

**ART THERAPY AS WITNESS:
A SACRED GUIDE**

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Photo by N. Bachrach

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Since 1977, Dr. Horovitz has served Art Therapy on both the state and national level. She has published numerous articles, book chapters, and books including *Spiritual Art Therapy: An Alternate Path* and *A Leap of Faith: The Call to Art*. Dr. Horovitz is currently Professor and Director of the Graduate Art Therapy Program at Nazareth College in Rochester, New York. As well, she spearheads two art therapy (interdisciplinary) clinics at Nazareth: these service adults with aphasia and children who are burn survivors. Dr. Horovitz is also in private practice. Since 2001, she ventured into educational film production and founded Julia Productions, Inc. (www.artxtfilms.com). To date, Dr. Horovitz has produced seven educational, art therapy films available in VHS, CD-ROM and DVD formats. She is currently the President-Elect of the American Art Therapy Association (AATA). Besides being a writer, avid painter and sculptor, her real job is being mother to her beloved children, Kaitlyn and Bryan Darby.

ART THERAPY AS WITNESS

A Sacred Guide

By

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With Forewords by

Craig N. Bullock

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*In memory of my dear friend, Doug May,
who was truly guided by all that is sacred.*

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FOREWORD

Many people walk through life profoundly wounded, with a severely limited capacity to live in a creative and full manner. In increasingly higher numbers, these individuals are making their way into psychotherapeutic offices, seeking relief from their suffering. Whether or not they are successful in their therapeutic endeavors depends not only on personal motivation, but the depth, quality, and vision of the guides with whom they are traveling. In other words, is the chosen therapist able to descend into the client's personal hell, remain compassionately present to the pain, and steadfastly witness the path of freedom as it emerges?

Such a guide is not easily found. Universities may grant graduate degrees that allow individuals to function as therapists, but they cannot bestow the necessary wisdom and depth needed to be a "wounded healer." No, only an individual that has been to hell and back can qualify as a witness for others making a similar journey. The hallmarks of such a guide are listed below:

1. *The willingness to experience personal pain.*

An authentic therapeutic guide has transcended the impulse to avoid pain. He or she is able to touch his or her own anxiety and discomfort. In short, the guide has learned to outstare the darkness. Thus, the guide's very presence exudes a contagious expansiveness that effortlessly supports self-exploration in clients, even when it means facing long repressed pain.

2. *The ability to be presented in a non-judgmental manner.*

It goes without saying that most or all of the clients that seek therapy carry a degree of shame and guilt. Typically, this results in a kind of psychological constriction, which has the effect of reinforcing

defenses and therefore maintaining the pathology. Only in the presence of a guide who has gone beyond the tendency to judge or condemn can a client begin to be present to his or her own issues of guilt and shame. This non-judgmental stance cannot be faked. Clients will know, perhaps unconsciously, when there is judgment. And accordingly, they will never expand beyond self-hatred.

3. *A radical openness to the totality of the human person.*

Each and every client that enters into psychotherapy is a mystery. The interior dimensions scan the range from the biological to the mystical. And, each aspect of the mysterious laden-self has a part to play in the healing process. Only a guide that is personally present to his or her own possibilities can serve as a witness to the multidimensional revelations that arise in the therapeutic process. In other words, the authentic guide neither reduces the client to a clinical formulation nor imposes a theoretical grid on the mystery of the human person. The guide is able to welcome, honor and integrate all aspects of the mysterious-self relative to the therapeutic process.

4. *A willingness to take therapeutically appropriate risks.*

Clients experience healing, in part, because they are willing to take risks. The risk can be the willingness to face a past trauma, the courage to own an aspect of one's self that does not measure up to the idealized self, and the faith to try new behaviors. However, how can we expect the client to take a therapeutic risk if the therapeutic guide is unwilling to trust his or her own intuitions? What is being suggested here is not unethical behavior, but the willingness to remain open to the stream of therapeutic consciousness, the willingness to remain open to the healing process, and the willingness to trust one's deepest instincts.

In this book, *Art Therapy as Witness: A Sacred Guide*, we are taken into the work and life of a true "therapeutic guide." Ellen Horovitz has journeyed into the depths of her own soul. She has made peace with her pain. She has learned to transcend the duality of judgment. She knows how to honor all aspects of the human person. And, she has learned to creatively trust her deepest therapeutic intuitions. Ellen has become the embodiment of what every therapist is called to be, i.e., a compassionate, wise, and inspired healer. This book perfectly captures the healing art of psychotherapy. Whether the reader is an aspiring

therapist or a seasoned veteran of the therapeutic process, it challenges its readers to be “wounded healers.” Ellen Horovitz is truly a mentor of mentors.

Craig N. Bullock
Author of
A Path to Healing
Assisi Institute
Rochester, NY

FOREWORD

When reading the introduction to *Art Therapy As Witness: A Sacred Guide*, I felt a tremendous joy and lightness within me. I heard myself saying, “Yeah that is it, Ellen. That is how we practice our chosen profession when we practice it at the highest level.”

We practice our chosen profession at the highest level when we resonate deeply with our clients and the results exceed our expectations. It is as if magic happens in the interaction between the practitioner and client. In Dr. Horovitz’s latest book, she illustrates those magical moments through numerous case descriptions.

In the cases that Dr. Horovitz describes, it is quite obvious that she works not only from a level of high technical proficiency, but more importantly from a deep level within herself, where she allows herself to vibrate with her clients. What struck me more than anything else about the interactions in the cases that Dr. Horovitz describes is that Dr. Horovitz creates a safe, or maybe it should be called a “sacred” environment for her clients—an environment where the clients feel safe enough to be comfortable with who they authentically are, create from this space, and allow their potential to slowly unfold.

I believe that the creation of a safe space where we can explore and be ourselves is the most important condition that a health care professional, educator, or parent can create for a client, student, or child. No matter what the therapy—art, music, dance, yoga, physical, or occupational—or what education field or level we study/teach at, our clients/students need a safe place to explore and express their innermost yearnings and dreams.

The clients that Dr. Horovitz writes about have been robbed of their safe space and therefore have stopped developing towards their full potential. The development has either stopped completely, or has seriously deviated from leading a fulfilling and authentic life.

I claim that almost all of us have had our safe space either taken away, or have been in a situation where we decided to give up our safe space for the idea of safety in the form of approval from parents, peers, teachers, partners, etc. However this occurs, we have deviated from what we could and should be, because we did not feel safe enough to live an authentic life. This striving for approval is something that continues throughout our educational years and working life. Very few of us are mature enough to stand up and always express our ideas and dreams in the presence of others. Instead we feel unsafe, and “shrink” a bit and compromise our dreams for others’ approval.

We don’t follow our dreams, and do not act in a way that is congruent with our deepest desires because we are afraid that speaking out, or acting in accordance with our authentic self, will be an unsafe position. We are afraid that we will lose our prestige, promotion, grade, etc. By not being able to act from a safe space we fail to fulfill our potential.

In many of the cases that Dr. Horovitz describes, there has been severe damage to the clients as a result of a misused trust placed in an adult. The client then loses the safe space where he/she can develop at a safe pace and direction. For cases like the ones Dr. Horovitz describes, the safe space must be re-created. The reader will note how Dr. Horovitz does not put demands on her clients. There is no directive such as “do this or that, in this or that way.” Such instructions would be counteractive to a client who does not have a safe space, and while it may lead to superficial developmental and behavioral changes, those changes will not be authentic or permanent.

The first thing that must occur in therapy/education, and that Dr. Horovitz practices repeatedly, is to provide a safe space for her clients. Once a client feels safe, he or she can authentically express and explore his or her intrinsic and authentic goals under the gentle guidance of a therapist/educator.

What sets a master therapist/educator apart is the ability to guide the client to this safe space, identify when the client is in a safe space where he or she can create and develop, and then faithfully trust in the process of his or her chosen Art. (At the level that Dr. Horovitz practices, a level that we all can practice from, the chosen therapy/profession is indeed an Art with a capital A). The function of the therapist/educator is to be the guide and guardian of this safe/sacred space.

The key to knowing when our clients are in a safe space is to close-

ly observe them as we interact with them. Depending on the therapy, this interaction can take place through touch, art, music, dance, etc. When the client enters a safe space where he or she can be authentic, the client's breathing slows down and deepens, the gaze softens, and muscular tensions release. The client is in a state where the parasympathetic nervous system takes over and there is no need to be in the fight or flight mode. The client has found a safe space. A master therapist/educator will then slowly let the client explore from this new-found place of safety. If we pay attention, we will be able to observe what the client did to reach this space, and we can teach him/her how to repeatedly enact that safety.

In *Art Therapy As Witness: A Sacred Guide*, Dr. Horovitz also offers examples of other ingredients for any successful practitioner, such as embodiment of our chosen profession, building relationships with our clients, ability to let the client lead, trusting the process and letting the final outcome be a surprise. None of the above ingredients will lead to lasting changes and development *unless* the basic ingredient of the safe space is introduced first. If we fail to provide a safe space for our clients, we may "forge an aqueduct," but there will be nothing flowing through the aqueduct. Once we establish safety for our clients they can then, as Dr. Horovitz suggests, "forge an aqueduct," and not turn it off! The client and the practitioner will be safe enough to let the creativity and dreams flow through the channel!

As I am sitting in downtown Rochester in a coffee shop writing this preface, Electric Light Orchestra's "It's a Living Thing" is playing in the background. Jeff Lynn is singing, "It's a living thing. It's a terrible thing to lose." Indeed, a living thing is a terrible thing to lose. Thanks to Dr. Ellen Horovitz and other masterful therapists/educators, willingness to share their experiences through books such as *Art Therapy As Witness: A Sacred Guide*, we can help bring "living things" back to where they once again can flourish and develop towards their potential.

Staffan Elgelid, PhD, PT, CFT, Associate Professor

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INTRODUCTION

FUGUE STATE–DREAM STATE

I'd rather learn from one bird how to sing
Then teach ten thousand stars how not to dance.
—E.E. Cummings

My book concepts come to me as visions during the night; they travel from the undercurrents of my dreams, tunnel their way into my subconscious and burrow a hole into my conscious mind that is so penetrating, that they quite literally awaken me. What they awaken me to propels my spirit and forges me into the depths of inquiry that quite simply rules me. This inquiry, this mission, gnaws at me like a dog to a bone. It leaves nothing unturned. Instead, it literally chisels me and I become an instrument to its lead. I don't write the words, they define me. And with each penned entry, I become more enlivened and simultaneously captive to that spirit. But I am not shackled to this entity but rather freed as I ping-pong between its pendulums. It is that flow, that rhythm, that metronome that quite literally beats my heart and makes me what I am.

In tapping into that cadence, Bullock (1998) coined the word “*uni verse*.” In his definition, he points out that *uni verse* is indeed our language—one song: all song. Quite literally, Eckert Tolle (1999) in his bestselling treatise *The Power of Now* described rising from a dream, hearing the voice of a bird and seeing a brilliant diamond in his mind prior to his wakened state of being ever present. Perhaps what he experienced was the *uni verse* that Bullock talked about: that is, the one song of all kind.

Furtively humans seek and long for answers to the unknown. Admittedly, I used to walk that trajectory, but no longer. I seek no

more for amazingly enough, as I have written in my previous works *Spiritual Art Therapy: An Alternate Path* and *A Leap of Faith: The Call to Art*, I have discovered what emanates and activates my being: and it's not outside me. Like many who have gone before me I have discovered that God, Spirit, Jesus, Buddha, Allah, whatever you might call that quintessential creator of the *uni verse*, that entity that energy is in me. And it enervates every being and all matter on this planet and the *uni verse*.

So really what I am writing here is nothing new. It is in fact as old as time. It just requires firing the doubting Thomas that runs amuck in your mind and replacing it with what was always there—your *Self*. Tolle talks about honoring that voice that runs amuck babbling nonstop by witnessing the transcripts that chatter in your head. While he suggests that you quite literally stop thinking and instead embrace the present moment, I both agree and disagree. Force-stopping the incessant chatter is not really the answer. I commit that channeling that entity is really what will bring peace. Not cutting it off as you would literally turn off the flow of water to a faucet. No, I suggest an entirely different approach. I say let the floodgates down. Let the chatter, the wellspring, and the language that desperately is trying to clang some sense into your noggin through. Give it entry. Offer it passage. Forge an aqueduct for cripes sake but whatever you do, DON'T turn it off. Don't stifle it, squash it, hide it and for Pete's sake, don't ignore it. No. Instead, embrace it, mind it, see it, accept it, and for pity sake, honor it. This is after all, your birthright, your ancestral code, your contribution, your gift, your creativity, your genetic predisposition, and your art. That's right: your art. Your art can heal you. Your art can propel you and inform you.

My creative urges spring from a variety of sources (Horovitz, 1999, 2002). Whether they are penned through poetic endeavors, novels, nonfiction, or made from artistic media, it all seems connected to the same purpose: expression of creativity. Without that expressive output, I am in a constipated state. Like the bodily functions that control the release of our waste system, I, too, find myself needing to purge myself of these creative urgings on as regular a basis as possible.

So I suggest that you listen to these inner dialogues: pay attention to the gurgling of your mind much the way you would pay attention to the orchestration of the acids in your stomach beating the reminder: "feed me." These ever present ramblings that you desperately try and

reduce to a hush while meditating need to be released in other venues. There is a reason that they are trying to break through while you are seeking that state of nirvana. Unlike the medicinal uptakes that slowly enter your bloodstream, you should offer these protestations the deliverance that they scream for and deserve. In doing so, you will channel your energy, become enlivened, actually feel lighter and happier and save your *self* from a lifetime of enslavement. Yes, art can heal you. To co-create is the name of the game. It matters little how one travels in order to clean up the baggage of the tattered portions of one's soul; more important is the desire to change and get to that place of harmony, inner peace, soul-making, *elemental play*, and *soulution* (Horovitz, 1999, 2002). But, discovering its existence doesn't affirm its placement: practice does.

And as the adage goes, practice makes perfect. But in this case *practicing* your art *transcends* the pain; it heals the mind, body and spirit and offers new vision. Bespectacled with a prescription for view, you can actually see more and activate your heart. So permission to co-create becomes the *soulution*, the *soulution* of heart, mind, body and soul.

I have shared this theosophy with my clients for approximately 30 years. And I learned this fervent "ever art" (Horovitz, 1999) approach from my greatest mentor, Edith Kramer. Edith is well known by the Art Therapy community. She is cantankerous, dogged in her approach, and unbending in her dedication to art and all its salubrious qualities. I admire this steadfast cocksure quality that she dons. She doesn't sashay about life; she lives it and does this through her art. Of course, not everyone in our community embraces her immovable advance. But after being under her tutelage, I enfold her concept because I not only grasp what she is imparting but I buy into it, heart and soul.

SUBLIMATION

In my second book, *A Leap of Faith: The Call to Art*, I witnessed this firsthand by retreating to my studio for a year and a half. I slept there, waked there, ate there, and lived in the studio. And every day, I woke up to the artistic daemons, which I had literally left the previous night. I would face the same canvas, sculpture, photograph, and/or artistic format that tucked me in the evening before the next morning light. It

left untold measure on my psyche and my approach to my patients, who, too, walked through this hallowed space. Quite simply and radically, I changed. I was changed by this entity, this God-force that had creatively taken over my being. And I shared this passion with my patients and as well, my students; while Art Therapy has never been about *the product* but instead has always been about *the process*, I found (like Kramer, 1975) that indeed my patients were working through their issues but in doing so, often their pain, sorrow and losses were being expressed in *formed art*. Formed art is what Kramer refers to as *true art* (Kramer, 1975). It is the highest form of sublimation, sort of like opera to classical music to borrow an analogy or to put it in Bullock's (1998) terms, *uni verse*.

This way of being sustains me, fuels me, and quite verily offers me a passageway to happiness. I co-create, therefore I am. While in this fugue state, my entity is borrowed. I am not the maker but as Tolle (1999) puts it, "witness" to the act. To explain this in artistic terms, I give you the apple. In drafting an apple, or any other subject, the artist quite literally dissociates, that is, removes her/himself from the subject and disembodies. This *natural, normal* (if you will) state allows for introspection, observation, and accurate delineation of the subject because the artist in this fugue state as I call it, quite accurately is out of mind/body experience and becomes one with the subject. She/he co-creates with this other and becomes the other while simultaneously separating enough so that the other can be captured and illustrated. Surgeons, musicians, writers—they do the same thing. They depersonalize in order to liberate the subject in the highest form of art.

That creative state embodies the reintegration of self in a way that reminds me of what occurs in cells that regenerate, as cited in the previous works of Ford (1992) and Becker (1985). Ford (1992) and Becker (1985) reported their scientific breakthrough of manipulating NEJ's (neuroepiduraljunctions), which lie directly under the skin. In their studies, they exposed NEJ's to electromagnetic currents, which transmitted information that caused the cells to regenerate.

Current is indeed operational for the artist truly immersed in the state of creativity. Researchers have described this "creative immersion" in varied manner. This is what Csikszentmihalyi (1993) refers to as the "flow experience." He goes on to say:

. . . in the mind, meeting difficult challenges become genetically linked with a form of pleasure. Just as we have learned to enjoy what is necessary to survive