current and not exactly an appropriate model. For the purposes of this text, I willingly threw out much practical knowledge I have of art therapy, but never was I self-deluded. I have attempted to write from the perspective of a pragmatic visionary, believing that "our daydreaming is what marks humanity in its depths" (Bachelard, 1969). To bring practice back to life, one has to reach beyond the literal and risk making a space for dreaming. What arrives in that open, prepared space will not necessarily be bliss. The antidote to disenchantment is not its enchanting, bliss-filled counterpart

but a true awakening to the paradoxes and polarities that hold them both.

I am not the first to observe art therapy needs re-enchantment, and I owe the title of this book, in part, to Suzy Gablik who wrote *The Reenchantment of Art* (1991). I draw on aspects in her groundbreaking work that have inspired art therapists to re-envision the artistic traditions of their practices. Gablik, in turn, acknowledges the cultural historian Morris Berman, who wrote *The Reenchantment of the World* (1981), for the title of her text. Re-enchantment refers to a process of stepping beyond our modernist, enlightenment heritage of objectification in a way that allows a return of soul, and the integration of heart and mind in the ethic of care (Gablik, 1991). Because I was seeking a re-framing of art therapy my inquiry was intentionally interdisciplinary. To identify my contemplative practices, I turned to the fields of socially engaged Buddhism, organizational leadership, peace studies, depth psychology, improvisational music, and philosophical inquiry. I drew on the literature of world mythology, feminism, environmental activism, art criticism, and architecture to make some of the connections between the stories told to me and similar patterns found in other human experiences across time and space. I also am indebted to the poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke and Mary Oliver, and to the life works of Joseph Campbell and Clarissa Pinkola Estes for their acute observations of the human condition expressed in the realm of timeless myth. Where acknowledgment of these sources would disrupt the flow of the stories, I chose to footnote and locate them in chapter endnotes instead of the standard APA format.

I am also indebted to the acute observations and practices of living mentors who had the patience to teach me and inspire knowledge of my own. Dr. Arthur Robbins has had a hand in every question I have ever asked about art therapy, for there is no more exacting a teacher in learning the depths of the process and the practice of self-scrutiny. Dr. Shaun McNiff is a visionary who has known for a long time the same living truths I have only recently bumped into, and to him I owe my appreciation for the life of images. Dr. Fred Donaldson is the closest I have ever come to an apprenticeship with a shaman, which he disguises in the romping form of a "big white guy" who makes his living playing with children and wild animals. It is strange to me that this triumvirate of men has guided me in a field that is predominantly

female and in great need of the feminine wisdom they have been instrumental in awakening in me.

For my research, I also acknowledge and thank the many art therapists who collaborated with me, shared their stories, and made a space with me for dreaming. I had only begun my inquiry when Lori Vance invited me to create the opening plenary for the profession's national conference on the theme of power and integrity. The art therapist's ambivalent relationship to creative power later became an essential finding in the study of art therapist disenchantment. I thank my collaborators Josie Abbenante, Valerie Appleton, Melody Todd Ashby, Robert Ault, Ellen Horowitz, Don Jones, and Cathy Moon who so willingly shared their insights on creative power and furthered my study. I had numerous conversations with art therapists interested in the same kinds of questions and thank Pat Allen, Janis Timms-Bottos, Suellen Semekowski, Deborah Linesch, Karen McCormick, Luanne Alberts, Stan Strickland, and Bruce Moon for their support and insights. Other art therapists, who showed me the depths and varieties of their disenchantment in the toxic work environment, were equally important contributors, although I have changed their names to protect confidentiality. I extend my thanks to "Danielle," "Leah," "Beth," "Sally," "Kari," "Val," and "Joy." When I put out an invitation to form a research group of art therapists who were interested in exploring the phenomenon of disenchantment in their lives and discover methods for restoring creative energy and transforming their art therapy practices, several art therapy colleagues willingly stepped forward though not all were able to participate. I am grateful to the "radical sewing circle" of my peers, Sonnie Albinson, Melody Todd Ashby, Michele Burnie, Min Kennedy, and Debbie Mickelsen for their wicked humor, wildish ways, and courage to encounter one another with a vulnerable fierceness of heart.

This research was begun in the early to mid nineties but found its focus beginning in 1998 with doctoral studies at the Union Institute in Cincinnati, Ohio. I remember walking into a seminar and discovering that everyone there–business leaders, human resource managers, educators, psychologists, religious practitioners, counselors, and one lone art therapist–were asking the same question: Why are so many workplaces killing us? I thank my fellow scholars for the tremendous support they gave me, especially Patricia Cane, Cherionna Menzam, Deborah Vogele, Cary LeBlanc, Julie Gatti, Marsha Tongel, Jim Stuart,

and Jenifer Cash O'Donnell. I thank the seminar leader and my doctoral faculty, Barry Heerman, for his unending patience, humor, and affirmation of my scholarship. Finally, I thank my doctoral advisor Beth Hagens for her incredible support and trust in the creative process.

I owe a debt of tremendous gratitude to my husband Eddee Daniel who has traveled the artist's journey with me and who made a space for my dreaming throughout the months of doctoral studies. My daughters Erica and Chelsea are an inspiration to me in all their beautiful passion for living life fully on the rocky shores of adolescence. And finally, I wish to dedicate this work to my mother, Lee Kapitan, whose love and artistry so inspired my own life's passions and frustrations.

L.K.

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INTRODUCTION

THE OPEN CLOSING DOOR

"Long ago and far away," I began, "there was a foolish young woman, caught in circumstances not of her own making." I couldn't explain it; I could only tell the story of how it came to be that I lost and found again the vital creativity that is the well-spring of my life as an art therapist. In the face of toxic, life-diminishing forces, I had been tracking an elusive question far into an unknown landscape.

"Was she a beautiful princess?"

"Not especially, and she wasn't a princess," I sighed. Who ever understood what art therapists did, or why the passionate intensity of their calling? "No," I said, "she was very ordinary. But she did have a talent for making things out of this and that, and telling stories to her children. On this particular day, though, she had a problem. She awoke from a disturbing dream and she was frightened."

"Was it a nightmare?"

"No, not really, the dream itself wasn't scary, but it stirred up scary feelings in her nonetheless," I said, shuddering from the memory of that image which came so suddenly in the night. At the time, I had been contemplating psychic deadness, seen in the faces of my colleagues and students. How could it be that they came to their work creative, joyful and life-affirming, only to become, a few years later, beaten down, cynical, drained of creativity and searching for a way out? I suspected that this pattern was a source of my community's lack of vitality and creative vision. It presented me with an ethical challenge that arose out of my work as a teacher who had witnessed a steady slide into disenchantment among new professionals: How could I inspire the many, creative, prospective students I talked to daily to commit to a calling that might kill them seven years after they've met me? And

what of the lack of positive models they would encounter when they began their internships and formed supervisory relationships with deadened, non-creative art therapists looking to them to find their own healing? As I pondered these questions, the dream had appeared and awakened me.

"What disturbed her," I said, remembering the crushing weight of the dream image, "was this huge, black, metal door that was slammed shut and locked up tight. On the other side of the door was a most beautiful, enchanting place–she dreamed that she could step right through that doorway and into pure-blue sky! Only she wouldn't fall; she'd be floating through sky, and it gave her the most delicious feeling of freedom."

"I thought you said she was scared."

"Oh she was, believe you me! Because, how could that be? She didn't know how to fly! She was just an ordinary person. And the worst part was that she could only get to the beautiful place by opening that black metal door," I said, thinking of the obstacles to creative freedom art therapists describe as their suffering. "She sensed that there was some powerful force that was keeping it shut, and that made her scared, too."

"The next night, she had the dream again. Only this time, there was an old woman guarding the door, marching back and forth, this way and that, and all the while looking at her very, very fiercely as if to try to scare her away. The younger woman could hear her children crying and realized they were hungry and thirsty. She had to get the door opened! So she waited until the old woman marched away, and then ran up to the door and pulled it open just a crack. She could see a sliver of blue sky through it. But the old woman spied her and came storming back, pushing her out of the way and slamming the door shut!"

"That's how it went," I said, sadly shaking my head, having lived with this yearning myself. "Every time she managed to get the door open, that woman would come and slam it shut again. She woke up all in a sweat, wondering about that door and worried about what the dream meant and how it might come true. Why did the old woman frighten her so? Was a famine coming to her land? Was she or her children in danger of starving?"

"She got dressed and went about her business getting breakfast ready for her family, all the while thinking about her dream and its terrible dilemma. The blue sky had looked so inviting; there must be a way to

go through the threshold behind the door. All that day she kept the dream in mind until finally, with her kids in bed and her husband asleep–"

"–She went to bed and had the dream again!"

"No, that is not how the story goes," I explained, describing an art therapist's method of artistic inquiry: "When all was quiet in her house, she decided she had to *paint* her dream and maybe that way she'd discover why it came and what it had to tell her. She went down to the cellar where she had a big sheet of dusty gray paper. With a piece of charcoal from the hearth she drew the black door and colored it in really solid, leaving just a tiny crack of blue peeking through. For no reason at all, she drew some lines across the bottom that looked like a bunch of twigs piled up in front of the door. When she was all done, she put the picture aside and washed the soot off her hands, staring at the painting–but not really seeing it because something else in her mind was trying to get her attention."

"So, even though it was very, very late, she got out another piece of paper–a white one this time. She just couldn't think of the door anymore because that crack of blue sky was calling to her, wanting lots more space. So this time she drew a wide, open space filled all in with a clear, clear blue, just like she had seen in her dream. She made it the shape of a doorway but left the paper white so the door was invisible."

Yes, I thought, this was the "open closing door," a painting I made to acknowledge the dream and to guide me into the paradoxical questions I was exploring (Figure 1). The door is open and closing at the same time; it is both a route to freedom and a means of containment. It promises a safe space that is protected yet constrained; it holds at the threshold the desires to act in the world and to withdraw in contemplation of it. I saw in the image both the desire for and the fear of creative power, calling me to set my inner and outer lives in motion, demanding renewal and reinvention in the course of my artistic, therapeutic practice. A key, perhaps, to the dilemma that is not really a dilemma at all. "When she was done," I continued, "she smiled with her heart's delight, and put the painting away. She crept upstairs to bed and fell into a deep sleep."

"Did she have the dream again?"

"Not right away, and that was fine since it had been scary, after all. But the next time the dream came she was standing perfectly still on the threshold of a blue-sky door. At her feet was the nest of twigs. She