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An Artist Meets a Therapist:
Conflict and Convergence in the Identity
of the Emerging Art Therapist.

Janet Rigg

A Research Paper

in

The Department of Creative Arts Therapies

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ABSTRACT

An Artist Meets a Therapist:
Conflict and Convergence in the Identity of the Emerging Art Therapist.

Janet Rigg

I was an artist at first, who happened to be studying psychology. Later, I would discover the profession of art therapy. It seemed perfect. However, my experience during the graduate training program at Concordia University taught me that this hybrid identity was not the marriage in heaven that I had assumed it would be. There were certainly points of convergence, but there were also deep conflicts. This text is a heuristic inquiry into my experience of my artist self becoming acquainted with my new, emerging therapist self. It is also art-based research, as I focus on the artwork that I created during the two year program. The text explores the needs and motivations of each identity as they were reflected in my artwork. It is my contention that my product always reflected my process, and that my sense of satisfaction regarding the product indicated the level of understanding I had reached. Furthermore, I found that the aesthetic elements necessary for a satisfying work of art -- balance, possibility, and belief -- were also necessary for therapeutic success. As a result, I argue that there should be a greater focus on the art product in art therapy and art therapy training programs. Art Therapists should be encouraged to use their special skills in understanding the art product in order to further the goals of therapy.

A special thanks . . .

. . . to my supervisor, Elizabeth Anthony, for following me through the maze of ideas that eventually led to this “text”, to Roeland for his love and support (and patience), to “the colleagues” that encouraged me, and to my family who always knew I could do it. But most of all, thanks to my spontaneous images for reminding me that red used to be my favorite colour.

Table of Contents

| | |
|---|---------------|
| 1.0 Introduction | 1 |
| 1.1 Heuristic Research and Art Therapy | 4 |
| 1.2 Intuition and Tacit Knowledge | 6 |
| 1.3 The General Stages of Heuristic Research. | 7 |
| 1.4 Validity and Heuristic Research | 10 |
| 1.5 Aesthetics and Art therapy | 14 |
| 1.6 The Structure | 16 |
| An invitation | 19 |
| 2.0 Sense of Discomfort and a Need for Beauty. | 20 |
| 2.1 Searching for the Question | 29 |
| 2.2 Primary Research Question | 35 |
| 3.0 Can there be Aesthetic Goals in Art Therapy? | 36 |
| 3.1 Art-Based Approaches | 36 |
| 3.2 Is Product related to Process? | 39 |
| ◇ 3.3 Little Relation | 42 |
| ◇ 3.4 Product Reflects the Process | 43 |
| 4.0 Balance? | 45 |
| 4.1 Artistic Success and Art Therapy | 48 |
| 4.2 Formed Expression and Successful Art | 52 |
| 4.3 Spontaneity to Explore Identity | 58 |

| | |
|--|------------|
| 4.4 Spontaneous Art and Unconscious Material | 77 |
| 5.0 Motivations and Needs | 82 |
| 5.1 Narcissism, the Artist and Art Therapist | 87 |
| 5.2 My Artistic Personality | 91 |
| 5.3 My Therapist Personality | 92 |
| 6.0 Containing. | 94 |
| 6.1 Experience and its Expression | 101 |
| 6.2 Expression and Countertransference | 107 |
| ◇ 6.3 Distance | 110 |
| ◇ 6.4 Total Abandon | 112 |
| 7.0 Towards Convergence - The Crack | 114 |
| 7.1 Phenomenology and Art | 128 |
| 8.0 Not Resolved At All - Possibility and Balance | 132 |
| 8.1 Formed Spontaneity | 134 |
| 9.0 How Do I Create Satisfying Art? | 137 |
| ◇ 9.1 Embodied Art = Satisfying Art | 141 |
| ◇ 9.2 Opinion = Satisfying Art | 142 |
| 10.0 The Experiment and the "Other" | 144 |
| 11.0 The Great Incubation | 147 |
| 11.1 Belief and Art Therapy | 151 |
| 11.2 Art Theory and Art Therapy | 154 |
| 12.0 Conclusion | 160 |
| ◇ 12.1 Aesthetic Intervention Not Justified. | 166 |
| ◇ 12.2 The Artist's Way | 168 |

| | |
|-------------------|------------|
| References | 171 |
|-------------------|------------|

| | |
|-------------------|------------|
| Appendix A | 178 |
|-------------------|------------|

| | |
|--|--|
| The Creation of the Wall and the Discovery of the Swirl Symbol. | |
|--|--|

List of Images, Figures, and Illustrations

Images = Personal therapy artwork

Figures = Focus artwork

Illustrations = Graphic diagrams

| | | |
|-----------|---|----|
| Image 1 | <i>Therapy art 1, pencil crayon and paint 18" x 24"</i> | 18 |
| Figure 1 | <i>Profile, Oil on canvas, 3' x 4', 1995</i> | 20 |
| Figure 2 | <i>Dive, Oil on canvas, 3' x 4', 2001</i> | 23 |
| Figure 3 | <i>Growing, Oil on canvas, 24" x 36", 2001</i> | 30 |
| Image 2 | <i>Therapy art 2, poster paint on paper, 18" x 24"</i> | 34 |
| Figure 4 | <i>Accepting, Growing, Striving,</i> <i>Oil on canvas, 20" x 40" each, 2002</i> | 45 |
| Image 3 | <i>Therapy art 3, pencil crayon on paper, 18" x 24"</i> | 55 |
| Image 4 | <i>Therapy art 4, poster paint on paper, 18" x 24"</i> | 57 |
| Figure 5 | <i>The Institution, Oil on canvas, 24" x 36", 2002</i> | 60 |
| Figure 6 | <i>Spontaneous art 1: Countertransference, Poster</i> <i>paint on paper, 24" x 36", 2002</i> | 66 |
| Figure 7 | <i>Spontaneous art 2: (What) Who am I as a Therapist?</i> <i>Multimedia collage, 18" x 24", 2003</i> | 74 |
| Figure 8 | <i>Spontaneous art 3: Supervision Experience,</i> <i>Poster paint on paper, 18" x 24", 2003</i> | 83 |
| Figure 9 | <i>Spontaneous art 4: Supervision Desire,</i> <i>Poster paint on paper, 18" x 24", 2003</i> | 84 |
| Image 5 | <i>Therapy art 5, Poster paint on paper, 18" x 24"</i> | 90 |
| Figure 10 | <i>The Quiet Room, Oil on canvas, 16" x 20", 2003</i> | 94 |

Introduction

“Serving to discover or find out”

Definition of *Heuristics*; Oxford English Dictionary

The mind can capture something like 25 images a second. I read that somewhere. What does that mean? What is an image? And then I remember. *Three Scenes* by Drew McNaughton

This “text” (which is equally visual and written communication) traces my meandering path as I strove to understand my experience of my pre-existing artist self becoming acquainted with my new, emerging therapist self. It was an experience that taught me how little I knew about the needs and motivations of each, or of the conflictual relationship that occurred when they tried to co-exist. This project has forced me to redefine both my artist self and therapist self. By “self” I am referring to the integral components of each identity, core elements that reach far into my psyche. With each identity there comes a strong tendency to perceive the world with a certain emotional valence based on my needs. However, I can play differing roles in my single lifetime, and can adopt or favour various perspectives based on these roles. When two roles, such as *artist* and *therapist*, combine in a hybrid identity, sometimes perspectives collide in an less than graceful manner.

My examination of this experience has brought me to a myriad of questions concerning the nature and aims of my own artistic and therapeutic endeavors. Why do I create art? How do I create satisfying art? What conditions are necessary? At the same

time, I have had to peer into the nebulous mass which was my emerging therapist self and ask myself, who is she? How does she help her clients? What is the role of the art-making process and the product? In the end, it was the dilemma of how to combine the two that I faced.

My experience of this hybrid identity is similar to the experience of the profession of art therapy as a whole. In the beginning of the movement to have art therapy defined as a profession (mid 20th century), two sisters, Margaret Naumburg and Florence Cane represented the two “poles” of art therapy -- the former being grounded in psychological principles, and the latter in the experience of the creative process itself (Wix, 2000). Between those poles, there exists a continuum, on which art therapists continue to place themselves. However, within the general literature and in many of the art therapy training programs, there has been an increasing emphasis on psychological theory, and not the creative process (Wix, 1996).

[M]ost art therapists realize that the field has borrowed with increasing frequency from psychology to establish itself. Much of art therapy’s beginnings have weighed in heavily on the psychology side . . . More recently, pressures to license art therapists as counselors have continued this trend of psychology-before-art in art therapy training and, in some cases, have pushed studio and art-making experiences to the sidelines . . . Undoubtedly, these have been difficult decisions made in an effort to help art therapists become more marketable within the competitive realm of health care. (Malchiodi, 1999, p.2)

This dilemma highlights the art *in* therapy versus the art *as* therapy debate that has raged within our profession since its inception. This debate will be examined in

further detail later in this text, however suffice it to say there are those that feel that art therapy has lost its unique contribution by identifying too closely with the field of psychology. Some, like myself, feel that there is a need to “truly identify a unique paradigm which is not based largely on a theory or method of psychology, but rather one which is based in visual art and the artmaking process” (Malchiodi, 1999, p.2).

What follows is a heuristic inquiry, predominately defined by the writings of Moustakas (1990), into my experience of becoming an art therapist. It is important to note that heuristic theory is not only my research methodology, it also forms part of my story, my experience. From early on in my research, I sought to experience the process of discovery and change as it was explained through heuristics, and thus saw a close relation of this theory to the process of change and discovery in art therapy. I also wondered if a similar process wasn't at work in the creation of personally satisfying art. What was this process, I wondered, how do I experience it and how can I understand it? I felt if I could begin to grasp this process, perhaps I could find a point of convergence between artistic and therapeutic pursuits, and perhaps I could begin to define the paradigm that emphasizes the art in art therapy. But it was a long journey, through image and word, searching, reorganizing, and redefining everything. Folding back on itself, starting with an image and searching for the other 24 images the mind captures in a second, the ones that escape conscious recognition.

This “text” is also art-based research, as McNiff (1998) described it. The emphasis throughout is on my experience and my artwork completed during the two-year art-therapy training program at Concordia University. Included are many of my artworks, as well as images that I created in personal art therapy. The personal therapy images will appear, but will not be discussed. I have included them as they appear to

reflect some of the form, colour, or subject matter that I found in my other artworks. This, I believe, shows how deeply the issues that I encountered in my training effected my sense of self, deeply enough that their vibrations were also felt in my personal therapy space. The other, featured artworks were created on my own and were all exhibited to students and faculty of the art therapy program at the end of the two years. The viewers documented their responses to my artwork, which have become an important part of this research.

Art-based research expands heuristic research by introducing the materials of creative expression to the experimental process. Heuristic research studies have a tendency to appear more “self-involved” than art-based research where the emphasis is on a partnership between the materials of expression and the researcher. In art, the self is a major participant but there is always the goal of making expressions that are able to speak for themselves. (McNiff, 1998, p. 54)

Heuristic Research and Art Therapy

Heuristic research as it relates to art therapy requires some explanation. Although it has been used with increasing frequency as a research method within the field of art therapy and psychology, it is still little known. In addition to that, it seems that researchers that choose this method of inquiry must go through a process of understanding and then appropriating the heuristic method as it relates to the experience of the researcher. As mentioned previously, I looked to heuristics for a template of discovery and change which I could then apply to the therapeutic process and the creative process respectively. Initially, I started with my central images and attempted to match

what I was experiencing or exploring at that time with the various stages of heuristic inquiry-- thereby mapping out the pattern of my experience of exploration. The results were revealing, demonstrating a swirl pattern (see Appendix 1), but I eventually realized that I had diverged from my original question concerning the combination of my artist and therapist identities. However, I feel that it is important for you, the reader, to witness how I understood the heuristic process before exploring the later documentation of that process.

Heuristics describes a qualitative research methodology, which is quite different from the quantitative research we usually associate with the word "research". Quantitative research aims to isolate a factor than can be quantified (assigned a number) which then allows the researcher to track any changes in the quantified value. Qualitative research, on the other hand, endeavors to describe the entirety of an something, for example, an experience, an object, or a whole culture. In qualitative research, the emphasis is on inductive reasoning, description of experience, and individual perception. It assumes that knowledge is constructed and meanings are negotiated, meaning truth is subjective and always modified by context (Hammersley, 1996). It is a discursive, reflexive, and ecological research method (Bruscia, 1995). Specifically, heuristic research is focused on the experience of the researcher. It searches to discover the underlying meanings or textures of an experience. Such "broad" viewpoints are important as instigators for further, more specific research.

Joan Bloomgarden and Dorit Netzer (1998) provide an interesting overview of heuristic research as it relates to art therapy. Bloomgarden and Netzer noted that heuristic research encourages the art therapist to experience self growth which is a continual goal for all professional art therapists. Although the authors did not mention its

benefit for the developing art therapist, many have argued that such an experience of self growth and self understanding would be even more important to those of us just beginning (McGraw, 1995; Robbins 1976, 1988; McNiff, 1998). To understand the process of discovery, as I experience it, will undoubtedly aid me in understanding and empathizing with a client's process of change and realization. "Creativity, inherent to art therapy as a treatment modality, is primary in heuristic research. This model lends itself to the nature of the art therapist's work with client, which includes the use of intuition and tacit knowledge" (Bloomgarden & Netzer, 1998, p.53).

Intuition and Tacit Knowledge

Heuristic inquiry as it was put forth by Moustakas (1990) relies on an inverted perspective to answer a question or a problem. Rather than looking to the external world for observable and testable answers, the heuristic researcher journeys inward to find understanding. However, before I outline the general stages of heuristic research, it is important for you, the reader, to understand the underlying forces of discovery that are central to heuristic research: intuition and tacit knowledge. Intuition is a term that most of us are familiar with, those stirring notions somewhere in the back of our consciousness that, if heeded, often help us make decisions or at least understand them. Tacit knowledge, however, was a new term for me. Tacit knowledge precedes intuition; thus intuition springs from tacit knowledge. Moustakas (1990) writes, "[f]rom the tacit dimension, a kind of bridge is formed between the implicit knowledge inherent in the tacit and the explicit knowledge which is observable and describable. The bridge between the explicit and the tacit is the realm of the between, or the intuitive" (p. 23). Moustakas refers to Polyani (1964, 1969) to explain tacit knowledge. Polyani said that subsidiary

and focal elements combine to make up tacit knowledge. The subsidiary elements are the unique and distinctive cues that can be seen and described. The focal elements, on the other hand, are more emotional. Together, these elements combine to give a sense of the whole. Thus, the aim of heuristic research is to tap into the tacit knowledge that we all possess, knowledge that is held together in units of meaning by our feelings. This comprises the 25 images the mind captures in a second, each image weighted by emotional valence, memorable only to a certain extent. The heuristic researcher endeavors to slow down the film, to understand as many of the images that come through our filter as he or she possibly can.

The General Stages of Heuristic Research.

The phases of heuristic research were first outlined by Douglas & Moustakas (1985) as immersion, acquisition, and indwelling (generally). Moustakas' (1990) later writing expanded those three phases into six. The six phases are initial engagement, immersion, incubation, illumination, explication, and creative synthesis.

The first phase, initial engagement, is essentially the search for the question. The research is thought to be inspired by a crucial question, problem, or theme that is found within the researcher. Awareness of this question is arrived at through processes such as self-dialogue, indwelling, intuition, and focusing.

The second phase is immersion. Moustakas (1990) wrote, "the immersion process enables the researcher to come to be on intimate terms with the question - to live it and grow in knowledge and understanding of it" (p.28). At this stage, the researcher begins to immerse his or herself into the experience of the question. Moustakas argued that everything the researcher encounters during this time can be seen to pertain to the

question. This includes dreams, conversations, and literature. For my purposes, the artworks I created were each an immersion into an aspect of my experience.

Once the immersion phase naturally ends, the incubation phase that follows allows “the inner tacit dimension to reach its full possibilities” (Moustakas, 1990, p.28). My original conception of this stage was related to completing crossword puzzles. I have often experienced beginning a crossword puzzle in the morning, been unable to complete it, only to return to it in the evening and solve the remaining words. It always seemed clear to me that my subconscious had continued to work on the puzzle long after I had consciously walked away from it. “Incubation is a process in which the seed has planted; the seed undergoes silent nourishment, support, and care that produces a creative awareness of some dimension of a phenomenon or a creative integration of its parts and qualities” (Moustakas, 1990, p.29). Throughout my process, once I went through a period of intense immersion (either written or visual), a period of incubation naturally followed. After I would return to my work, new understandings of how it functioned in relation to the rest of my experience became clearer.

The word “heuristic” derives from the Greek word *heuretikos* which means “I find” and is also related to the term “eureka” (Craig 1978, as cited in Douglas and Moustakas, 1985). The phase of illumination involves the movement of the new tacit understandings (reached during incubation) through to known consciousness. This, clearly, is a spontaneous event. At this time, an insight or modification occurs in relation the question, allowing new knowledge or understandings of the truth of an experience to be realized (Moustakas, 1990).

The fifth stage is explication. After an illumination, the previous knowledge must be reorganized and reevaluated. This phase repeats much of the same process as in the

immersion phase, such as self-dialogue and indwelling, to gain a better understanding of the question (Moustakas, 1990, Sela-Smith, 2002). You can see how this may necessitate a further return into the incubation phase. In the latter portion of the research process, the explication phase becomes more and more important. The final explication phase serves to alert our conscious mind of the deeper consciousness shift that has taken place, one that is of a greater importance and leads to self-transformation (Sela-Smith, 2002).

Finally, the last stage is the creative synthesis. This is where we return once again to our “tacit and intuitive powers” (Moustakas, 1990) in order to create something that captures as much of the subtle complexity of the experience as possible.

It is important to note that the phases of heuristic research are being continually re-experienced as the research progresses. It is nonlinear process, something that is often not emphasized in the existing literature. To orient myself, I found it useful to imagine the process to be something akin to the hermeneutic spiral described by Linesch (1994).

Linesch, like myself, drew parallels between a qualitative research method and the practice of art therapy. Linesch looked to hermeneutic studies, which “involve attempts to interpret and understand meaning based on the dialogical process between the inquirer and the data (text or artifacts). It is a sense-making process bounded by one’s specific historical existence in culture and time” (Junge & Linesch, 1993, p. 64). Linesch saw a two point dialogue between the researcher and the other (or the client and the therapist). Through my experience in heuristics, I viewed the dialogue to be three-fold, the researcher, the image, and the other (peers or supervisor) or client, image, therapist. I believe she saw the image as central topic of the dialogue, the results of which would move understanding, but she did not accord it a separate space.

The spiral illustrates the way art psychotherapy provides and, in fact,

creates a backdrop for therapeutic conversation and then engages the client and the therapist in a dialectical experience out of which emerges joint constructions of meaning on which can be based new understandings and the possibility for change (Linesch, 1994, p. 190).

The symbol of the spiral became important in my research, and eventually was expanded to the symbol of the swirl (see Appendix 1). This symbol, I feel, captures more of the subtle feedback loops that determine discovery. It was apparent in my initial comparison of the three processes (heuristic, therapeutic, and artistic) that I moved in a swirl-like pattern. Once I discovered the swirl it replaced the sense that I was getting nowhere (just touching on the same issues over and over again) with the sense that I was swirling down a spiral. The going in circles was acceptable, as long as the circles deepened. This discovery was important in orienting myself, but it was a divergence from the personal aspects of my experience.

Validity and Heuristic Research

Validity - I see it as similar to walking back from a painting to really see it.

You look, you add, you look and only you can decide when it's done (like heuristic research). And when it's done - is it good?

(McNiff, 1998, p.59)

The question of validity, or credibility as some have put it, is a question that applies to all of the qualitative methodologies. Patton (1990) wrote that the credibility of qualitative research is intimately tied the credibility of the researcher. He outlined various parameters that one can use to frame your qualitative research so that it has more integrity. These include considering rival organizing schemes and negative cases, and

triangulation. Patton outlines four kinds of triangulation; methods triangulation, triangulation of sources, analyst triangulation, and theory/perspective triangulation. All four are meant to overcome the intrinsic bias of using only one method, one data source, and one theory. This heuristic researcher has attempted to utilize triangulation where possible, as well as experimenting with different organizations of the data. I have also tried to pay attention to the bits that didn't fit and the people that I know who would not fit with how I have described my experience (negative cases). Triangulation of sources is something I used by including viewer responses (creative arts therapy students who had completed the same program as myself) to my work. These responses were very important in the analysis stage of my research. I also believe I have tried to look at my work from a number of theories and perspectives, as well as through different research methodologies. You, the reader, are the analyst triangulation -- only you can assess the validity of this research in relation to you. In presenting my work, I have included as much as my raw data (images, journal passages and selections from previously written papers) that I felt was required to demonstrate how I experienced the combination of identities. These sections are indented a 1/4 inch from the margin, the hand-written journal entries appearing in a different font. This, I hope, will allow you to follow my process more intimately and assess its validity.

Sela-Smith (2002) highlighted one of the central difficulties of heuristic research - staying with the subjective experience. Sela-Smith points out that "Moustakas [in his heuristic research on Loneliness] shifts from *experience* used as a verb that is connected to the internal self-search to *experience* as a noun that is connected to observation and thoughts related to the observation of an event or an experience" (p.72). She argued that self discovery can really only be about the self that was discovered, although it may

resonate with the understanding of others or inspire new understandings in others. Sela-Smith pointed out that Moustakas' methodology moves heuristic research into an enterprise based on observation and comparison with the outside, not an enterprise based on internal, felt experience. In some aspects, I agreed with Sela-Smith's position. In heuristic research, we must stay firmly rooted in the feeling states.

Validity of the research is established by surrendering to the process that is pushing itself into the consciousness of the researcher, allowing the process to unfold and then noticing the results in expansion of self-awareness, deepening of self-understanding, and of self-transformation that others can experience in the 'story'" (Sela-Smith, 2002, p.79).

However we must also remain constantly vigilant for resistance which might lead us from our path of discovery, and sometimes it is only an "other" who can alert you to that resistance. I admit that in the initial stages of my heuristic process I embraced Sela-Smith's position completely. However, such freedom, such surrender, can be overly intoxicating. In heuristic research, and in personal discovery, there are blind spots. We all have them. I have found that there were times in my process that I would not have noticed something, were the input of others not available. My supervisor alerted me to the essential need of including the "other" in my research. "[W]ithout an adequate acquisition phase [drawing on external sources and others to challenge flawed tacit knowledge] and without some 'Other' with which to dialogue *other* than the partitioned self how can the inquirer . . . overcome the potential that the conclusion be one of collusion -- of self-collusion and self-confirmation rather than sufficiently challenged growth[?]"

This summary of the process and validity of heuristic research certainly

demonstrates its nebulous nature. As a first time heuristic researcher, I often wished for a more definitive methodology to guide my discovery. However, for me, that is akin to looking to your therapist to give you concrete advice. It is my opinion that such direction in therapy is detrimental to the client's particular, and unique, process of discovery. Sela-Smith (2002) noted that Chapters 3, 4 and 5 in Moustakas' (1990) book on heuristic research begin to establish rather firm guidelines for a research process that was originally conceived as methodology free, a research process that is meant to exist "without the restraining leash of formal hypothesis, and free from external methodological structures that limit awareness or channel it" (Douglas & Moustakas, 1985, p.44).

As mentioned previously, I began by attempting to find links between the heuristic process, the therapeutic process, and the creative process as I experienced it. Naturally, the phase of creative synthesis seemed to be a logical place to investigate for links to my artistic process. Initially, I held the assumption that "great" works of art, works of art that offer a deep window into an experience and inspire others, are only possible when the artist follows something of the heuristic process in its inspiration. It would then follow, with regards to art therapy, that I could consider a creative synthesis as the central goal for my clients in any of the therapies I conduct. There are, clearly, many holes in this train of thought. First, the term "great art" is likely not appropriate, nor my definition of "great art". Eventually, I would examine *exactly* what I meant by that term, changing it to the more appropriate "art that is personally satisfying for the artist". In this sense, the artist has, in his or her opinion, communicated the intention of the artwork in a satisfactory manner. Admittedly, what constitutes "satisfaction" will vary from artist to artist, just as the goals of therapy vary from client to client, however in *art* therapy I would argue that the accomplishment of satisfactory artwork would

likely coincide with the attainment of those unique therapeutic goals. Does this mean that there is a role for aesthetic goals in art therapy?

Aesthetics and Art therapy

Walsh (AATA proceedings, 1977) argued that an understanding of the creative process is instrumental in understanding the therapeutic process in art therapy. Walsh drew upon James Joyce's *Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man*, and used Joyce's ideas concerning the artistic process (lyrical form, epical form, and the dramatic form) and applied them to the therapeutic process (essentially, a preconscious idea, internalization and projection, followed by externalization of the emotions of the first two stages). Change the labels, and we have initial engagement, immersion, and explication or creative synthesis.

Over the years, art therapists have talked about how important art therapists' creativity is within the therapeutic exchange; how the creative process and the therapeutic process parallel each other; how art therapists tend to be visual thinkers; how art therapists' in-depth understanding of materials, space, process, and techniques defines and enhances treatment; and how intuitive thinking, inherent to the creative process of artmaking, is a characteristic of art therapists in general, setting them apart from other professionals. (Malchiodi, 1999, p.2)

If we can see that there are similarities between the creative and the therapeutic process, then there must be degrees of success at the end of each respective process. Not all therapies work out, and many an artistic endeavor has failed in the eyes of its creator. Thus, when I speak of aesthetic goals in art therapy, I assume that artistic success will be

linked to the overall therapeutic success. Other art therapists have entertained this notion as well (Henley, 1992; Kramer, 1971, 2000), coming to the conclusion that the quality of the artwork can be a measure of therapeutic success. But first we must consider what I mean by the term “aesthetics”. What follows is an excerpt from my journal, written in the fall of my second year of the program.

Aesthetics. Sticky, expansive, hard to define. I see aesthetics as the formal qualities (colour, line, shape, gesture) of art that evoke a response, a strong or moving response, in the viewer. It triggers something. But how do I know if I'm achieving this (if I ask for a response, as I have so far, then I get one) Does it matter? How important is it for our clients to achieve this?

This is where I began in my thinking on aesthetics; to me the concept was related to the overall satisfaction the artist felt in relation to the artwork. This concept relates to art therapy in a complex way. Not all artwork will be considered satisfying by the client - in fact, in my experience the most unsatisfactory artwork often contains the most therapeutic material. However, it is my contention that once that material is worked through, verbally *and* visually, the new understanding will be made all the more concrete and lasting for the client if this resolution (of sorts) can be contained in a successful artwork. What the term “success” entails will vary from individual to individual, but I would argue that if that artwork is received well by an “other” (perhaps just the art therapist) in a genuinely felt manner, the creator/client will deem it the most successful.

In my role as artist/researcher I was looking for the key that would unlock the mystery of what made my art satisfying. You will see that many of the artworks included in this text were not considered satisfying by me. By linking that sensation of dissatisfaction to the theoretical framework of heuristics, I began to see that these

particular artworks were missing something that I had unconsciously missed in trying to understand my experience, necessitating a return to an earlier stage in the heuristic process. If we then link that process to the process of therapy, it would seem that dissatisfaction experienced in relation to art produced is a reflection of something escaping conscious recognition in the therapeutic process. It seems to be a signal that there is more work to be done. I found this to be evidence of the unique way that the art product could function in the therapeutic process.

The Structure

In the world of academia, heuristic research is often overlooked. I feel that this is mostly a result of how it is reported, which seems undermine the very strengths of heuristic research. What often results is a falsely linear description of the researchers' experience, a description that the reader is forced to follow. This method of reporting is counter to the basic principles behind heuristic research which are: heuristic research is not a linear process, it is constantly folding back on itself to create deeper meanings, and, second, that the only way we can truly know anything is to experience it ourselves.

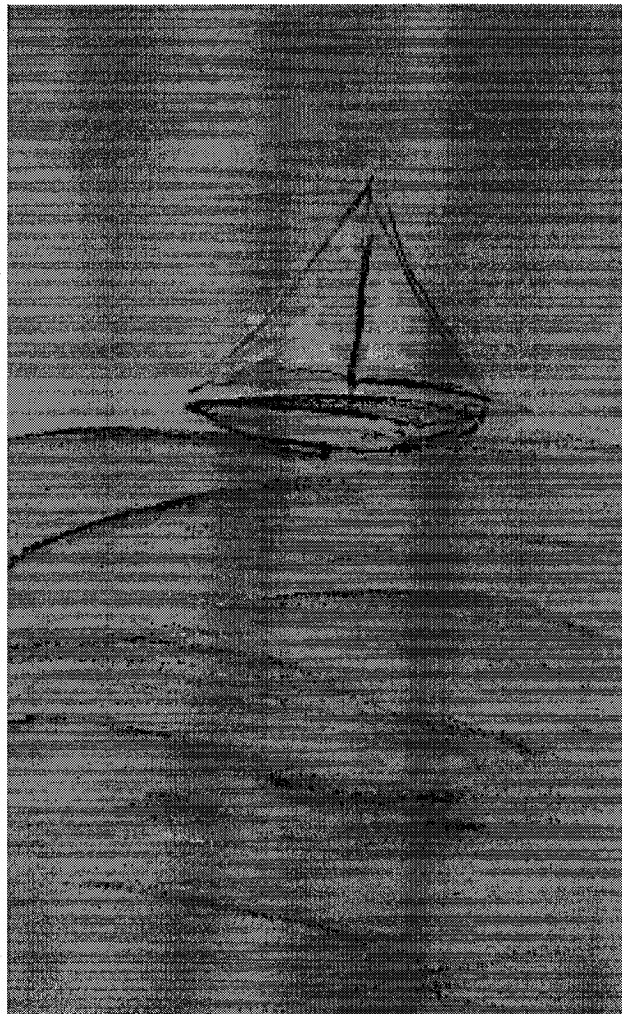
“[T]here is no substitute for experience, none at all. All the other paraphernalia of communication and of knowledge - words, labels, concepts, symbols, theories, formulas, sciences - all are useful only because people already knew them experientially” (Maslow, 1966, p.45-46).

In order to remain true to a sense of experience, I have created this text in the form of a “choose your own adventure” story. There will be “loose threads” at points where my thinking diverged into areas that I either abandoned or modified, threads you may choose to follow and, perhaps, continue in your own research. These “loose threads” will

be terminated by the words "*The End*" as a reference to the way similar diversions would be ended in the original *Choose Your Own Adventure* books that I read as a child. You will then be given the choice to re-join my text in describing my experience. My story will be brought to its natural end, but this text may serve as a beginning for you, should you find that your interests lead you more strongly in the direction of one of these "loose threads." This text has taken many forms as it developed, but I feel that the choose your own adventure format will allow you to follow my process of discovery within the context of your own experience and ideas. If you find yourself on one of the few loose threads, it is up to you to continue it where I left off, or to turn back, as I did, to follow a new or modified idea.

Originally, when I was comparing the heuristic, artistic, and therapeutic processes, this work was structured as three threads woven together to demonstrate their convergence in a web-like pattern. It was this structure that helped me to create the swirl, but, as I have mentioned, I have since realized that the swirl is not the central aspect of my discovery. In this web, my own story was disjointed and lost. As much as I wish that you, the reader, will have an interaction and experience with this text, it is still my story. I feel that this new format is faithful to the heuristic principles, while also being faithful to my experience.

◇ *If you wish to read about the swirl as a symbol of change, turn to page 178.*



An invitation

I invite you to choose your own adventure which may or may not converge with my own. When two identities collide, the debate can be extensive, persuasiveness waxing and waning with each new moment of experience. If you have experienced, or are experiencing the combination of artist and therapist, I invite you to consider exactly what those identities mean to you. My own experience demonstrates how easily they can combine, but also how frequently they can compete. *An Artist Meets a Therapist: Conflict and Convergence in the Identity of the Emerging Art Therapist* explores my experience of finding common ground. Your adventure may lead you elsewhere, but please be reflexive -- stand back and consider why. Go explore, and perhaps together we can begin to find a paradigm that explains the unique effectiveness of *art* therapy.

Part II**Sense of Discomfort and a Need for Beauty.**

Figure 1 - *Profile*, Oil on canvas, 3' x 4'
1995

Letter of Intent. (Pre-program)

I enjoy the meditative state that envelops me while I create art, the complete concentration to the exclusion of everything else. In highschool, I was fortunate to be in the International Baccalaureate program which offered Art as a higher level course. For two years I completed a wide range of projects that were eventually judged by an I.B. examiner. I received a perfect mark (7/7). Reflecting on my completed projects, I noticed an unconscious narrative. I often worked with the idea of woman and nature. In the pieces there was a mystical and spiritual theme that progressively brought the feminine figures that I created closer to nature. This theme culminated in "Profile" [figure 1] where the female profile became fused with nature. I realized that I had, over time, expressed my changing feminine identity through my art. Unconsciously I had expressed this visually, not verbally, for I believe that it is often hard to verbally express emotions that are still in progress.

My interest in people and my empathetic personality led me to pursue a BA in Psychology at the University of McGill. In my final year of the program I discovered the occupation of Art Therapy. I have since commenced a BFA in studio arts at Concordia University in order to, once again, explore myself and my world through art. I create art for the purpose of creating and expression. My goal is to examine the individual symbolic language that can be discovered through the artistic process (such as the process I underwent in highschool). . . In my opinion, Art Therapy recognizes the subjective nature of art, as well as the therapeutic benefits of the creative process itself. Furthermore, Art Therapy adds the human and the subjective to the field of Psychology, something that I felt wasn't emphasized at McGill. It is for these reasons that I have chosen to apply to the Art Therapy Masters program at Concordia.

The preceding letter is the one that I included with my application for the graduate Creative Arts Therapy program at Concordia University. It is where I began. Reading it now, I am struck by how simple it all seemed to me at the time. I thought I knew why I created art; "*for the purpose of creation and expression*". Perhaps that is why I create art,

although the reason isn't as defined as it may seem. I am also struck by the inclusion of my IB mark (7/7, a *perfect* mark). It would seem that I wanted the admissions committee to know that not only was I an artist, I was a *good* artist. The narcissistic implications of this statement will be discussed in detail later, as it was certainly no where near my conscious recognition when I began the program. To my credit, I did recognize my empathetic personality, the importance of subjectivity, and the implicit therapeutic benefits of creativity. I did not, however, fully recognize the depths of the unknown into which I was diving. I speak of wanting to be in the program to "*once again, explore myself and my world through art.*" In reality, I would explore myself and my world through piles of literature on pathology and illness, with a sprinkling of what constitutes health and healing. Creating art would not be so simple within these parameters. There would be a sense of discomfort.

In the summer before I began the art therapy program (after I knew I was accepted) I created the following image, a large oil painting titled *Dive*. This work was included in my exhibition at the end of the two year program even though it was technically created before my experience in the program began. It represents the beginning, when I was just an artist, sensing all sorts of possibilities. Following the image are the documented responses I wrote or received at my exhibition.



Figure 2 - *Dive*, Oil on canvas,
3' x 4', 2001

Responses

My Own Associations

faceless cool
 Green Westcoast
 blind unknown
 Dark

The figure is trusting but unsure,
 frightened.
 Refreshing to dive in.

Responses of Others at the Exhibition

Seeking
The unknown
Fear
Willingness to experiment -
to change everything.
 Deep into the BLUE
 scary
 unknown
 messy

serenity (sic)
unknown
 This is how everything began
 2 yrs ago. It evokes really nice
 and pleasant memories. There
 is this sort of attachment to this
 painting.
it feels cold! I need to take a deep
breath and, without thinking,
going deeper and deeper to find
an answer, a word, a response and
maybe a reflexion (sic) (miroir)
myself.
 I remember this one. I am attracted
 to it now as I was then, almost 2yrs.
 ago. I love the colours. Blue & more
 than blue. Today it makes me feel
 cool (well almost!) and "diving in"
 is exactly what we were doing,
 wasn't it!

A BLUE GUSH
COOL-REFRESHING
SUBMERGING INTO
BLACK DEPTHS
THE UNKNOWN
I DESIRE?

There is a strong duality of diving
 down and reaching up... again, the
 ambiguity of beginning an
 exploration.

Desire engulfs leaving you
no choice but to emerge.
 Inconscience (unconscious)
 Trouble inconscient (unconscious
 confusion)

Distillation

I distilled each of the preceding responses into the following notes. If responses were repeated, I indicated the number with slashes after the response. After this process, I further distilled the data to one phrase of as few words as possible, focusing more on the responses that were repeated. This phrase is included in capitals after the summarized responses.

- Remember 2yrs. ago - attracted to it // , attachment /
- Submerging - "Desire *engulfs* leaving you no choice but to emerge."
- Unknown //// , scary (fear) //, messy
- cold, cool ///
- without thinking. Unconscious, unconscious confusion.
- duality
- ambiguity of beginning an exploration. Willingness to experiment, to change everything. Going deeper for an answer.
- serenity, refreshing /
- blue ///

BLUE COOL UNKNOWN

This is a satisfying representation of the experience of beginning. Optimistic that there wouldn't be large pointy rocks just below the surface, I dove in. As my training commenced, I became a lot more cautious. I realized there were sharp pointy rocks just below the surface -- I had been lucky enough to avoid them in the past -- but that was all changing. There was a sense of discomfort for me, and a need to do something *more* artistic, or experience something more artistic. At the beginning, I was working with developmentally delayed cliental, and I was struggling with what I thought art therapy would be.

Excerpts from "A Therapist's Journal"

October 10th, 2001 - second session in group art therapy (Second session as a therapist EVER for me).

We provided the participants with a pile of magazine pages that we had ripped out of magazines. We were told to do this because of the tendency for this population to just get absorbed in looking at a magazine rather than cutting out images. However, what happened was that many of the participants simply would pick an image and glue the whole page onto their paper. At the time it was disappointing, but now it seems rather funny.

October 17th, 2001.

When working at the Centre, one's artistic aesthetic is thoroughly challenged. I have to admit that it is hard to be as engaged in an artwork that one does not find artistically stimulating. The meaning seems harder to find.

November 1st, 2001.

Kottler (1993) advises that the first step in resolving difficulties with a problem patient is to determine whether the problem is with the client or with us. At the Centre it is easy to believe that the problems lie with the clients. However I have to admit that it is also like a result of my own frustration with what I thought practicing art therapy would be. Sometimes, because our participants have difficulty talking about their artwork, making associations and having an awareness of their own symbolic language, as well as verbal confusion when talking, it feels like half of what we are learning in our courses is irrelevant. At times I begin to feel like I am working in a daycare center, and that this is just an art class (that is what

many of the participants think). It's frustrating as a new therapist to be in a population where you can't really expect a large amount of insight. Regardless, I am developing strong skills in interpreting the nonverbal, and in asking questions to elicit responses from the most resistant participants. Yet, as I said, it can be a source of annoyance when you rarely, if ever, witness the "ah-ha!" from your clients.

These excerpts come from my very first experiences as an art therapist. It was an overwhelming time of trying to figure out what I was doing while I was doing it. I was also working with a population that I had no experience with. My bias is certainly apparent -- it wasn't what I thought "real" art therapy was going to be like because of their lack of insight (as I wrongly perceived it) and their seemingly simple artistic expressions. However, at the same time I was beginning to realize how much could be communicated through the product, even if the client could not verbalize the message. I began to trust the product and my instincts concerning the product. I knew the process was beneficial for the clients, but the product, I felt, was of equal importance. However, personally there was also a deeper sense of disappointment that I did not fully recognize at the time.

December 10th, 2002

I have now finished my practicum at the Centre for the holidays. In our last group sessions, we decided to give each participant an individual puzzle piece that they could decorate, and then, as a group, we assembled the puzzle at the end of the session. As everyone worked, W. drew a very elaborate pattern on his puzzle piece in pencil. He then took the paint and began to painstakingly paint in the colours for his design. At one point, W. asked if I could help him fill in his design. I was more than pleased to help. For the

rest of the session I got to paint with this person, communicate non-verbally, work in unison. I felt very close to him. And I got to paint! Every day I sit there and I watch them use the materials and the artist inside me screams "I WANT TO PAINT". Finally, I could. But then, later in supervision, they questioned what I did. Did I influence the participant? How did he feel about the quality of his painting in relation to mine? What did the other participants think? How did they feel? That one I could answer - N. said it straight out - she felt jealous. I feel bad about that, I really do. But there must be more room in the art therapy room for me to be artistic!

Again, my bias towards this population is apparent -- they "decorate" the surface. I now believe that their expressions were just as capable as any of aesthetic movement, something I did witness with my individual client. At the time, however the aforementioned experience alerted me to a way of being in the therapy room that seemed to really satisfy a part of myself. But it was being questioned. My artist self, I feel, saw this as an affront. At the time I did not particularly notice that part of me was angry, so rather than continuing the dialogue, my artist self, I believe, retreated. There seemed to be a requirement that I be fairly neutral in the therapy room, and my artist self did not seem able to be that neutral. "Artists committed to life and the use of the self as a creative instrument are attracted to the discipline of art therapy but they soon discover the restraints placed upon their vision by the tight boundaries of professions" (Robbins, 1987, p. 96). This quote demonstrates how I felt, but it does not clarify *what* exactly my vision was that was being restrained. There was only this sense of restriction and discomfort.

Searching for the Question

My sense of discomfort was what I latched onto in my search for my question for this research project. The whole process began in the second semester of our first year. We had to find our research question and then find our methodology. This was complicated for me because, in heuristic research, the search for the question is a part of the methodology. Thus my question went through numerous transformations.

When someone feels an internal draw and hears the call from the deepest recesses of the self; it is almost impossible not to notice. This may be something that is being consciously or unconsciously experienced as incomplete and that needs to be completed. It may be something that is discordant that needs to be brought to harmony or something that is unclear that needs to be clarified. It may be something that is misunderstood that needs understanding or something that is dissociated that needs to be integrated. Perhaps it is something that has not been known before that seeks to be known. (Sela-Smith, 2002, p. 64).

Do you remember what it was like to stare up a tree-trunk when you were a child, trying to imagine how to climb it? Somewhere in that tangle of branches lay my research question *and*, further still, my answer, but I needed to figure out how to begin. The following image was painted in the first semester of my first year.

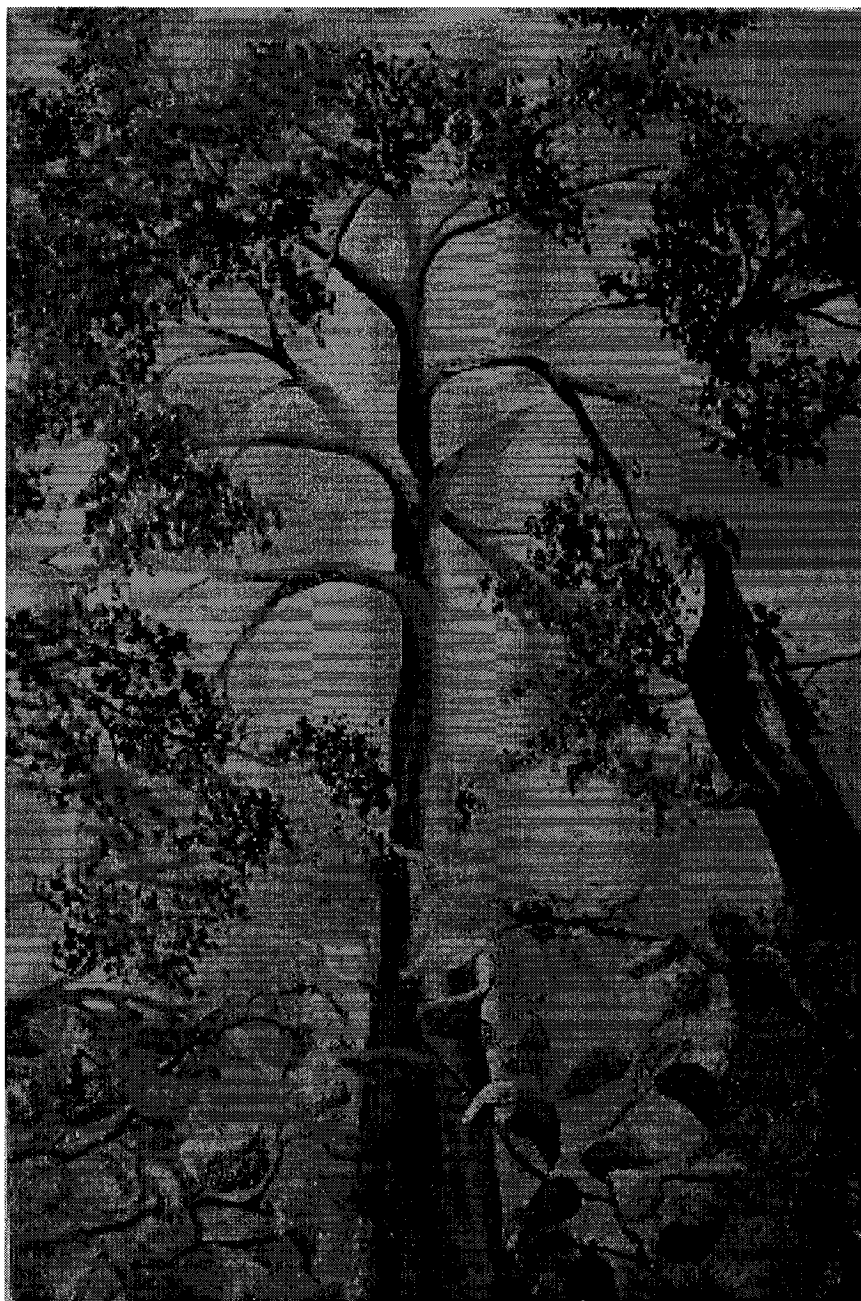


Figure 3 - *Growing*
Oil on canvas, 24" x 36", 2001

Responses

My Own Responses

Simple - Jack & the Beanstock

Naïve fairytale

Old vs. New

a bird

The Responses of Others

Prise de conscience de l'opportunité de la vie (Realizing the opportunity of life). Analyse de la situation (analyze the situation)

The tree looks so big, compare [sic] to me.

First associations: growth, unknown.

Magic Beans

Magical Journey

Fairy TALES

What['s] up the beanstock.

Fogginess

Concentrating on the here & now.

Dawning recognition that much is healthy already.

I feel so small at the bottom of the tree. I would like to climb it to see where I am. It's nice to be lost in the forest but it is also scary.

I feel the warm light, can almost hear the birds chirping, the leaves drinking. Very nourishing.

A bird wants to fly. The beginning of a journey. The thought of starting something.

A spark of birth in an ocean of uncertainty.

Ah, the tree! Always one of my favorite images and favorite beings.

Looking up.

I'm still down here. How do I get up to the first branch?

I want to climb

Is that a bird? Another tree? Joined to the tree? (Which feels like me).

Distillation

- Looking up // - wanting to climb //, how?

Where am I?

>Questions

What is at the top?

- feeling connected to the tree.
- feeling small //
- lost, scary
- warm, nourishing. *Dawning recognition* that much is healthy already. *Realizing* the opportunity of life.
- magic, fairytales /
- “a spark of *birth* in an ocean of **uncertainty**”. *Beginning* of a journey. *Starting* something.
- **Fogginess**, concentrating on the here and now
- a bird //
- analyse the situation - *questions*.

SMALL BEGINNING?

Looking for the Question, April 2002

How can a therapist use art to communicate to a client?

With what populations is such communication most effective?

Which art therapists use this type of interactive method?

Does the focus remain on the client?

What is the role of the aesthetic?

What is the role of interpretation?

What theories support this method?

What is the history?

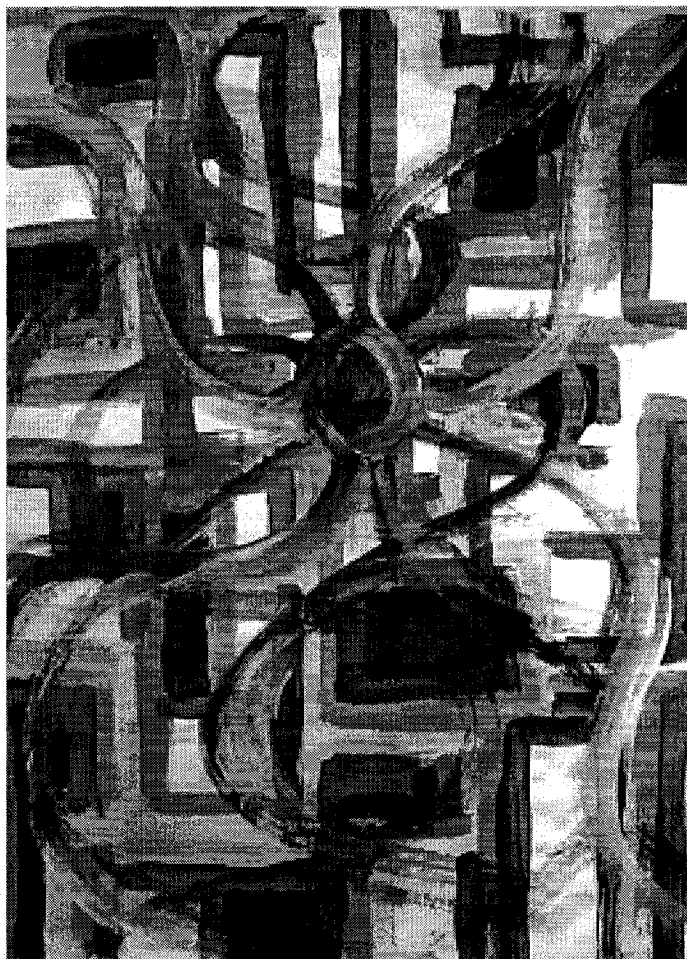
How much should an art therapist's reflection of a session be artistic? How much of the overall process (ie. Countertransference and transference) should be worked through artistically?

These questions point to my initial concern about the role of my artistic self in art therapy. They were written quickly on the back of an in-class handout during a moment of distraction. I was thinking about interactive methods, methods that allow the therapist to use her artistic skills inside the therapy room. I was clearly very curious about these methods, likely because I was becoming more and more antsy *just sitting there watching other people do art*. Discussions in research class led me to realize that I was still too much of a novice art therapist to start trying interactive methods -- I was still too *naive*. Eventually I realized that I needed to explore *why* I was feeling so antsy "*just sitting there ...*" What was my motivation? What was my true question? At this point I was circling around the question -- like painting the wrong painting. What was I after, what was "wrong"? What wasn't recognized?

September 17 (2002) , Reading Reflections

I know it begins with the idea of an artist who is a therapist. You would think that this relationship would be self evident in art therapy, but I feel that it can take on a very individual form from therapist to therapist. Sensing this, it seems that a heuristic inquiry would be most appropriate to answer my question. I am the researcher and I am the phenomenon. What is my relationship between being a therapist and being an artist?

This stirring notion grew and grew, expanded and contracted, until I began to circle closer to my question. This process was greatly aided by literature which deepened my understanding of the heuristic method. I realized that the question must be personal, and connected to my experience. I began to see the question that contained all the other questions.



Primary Research Question

What was my experience of my preexisting artist self becoming acquainted with my new, emerging therapist self?

Subsidiary Research Questions

- a) What does a consideration of this experience tell me about the needs and motivations of both my therapist self and artist self? How are they complementary and how are they conflictual?
- b) What does this heuristic experience tell me about the relationship between the process and the product in the pursuit of discovery and integration?
- c) What does this heuristic experience tell me about the role of art in art therapy?
How can we begin to distinguish art therapy from the other helping professions?

I felt that I should begin my adventure by exploring the possibilities for aesthetic goals in art therapy. This led me to explore art-based approaches to art therapy - an endeavor that illuminated the rift that exists in this profession; art *in* therapy versus art *as* therapy.

PART III

Can there be Aesthetic Goals in Art Therapy?

The continuum between art in therapy and art as therapy proved to be complex. Each side has laid claim to being a part of something better -- art in therapy remaining true to the roots of traditional verbal psychology, and art as therapy reaching as far back as the most primal examples of ritualistic healing (Malchiodi, 1999; McNiff, 1990, 1989). Although I was wary of too much language centered around spirituality (when describing art therapy), I felt strongly that there was room for me to use more of my artist self in the therapy room. The following excerpts demonstrate what I thought I knew at the time.

Excerpts from Art-Based Approaches to Art Therapy, written by me in the 1st semester of the Art Therapy program.

Within the field of art therapy there are those practitioners who stress the *therapy* of art therapy, and those who stress the *art*. This difference of perspective is embodied in the distinction between art *in* therapy, and art *as* therapy. Art-based approaches to art therapy are those that emphasize the notion of art as therapy, be it within the realm of aesthetics (as a tool to further expression), or an emphasis on the innate healing capacity of the art making process. Within these approaches there is also the implication that an art therapist must be engaged in personal art making in order to be authentic. An art-based approach to art therapy can fall within a broad continuum of practitioners, ranging between humanistic perspectives and transpersonal approaches; however, each approach agrees upon the centrality of the image, as well as image making in art therapy - both for the client and the therapist.

David Henley, in *Aesthetics in Art Therapy: Theory into Practice* (1992),

begins with this controversial statement, "I can often gauge the effectiveness of art therapy upon my clients by the quality of art they create" (p. 153). In order to support his claim, Henley explores the relation between aesthetics and art therapy, and how a consideration of aesthetics, and even an active intervention aesthetically by the therapist, can further the progress of a client. Henley combined this perspective with ego psychology, as outlined by Edith Kramer, which saw the art making process as a direction of primary process energy in the service of the ego (i.e. sublimation) (Kramer, 1971, 2000). Henley believed that once a client has reached a certain level, with a stronger ego, then the art therapist may intervene cautiously to further the client's aesthetic sensibility, thereby helping the client experience the full and satisfying sublimation process through art.

Paolo J. Knill also explores the place of aesthetic sensibility in art therapy. In *The Place of Beauty in Therapy and the Arts* (1995), Knill discusses the "aesthetic response" and "aesthetic responsibility." Aesthetic response is "a distinct response, with a bodily origin, to an occurrence in the imagination, to an artistic act or the perception of an artwork we associate with beauty" (p.2). Aesthetic responsibility, on the other hand, "describes a phenomena concerning the artistic process" (p.2). This is the phenomena of making art, imbuing one's artwork with personal meaning and significance. Knill suggests that it is the role of the art therapist to heed ones aesthetic responses, as well as to implement "techniques and methods that increase aesthetic responsibility, unlock creativity and foster technical skills for an opening to the imaginal" (p.3).

In both approaches, Knill and Henley propose a more active role for the art

therapist. The art therapist is not, in the art-based approach, simply a therapist who uses art in therapy. More accurately, the art therapist is a competent and practicing artist, who uses his or her knowledge of aesthetics as an artist to further the expression of the client in therapy. Here there is a dynamic relationship between the therapist, the client, and the image. Furthermore, although the end product is emphasized, considerable attention must be given to the art making process (for Knill, the “aesthetic responsibility”). Although the distinction between process and product may seem necessary, in truth one can argue that if the process is correct, then the product will be personally meaningful and, likely, aesthetically evocative.

Pat Allen was featured in “Artists who are Art Therapists” (2001), as she, too, emphasizes the role of being an artist in art therapy. In the beginning of her career, Allen describes her frustration with the difficulty she found in reconciling the way she worked as an artist and the way that she was expected to work with the clients as an art therapist; “there were many separations that were taken for granted in art therapy, such as how the client’s art products were regarded versus the way the art therapist might speak about or regard her own” (p. 104). Allen believes in the power of art to connect us to a power, or consciousness, greater than our own. She writes that she has often witnessed individuals, who start by creating images that deal with their own difficulties or insights, move toward creating images that are concerned with larger issues suffered by all of humanity. Allen also argues that; “Creating images is a way of holding the disparate truths side by side without becoming numb or going mad” (p. 104). The goal of art therapy, therefore, is to provide an experience through which the individual can

realize the interconnectedness of human existence, “and allow ourselves to feel and hold the complex truth rather than grasp for the simple solution” (p. 105).

Is Product Related to Process?

Writing this paper was a certain relief for my artist self. We were introduced to many theoretical perspectives in the initial classes of the art therapy program: psychodynamic, humanistic, Gestalt, object relations, existential and more. It was overwhelming, because we all felt the need to find our perspective, our theory, the club to which we could belong. But none of the theories held art as a central method for change, none of them seemed to really speak to the art and artistry that I felt was inherent in art therapy. Finding the art-based approaches gave me my first idea of where my club house might be. These practitioners used different theoretical approaches -- one might use the language of psychodynamics, whereas another may be more humanistic -- but all recognized the unique role of art in art therapy. It is, as mentioned earlier, art *as* therapy. The practitioners described in this paper looked at the role of art as central in promoting change and progress in the client, an opinion I felt I shared.

However, at this stage in my development, I had little idea of *how* to assert more of my artistic identity without influencing the natural expression of the client unduly. Lachman-Chapin (1983) proposed an interactive therapy technique where the therapist worked concurrently with the client, but I felt that I would become too absorbed in my own artmaking process that I would lose my focus on the client. Recently, I have become aware of studio-based art therapy approaches which adopt an open studio format for the therapeutic experience. The art therapist may, in this framework, work on his or her own artwork (Allen, 1995; McGraw, 1995), but some note that it may be too absorbing for the

therapist to be effective (Cahn, 2000; Henley, 1995; Malchiodi, 1995). It seemed clear, given my level of experience, that it would be counter-therapeutic for the client if I engaged in my own artwork. I had to find another way to assert my artistic skills in the art therapy room.

I began to think of the product produced in art therapy; the client art. Did the product reflect the process? Specifically, I was looking to understand the differing sense of satisfaction that I received from *my* finished works, both in therapy and on my own. In some cases, the continuing satisfaction I got from my product seemed to constantly renew the benefit of the process of making it. In those cases, it felt as though I had reached a level of expression that contained the subtle nuances of my experience in an effective way.

The artistic process requires simultaneous physical, emotional, and intellectual involvement in order to balance the internal and external forces that impinge on the artist. In choosing to draw and constrained by the medium, the artist embarks on a process, on a course of action over time to achieve a self-determined goal. (Schwartz, 1996, p. 244)

Could the creation of such satisfying art be a goal for my clients? If so, how would that fit with individual therapeutic goals, and how could I help the client achieve this? Would the “self-determined” goal be the successful externalization of the inner process of change? Would aesthetically effective and satisfying art then reflect successful therapy (given that the general goal for nearly all therapies is the balancing of inner and outer forces)?

Your first choice:

- ◇ *If you feel that the client's experience of satisfaction regarding the art product has little to do with the success of the art therapy process, turn to page 42.*
- ◇ *If you feel that it is more likely that the client's sense of satisfaction regarding the art product naturally correlates with the overall success of the art therapy process, turn to page 43.*

Little Relation

Art therapy supports the belief that all individuals have the capacity to express themselves creatively and that the product is less important than the therapeutic process. The therapist's focus is not specifically on the aesthetic merits of art making but on the therapeutic needs of the person to express. That is, what is important is the person's involvement in the work, choosing and facilitating art activities that are helpful to the person, helping the person find meaning in the creative process, and facilitating the sharing of the experience of image making with the therapist.

(Malchiodi, 2003, p.1)

In my day to day experience at my practicum site, we would engage the participants and try to keep them involved, then we would facilitate the sharing of the work. In the above quote there is also statement that we help "the person find meaning in the creative process". I believe that this is true, but without a due consideration of the product, how can the meaning of the process be understood? The argument is that the product is the natural reflection of the process. If the process is the therapeutic process, and we speak about therapeutic success, then must we not, in art therapy, also speak about the success of the product as a reflection of a successful process? This line of reasoning is what led me from dismissing my sense that the art product (measured as successful or satisfying by the client/artist) is an important indicator of success in the process of change and discovery.

The End

To continue, return to page 41 and make another choice . . .

The Product Reflects Process.

I have often thought of produced art as the by-product of a process. It is the concrete representation of the process of thought and discriminatory judgment. A sense of aesthetics is, I believe, a sense of discrimination. Being able to trust those perceptions, to organize and reform the perceptions into new arrangements or relationships, to amplify or eliminate those aspects that interfere with the Gestalt, are part and parcel of the artistic nature and work. The product, then, is the bringing into a concrete form, internal blendings of thought and intuition. (Ault, AATA proceedings, 1977, p. 55)

Excerpts from my journal/sketchbook - Things I know - December 11th, 2002

Art is a visual language that can be expanded and refined. Artistic success is defined by the ability of the work to tease tensions that exist in all of us. Tensions between our sense of self and the reality of our experience. They could be personal or political, psychological. As a developing therapist, I am most concerned with the psychological. Holding opposites without denying either of them. Tease and balance tensions. My artwork is not meant to be interpreted, but to be experienced. The interpretations add a valid dimension to the work - it is what it means to the viewer - it can change. It reveals, but the essence stays the same. It is the formal aesthetics of the work that accomplishes this.

For a time in my process I entertained the notion that the artworks I found to be satisfying had some sort of essence that was embodied in the aesthetics of the work (form, colour, composition etc.) and therefore transcended individual interpretation. I felt that one such essence would be a sense of balanced tension in the aesthetics of the

artwork. However, arriving at the most evocative dyad or triad to create tension seemed to be the difficult part.

We are told that the arts are needed to create a well-rounded person, although it is not obvious that being well-rounded is better than being slim. We hear that the arts give pleasure but are not told why and to what useful end. We hear of self-expression and emotional outlets and the liberation of individuality. But rarely is it made evident that drawing, painting, and sculpture, properly conceived, pose cognitive problems worthy of a good brain and every bit exacting as a mathematical or scientific puzzle. Nor can it be said that the study of the arts makes true sense unless we are led to understand that the efforts of the great artist, the lowly art student, or the client of the art therapist are means to the end of facing the problems of life. (Arnheim, 1966, p. 147)

I have included this quote because it questions the lack of understanding concerning *how* the creative process and the product function. Moreover, Arnheim portrays art as “mathematical or scientific puzzle” indicating an active need to solve the puzzle of expression, rather than total abandon to the meditative absorption of the creative process. Finally, Arnheim points out that clients of the art therapist face the same problem, the puzzle of expression, that art students and “great” artists face as well. How do I express, most effectively, my inner state? I began with an attempt to balance tensions.

The following artwork was created during my first semester in my second year. I was struggling to see how suffering and growth fit together. I wanted to *see* how it fit. I took my imagery from *Growing* (looking up a tree) and expanded it into three canvases.

PART IV
Balance?



Figure 4 - *Accepting, Growing, Striving*. 2002
Oil on canvas, 20" x 40" each.

Responses

My Own Responses- In my sketchbook/journal

idea that the middle tree is the growing identity of the therapist - branches out to encompass the dark and the light - all part of the same tree - broken/growth, all one. Twilight - change, transition - gives the psychological feel - real & unreal - surreal.

Connections: reaching, pulling, breaking, teasing, swirling, ascending, spiraling, dancing on the stairs - PLAY.

My Own Responses- At the exhibition

A - defiant, teasing, phallic, the swirl

G - strong, dark, wounded, shimmering, higher, foreboding

S - teasing, incomplete, bright, positive, challenging

The Responses of Others

"With a look of 'I told you I could'
I looked back at my smaller self."
*A sense of emergence, a working
through, a birth. The person at the
bottom seems serious, determined to
face a big challenge. The second
person feels peaceful, playful, somehow
resolved but beginning, or about to
begin.*

>>> excellence!

a long journey into night.
*Moving from under to over and
taking the lead, being responsible for
the path I chose. Ouf! There's a light.*
love, healing
Generosity / gratitude
looking forward / upwards / Back / revising
*It's not about the tree, it's about the
light, the hope, the possibilities.*
First thing that comes to mind -
push the limits, break the rules,
and rule.

Shells broken, dreams happen.
*Enfin je vois claire, mais ...
est-ce moi?
(finally I see clearly, but ...
is it me?)*
Beautiful.

Distillation

- long journey into **light** /, beginning challenge, moving
push limits
break rules
- excellence, beautiful
- love, healing, generosity & gratitude
- emergence, birth
- “With a look of ‘I told you I could’ I **looked** // back at my smaller self” (lead, rule)
- light, hope, possibilities // dreams happen
- bottom figure - serious, challenging, determined (only mentioned by one respondent)

LIGHT (LOOK) POSSIBILITIES

In addition to showing this work at my exhibition, I also presented this work to my studio inquiry class and asked them to respond if they wished. Most of the students were art education students, not art *therapy* students. In my experience, this led to a different way of talking about the artwork we saw. As art therapy students, we were accustomed to giving more general, unobtrusive responses -- responses that were sensitive to the artist that created the work. The art education students were not so inhibited -- they dialogued directly with the artwork and unabashedly shared what they saw. At times, I cringed. At other times I wondered if I was now unable to see the product as separate from the artist. However, for the most part, the responses of the art education students were very similar to the ones obtained at my exhibition. I have included two of the responses, followed by my distillation of all the responses.

Coming out of the woods, reaching for the star.

What is he thinking?

Going up the ladder, the tree of life inviting/hesitating
one life falling into the other - exchanging.

figures seem to be an emerging state breaking out - an alien quality, from a better place.

Distillation (of studio art responses)

- spiritual // - cool // - secret - tree of power BLUE
- looking back, looking forward wonderful - optimistic
- primal - star burst -reaching for the star ascension //
- day for night - darkness & light
- emerging // -alien /
- top person challenging me - inviting
- one life falling into the other, exchanging, comforting

SPIRITUAL ASCENSION

Artistic Success and Art Therapy

I feel that “spiritual ascension” and “light (look) possibilities” capture a similar essence. I wanted to create an artwork that reflected the interrelationship between pain (darkness) and growth (light) which is something that could fall within the realm of spirituality and religion. However, I was never truly happy with this artwork -- my “essence” seemed to be shallow. The blue people were meant to capture the essence of spirituality, or transparency, found in *Dive*, but in *Accepting, Growing, Striving* they just look like blue people. Why this lack of depth? Or why my lack of satisfaction?

I believe that this dissatisfaction with the finished product was a reflection of my lack of true understanding considering the intricacies of the process of change. The balance was contrived and forced, the expression too didactic. Edith Kramer (1971, 2000) viewed the quality of the art product as a direct indicator of the degree of artistic sublimation that has been achieved. Sublimation is the expression of unacceptable impulses in an acceptable form, a process that often occurs unconsciously and results in a greater psychic integration for the individual. Kramer argues that the indicators of “good art” are its “evocative power, inner consistency, and economy of artistic means” (p. 67). If an artwork balances tensions and integrates them into a cohesive whole, then the art is

successful. This is contrasted with a simple elimination of tension, or “chaotic discharge” (p. 54). Good art then, according to Kramer, is intimately tied to the balancing of psychic forces in sublimation. Pat Allen (2001) put it this way:

We receive images of discord from nations around the world, then offered anti-anxiety medications to help us relax from the information overload and sense of helplessness those images produce. Creating images is a way of holding the disparate truths side by side without becoming numb or going mad. (p.104)

If one of the indicators of successful creative expression is an essence of balanced tensions, then how does this concept fit into the process of therapy? Given that I feel a sense of dissatisfaction when I regard *Accepting, Growing, Striving*, how is that a reflection of my ability to comprehend both the agony and ecstasy that I encountered as an intern?

Arthur Robbins (1980, 1988, 1992, 2000) has written a considerable amount of literature supporting a more aesthetic attitude towards therapy. Inherent in his theory is a emphasis on balance, balance not only in the artwork, but also between the therapist and the client. Robbins developed expressive therapy, which is essentially a multi-modal creative arts therapies approach. Consideration of expressive therapy has led Robbins, in more recent years, to explore what he terms “the psychoaesthetics” of therapy (1992, p. 177). This perspective calls for the therapist to approach the therapy as a complete aesthetic experience. Part of this experience is the energy that exists between the client and the therapist.

By providing nonverbal and verbal structures that respond sensitively to the changing nuances in the relationship, therapists offer balance or

counterbalance to the energy in the relationship - accomplishing this task by temporarily losing their boundaries and feeling the inner life space of the patient . . . Thus treatment, if nothing else, is a dance in which there is a variety of images, interplaying between the two participants - therapist and patient - and taking place on both an unconscious and conscious level, creating, in turn, its own dynamic art form. (Robbins, 1988, p.97)

Meier (1971) conceived of the therapeutic relationship as a rotation in which the therapist creates tension in relation to whatever arose in the client, "so that something can really come to a head ..." (p.282-283). We counter the client's expectation of dismay with acceptance, we balance their anger, we feel the sadness they can't feel, we try to act as the complement. This challenges the client to move towards integration.

We have to attempt a synthesis of those opposites that are in play all the time and we must come to a point where the well known "exclusion principle" between the opposite function becomes less and less exclusive, so that a synthesis is at long last possible. And whenever the "exclusion principle" is no longer dominating the situation, or also when it is absolutely valid, then one can expect the formation of a "uniting symbol" and in such a way a constructive or healing effect can take place. For the healing always is the beginning of a new microcosm and, if you like, you can call all these schemas or mandalas, a description, or an attempt at trying to describe, microcosmogony. (Meier, 1971, p. 283)

There were two elements that appeared quite spontaneously in *Accepting, Growing, Striving* -- the spiral and the starburst. I had not imagined these elements when I conceptualized my work. Rather, in the last session that I worked on this piece, they

suddenly appeared. Later, these symbols would reappear in my personal therapy artwork. They seemed to be linked to my conception of the process of discovery and change (a theme *Accepting, Growing, Striving* was concerned with) but I did not understand exactly what they symbolized for me at the time. Now I see it quite clearly -- *at the time* my energy as a therapist was about spiraling down to (hopefully) reach a new understanding (although sometimes it felt like we were just spiraling down), whereas my artist self had the bursting, expansive energy that appeared exciting but dangerous, possibly overwhelming. Originally, I saw *Accepting, Growing, Striving* as an upwards movement towards change and discovery (this artwork is currently hanging up my stairs), but now I see its direction as two-way (we walk up *and* down on the stairs). It is an attempt to pull two disparate identities into a central metaphor of balance.

As I worked at my practicum sites throughout the two years, I found it increasingly hard to function as I felt I was giving more and more to my clients, spending so much time in their "inner life spaces" as Robbins (1988) put it. I feel that I was balancing the therapeutic experience, but as a result was not balanced within myself. Unable to synthesize the experiences of my clients with my own experience, my deeper equilibrium was off, I lacked the depth of balance that *Accepting, Growing, Striving* lacked. My product was reflecting my process. The urge to create art was strong, but the product felt constricted. It seemed apparent that neither my artist self or my therapist self was working effectively. So what did my process need to be in order to achieve the deep essence of balance that I was searching for in myself and my product? I decided to explore what constituted successful and satisfying art in order to understand more about the process that produced it.

Formed Expression and Successful Art

As mentioned in my introduction, it occurred to me that the achievement of a creative synthesis, as it is explained in heuristic inquiry, could clarify the process I would require to create a successful work of art. I believed that the phases of explication and creative synthesis were synonymous with the act of formed expression. By formed expression, I am referring to artwork that has been extensively thought about, almost completely planned, with a “message” in mind before the act of creation begins. The inspiration for the work may come from an unconscious need, but the aesthetic look of the work is planned beforehand. The artist takes into consideration the elements of an experience that he or she wishes to express and uses his or her artistic sensibility to put the elements together in the most aesthetically pleasing and evocative manner. This synthesis of units of understanding is reflected in the explication and creative synthesis phases of heuristic research.

In explication a more complete apprehension of the key ingredients is discovered. Additional angles, textures, and features are articulated; refinements and corrections are made. Ultimately a comprehensive depiction of the core or dominant themes are developed. The researcher brings together discoveries of meaning and organizes them into a comprehensive depiction of the essence of an experience. The researcher explicates the major components of the phenomenon, in detail, and is now ready to put them together into a whole experience. (Moustakas, 1990, p.31)

Truly formed expression is wholly satisfying for the artist. It is the successful balancing of various elements that can be organized and condensed into a single expression

that is far more comprehensive than the parts. It is also clear to the viewer what the overall essence of the experience depicted is, even if individual perceptions and associations to that essence may differ. This echoes the goal of creative synthesis which is to express a new whole that has emerged out of the illumination and explication phases, a new understanding that has sprung from tacit knowledge and intuition (Moustakas, 1990; Sela-Smith, 2002).

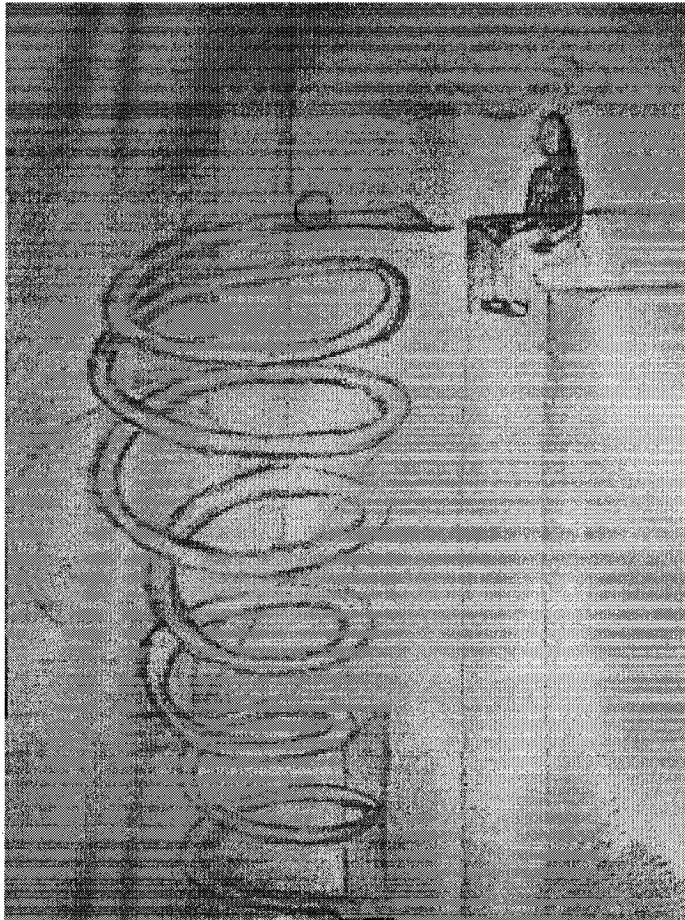
This new whole draws some expression of creativity out of the researcher to reveal its presence in the outer world. The new whole and its expression .. is born. There is something transpersonal about what emerges that seems to take on a life of its own. It is an amazing time of synchronicity, harmony, connection, and integration.

When others experience the story, whether it is in the form of a dissertation, a painting, a book, a piece of music, a dance, a lecture, or anything else creative, there will be something that resonates deep agreement with the observer. There will be a mutuality between the creator and the creative synthesis; there will be a sense of connection and transformation that cannot be falsified. (Sela-Smith, 2002, pp. 68-69)

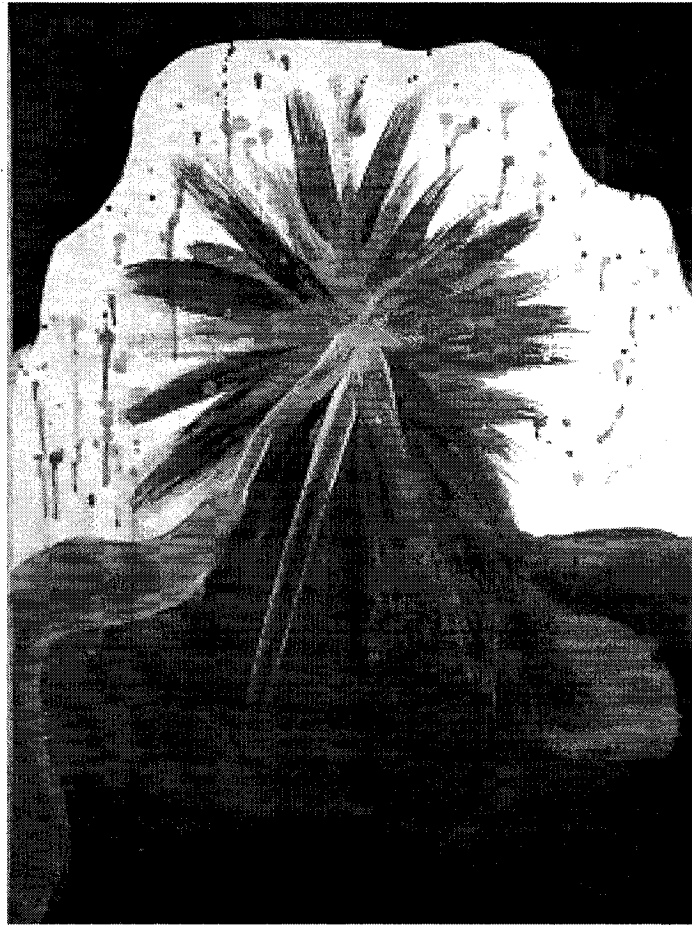
It is my opinion that my artwork that I find truly satisfying falls more under the description of creative synthesis, whereas the work that I don't feel is quite "right" falls more under the description of explication. *Accepting, Growing, Striving* falls in the latter category. At the exhibition, fewer people responded to this work than the other formed expressions, and I have actually never signed the work.

However, I feel that the premise of; creative synthesis = satisfying art only goes as far as explaining *what* constitutes a satisfying work of art, but does not explain *how* I

should go about it. I suppose the logic is that if one follows the heuristic phases authentically, one would arrive at a successful creative synthesis quite naturally. If this was true, then, again quite naturally, our art therapy clients should be producing truly evocative and satisfying art once a certain issue or dilemma has been resolved in therapy. But there seems to be something missing in this argument, as anecdotal evidence and experience has led me to understand that often this is not the case. There seemed to be a complex relationship between the unconscious experience of discovery and conscious experience. This is evidenced in many of the following artworks and my understanding of them at the time versus my understanding now. You will see that they reflected what I consciously knew, but also held a lot of information concerning what I only knew subconsciously. My sense of satisfaction regarding these works seemed to be dependent on the degree of detachment between my conscious understanding and my subconscious experience.



“[L]earning that proceeds heuristically has a path of its own. It is self-directed, self-motivated, and open to spontaneous shift. It defies the shackles of convention and tradition ... It pushes beyond the known, the expected, or merely possible...” (Douglas & Moustakas, 1985, p.44).



Spontaneity to Explore Identity

To explore my dual professional identity: in retrospect, I realize that what I have undergone is, in a sense, a professional identity crisis. At one time I was solely an artist. It was always an identity I carried with pride and humility. What joy the the studio brought me. It was a place where I could come and block out everything except the process itself. I always approached my art, be it painting , sculpture, or etching, with my most innocent self. Preliminary sketches or ideas were not part of my style. All that was in the studio was the art media, myself, and the magic of the emerging image. (Landgarten, AATA proceedings 1977, p.38)

I happened to be in the area and so I wandered into the library. I had no specific book in mind to get, and so I just made my way to the art therapy section and perused the titles on the shelf. Heuristically, I see this serendipitous moment as part of the overall general flow, perhaps mystery, of the process. One title jumped out at me, "Creativity and the Art Therapist's Identity". It was the proceedings of the 7th Annual Conference of the American Art Therapy Association, held in Baltimore in 1976. I wasn't even born then. Yet, here I am, 26 years later, grappling with the same issues they did at that conference. In fact, many of the "names" at this particular conference have already made their way into my reference list, as it seems that they, too, have continued to grapple with this issue.

The following image came from two sources. In fact, for me, it began as two images. On the left side is the lock of the door resting on the inside of the door frame. This is how I would often leave my office door at the hospital (my practicum site in the second year), so people would know I was in, but I wouldn't be disturbed unless it was

necessary. On the right side is the door resting on the outside of the door frame, revealing the gaping hole of where the lock would fit. This image came to me from a dream. In it, I noticed this almost open door, and when I pushed it open it revealed a spiral staircase going down with no railing. It was precarious, but strangely familiar. It was dark below, and I carefully started down the stairs (and, yes, *then I woke up ...*). As a result, this image is formed, but comes from a spontaneous source.

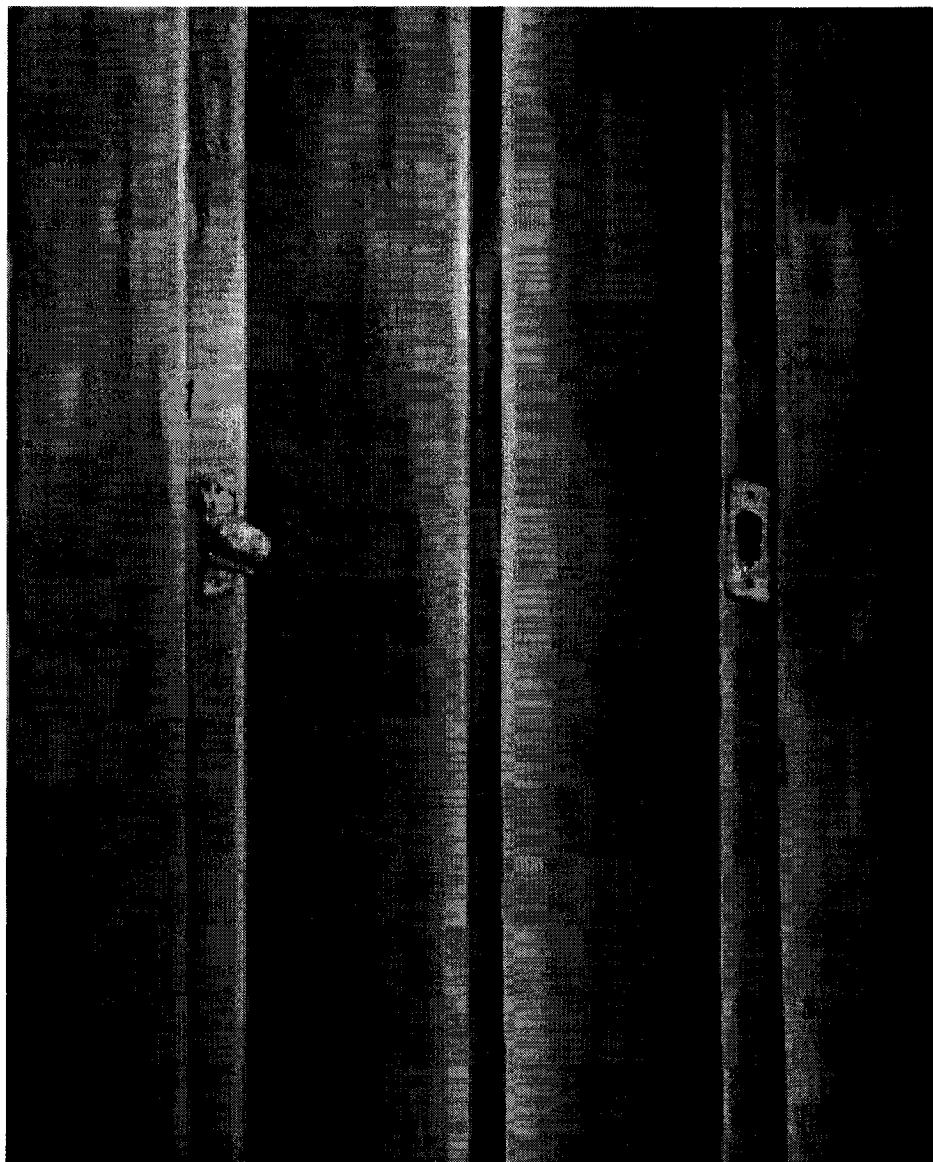


Figure 5 - *The Institution*, Oil on canvas, 24" x 36"
2002

Responses

My Own Responses (in my sketchbook/journal)

reality flipped 2 perspectives - real/not real, real/not real, inside/outside
 Door ajar - not open/not shut - accessible

My Own Responses (At the exhibition)

Opening & closing -poor light - shadowy
 Opportunity & constriction sexual - intimate
 dark but soft a bright light partially blocked by the solid line.

The Responses of Others

Oh! It looks like the door is not locked. But it looks fairly dark and disturbing. There is a way outOr is that a bar? It feels like I'm on the inside.

A dream of changing barriers at every turn.

There is a good sense of ambiguity in these doors. Are they opening or closing? Cold and uninviting but intriguing and curious. Therapy is about being able to tolerate the ambiguity and work with it too.

Sigh - the deadbolt lock neither opens nor closes, but stands uncompromisingly as I struggle to find my way through the doorpost... the path to follow is so straight.

I don't see myself in there. (I was afraid to come in the program too, I guess I was not alone)

Dullness - possibility? (tabula rasa) or disappointment?

The dungeon - feeling split - opened-closed. Make sure the door is closed. confidentiality - secrets
 - part of the institution
 - Role of the Jailer?

I do not know.

I can relate to that.

Le premier pas franchit, et prise de conscience de la difficulté à surmonter des peurs. (realize the difficulty of overcoming your fears).

Distillation

- opening or closing? ///
- (dark and disturbing) - dungeon
- “a dream of changing barriers at every turn”
- need to tolerate ambiguity. Possibility or disappointment. Cold & uninviting, but intriguing and curious. Opportunity and constriction.
- feeling split - confidentiality and secrets
- authority (the jailer)?
- trying to fit in a straight path. A bright light blocked by a solid line.
- feels like I’m inside -I don’t see myself there
- realize the difficulty of getting over your fears.

OPENING OR CLOSING - AMBIGUITY.

Again, with this piece, I had the opportunity to show it to my studio art class. And again, I found that the art education responses were not, in essence, that different from the responses I collected at my exhibition. I have included one studio inquiry response, but in the interest of brevity, I have included only my summary of the rest of the responses.

“penis, pre-pubescent, about sexuality, 2 sexes - the division, separation, going together, in & out, disturbing, abuse? - don’t like the shape of the ‘penis’, don’t like the shape of the ‘vagina’ - they don’t fit together - can’t match - control - something is coming in.”

Distillation

- sexuality //// - 2 halves fit/don’t fit together
- separation -in & out //
- claustrophobia - protection vs. imprisonment
- open & locked // - a hidden entity ///
- spiritual door to another universe , unconscious, surrealistic
- dreamlike, mysterious ///, scary, inviting //
- where does the door lead to, where are you coming from? Transition.
- who has the power and control? to escape, to find home.

SEXUALITY - A HIDDEN ENTITY (FIT)

If I attempt to combine the two sets of responses I feel that this image is pointing towards something about intimacy and internal vs. external (in and out, opening and closing). There is this ambiguity in many of the responses, simultaneously sensing one and the opposite, whatever it may be. In relation to my artist self meeting my therapist self, I feel there certainly was this struggle with intimacy and a sense of opportunity and constriction.

In *The institution as a holding environment for the therapist* (Robbins, 1987), Gonzalez and Robbins discussed how art therapy interns can understand the impact of the institutional environment on their creative and therapeutic selves. It was suggested that the interns create their own artwork and then discuss the work in groups in order to understand the complex interrelationship between the institution and themselves.

The struggle between the artist and the therapist in all of us can be gratified or frustrated depending on the institution. Which department houses the creative arts therapist and how the institution sees the art therapist's role are but two of the components of this picture. (p. 127)

In my experience, the resident art therapist at the hospital in which I worked was certainly respected as an equal member of the team -- a team which consisted of a psychiatrist, a few psychologists, a music therapist, and a pet therapist. There were also occupational therapists and the front line staff (with various training in nursing and social work). It was quite a progressive team as far as the variety of treatments offered in a public hospital. However, few on the team seemed to really know the difference between us art therapists and the regular psychologists. This experience was partly what prompted me to search for a better way to define what we do, beyond simply using art materials as another form of communication. I felt I needed to somehow define how the

creative act heals, incorporating both the process and the product. Again, my artist self wanted more space in the art therapy room, but was unsure of how much to show to the institution. Could they really understand? “The spirit of the artist is one that is associated with changing boundaries, redefining self, and moving into alternate states of consciousness. Institutions tend to move toward homeostasis and stabilization” (Robbins, 1987, p. 128). “*A dream of changing barriers at every turn*” (exhibition response to *The Institution*) reflects the spirit of the artist that is somewhat confined by the institution. For me, it was *opportunity and constriction*. The institution was *opening* doors, but also *closing* off parts of my creative self. I was also *inside* as an intern, but *outside* as I wasn’t a “real” member of the staff. I see all of this in *The Institution*, but I never actually recorded in my journal/sketchbook how I felt until February 27th, 2003.

I’m getting frustrated with the hospital and bureaucracy. We’re told so little - not when sessions are canceled & not given much respect for the clinical work we’re doing. They try to get the kids out of there so fast, as soon as their external behaviour improves, without acknowledging that their internal state has barely been touched. But then I feel helpless, because I don’t know how much I’m effecting their internal worlds.

In the first draft of this text, I left my exploration of this work at this point. I wasn’t yet ready to take many risks on my adventure. But when I came past this juncture again, I was struck by how I had only skimmed the first level of analysis. What was *really* in this artwork? I felt there was more.

The aesthetic elements that stand out to me are strong lines versus graduated colour. The colour, in a muddied form, suggests blue and red combining to create purple. Later in my adventure, my perceptions of blue and red become very significant. There is

also an experience of light and dark at the same time. There are tensions in this work, ambiguity, and something sexual. I feel that, in the context of my artist self becoming acquainted with my therapist self, there was an ambiguity concerning intimacy (open vs. closed). On the one hand, my therapist self was questioning how close she should get, should she let the experiences touch her? And on the other hand, my artist self wanted to delve deeper into the experience and feed off it creatively. "What was I that day, a therapist that used art for his own health needs, or an artist that had chosen to expose his life to experiences that built depth of understanding?" (Ault, AATA proceedings 1977, p.55). This deepening of understanding considering this work is indicative of the swirling through a spiral sensation that I have used to describe the heuristic process. I feel it is no coincidence that the staircase in my dream spiraled down into darkness.

The following image was created entirely spontaneously. This work involves a client (an eight year old boy, diagnosed with ADHD, oppositional defiant disorder, and dyslexia) with which I identified strongly, and I became quite attached to him. This artwork was an immersion into an intense feeling state that would take a long time to understand.

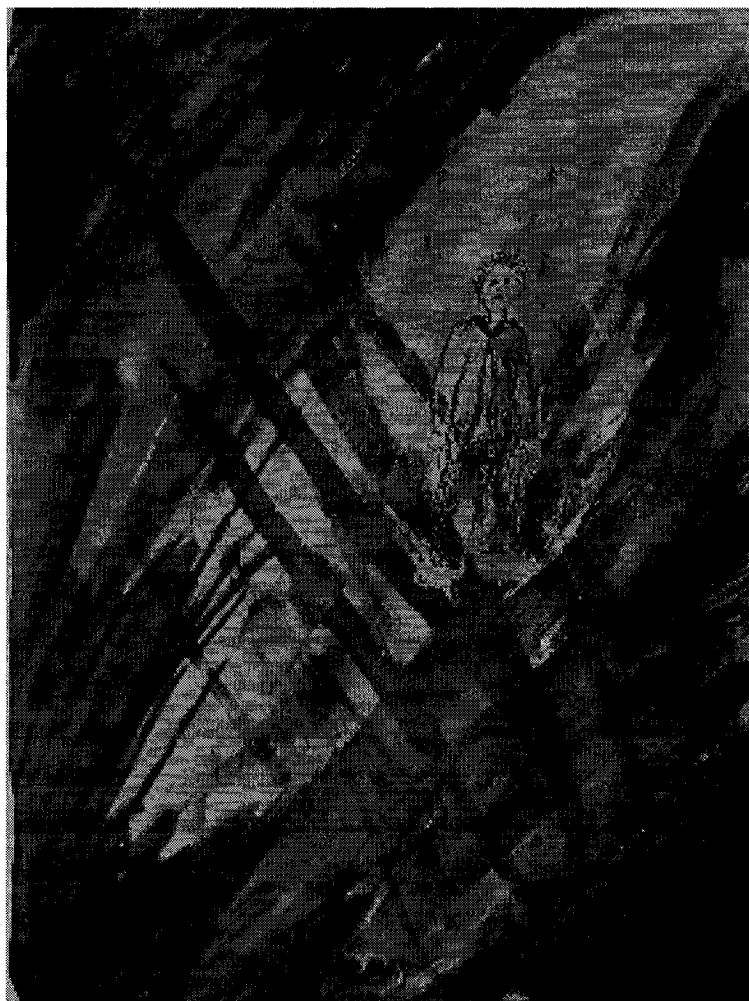


Figure 6 - *Spontaneous art 1 -Countertransference*
Poster paint on paper, 18" x 24", 2002.

Responses

My Own Responses

painful
lost
alone
hurt
darkness encroaching vs. colour expanding

claws scratching
transparent

The Responses of Others

Dangerous
Bloody, oops! I meant to write blood.
She looks angry but harmless (whose countertransference is this, anyways?)
Can he see through me ??
Are my defenses too high?
Do we collide and clash ...?
Can I be of help?
Frustration & pain. "I want to reach the child but there's so much in the way that they seem to fade"
Anger, mine & theirs.
Blood. And loss.
And a hoping for hope.
Red is coming. Expectations not met. facing the pain, anger, sadness, loneliness [sic].
Mixed emotion - Rage and loathing encroaching on the core/life force sickness with the opportunity for healing.

Paint-EXPRESSION-Pain-PEACE?
Have I really helped?
I had no idea I would feel so bad.
Red, blue, time, frame
Boundaries, loving, hate
Relationship.
Frustration envers le problème... et conscientisation à du problème réelle (frustration in the face of problems ... and awareness of the real problems).

Distillation

Dangerous -angry but harmless -love/hate relationship -mixed emotion.
 -Who's CT [sic]? mine & theirs / Can he see through me? Are my defenses too high?
 Bloody / Red is coming / life force, encroaching the core
 expectations not met i had no idea I would feel so bad
 FACING the anger ///, pain //, sadness & loneliness [sic], loss
 Have I really helped? / Frustration /
 hoping for hope sickness with the opportunity for healing
 Consciousness of the REAL problems.

DARKNESS & DOUBT

As I transcribed this distillation, I moved some of the notes around into more accurate groupings. On reflection, I don't feel that DARKNESS & DOUBT is an adequate summary statement. This painting is significant because it is the first truly spontaneous artwork I did. It is also the first painting in which I see my "red" emerging. Perhaps, (HELPING?) DARKNESS SURROUNDS (FACING) VULNERABILITY. It's hard to make a succinct summary, this artwork holds both professional and personal concerns.

I have left the above passage in this "text" because it demonstrates the difficulty I had in understanding what was in this artwork until I came swirling by a third time. It was at this time that I received a comment from my supervisor, neatly written in the margin. She politely called my attention to the four tics next to the word ANGER, and its absence from my summary statement. This is not surprising, given that my personal therapy has centered a lot on trying to recognize my anger. So now I would make my summary statement simply: ANGER?

As mentioned in the introduction, one of the central phases of heuristic research is the immersion phase. I feel that for the art therapist researcher, creating spontaneous artwork is one of the central ways for us to deepen our understanding of an experience.

Once the question is discovered and its terms defined and clarified, the researcher lives the question in waking, sleeping, and even dream states ...

Primary concepts for facilitating the immersion process include spontaneous self-dialogue and self-searching, pursuing intuitive clues or hunches, and drawing from the mystery and sources of energy and knowledge within the tacit dimensions. (Moustakas, 1990, p.28)

Accessing the tacit dimension is fairly simple when one creates spontaneous art in a truly spontaneous fashion. By spontaneous expression I am referring to having absolutely no preconceived idea of what the artwork will look like upon completion. It means sitting down in front of the supplies, choosing the medium you first feel attracted to, and then making the first mark that comes into your head, without considering exactly what it is or what it means. It requires complete suspension of judgment and analysis while you work. You must follow your inner sensations which will tell you to paint green here, and leave this area white. You feel it when the work is done. We could imagine it as remaining in the right side of the brain, or firmly in the "I-feeling state" discussed by Sela-Smith (2002).

This concentration on the nonverbal aspect of an experience allows us to access the tacit dimension. "Thought processing begins as preverbal, body based, global experiences of wholes in the present. In early childhood, though processing changes to a verbal language system that is linear and time-oriented, that differentiates and generalizes, and that is observational" (Stern, 1985; Werner, 1948; Werner & Kaplan, 1963, as cited in

Sela-Smith, 2002, p.61). It is clear, from this description, that tacit knowledge cannot be known through language entirely. It can only be reached when verbal language is suspended. Problems arrive for us when our the tacit dimension of our experience cannot be verbalized, perhaps because of resistances and defenses. When this happens, the verbal awareness remains, while the actual experience remains removed from our consciousness. According to Sela-Smith (2002) the reparation of flawed tacit knowledge “must take place through thought that is connected to preverbal, body-based, global experience of wholeness rather than reflective reason” (p.62). In my opinion, spontaneous artwork is the ideal method to access this preverbal aspect of an experience, to bridge the space between tacit knowledge and intuition, thereby bringing the totality of an inexperience closer to consciousness.

Spontaneous art 1 - Countertransference was the first truly spontaneous artwork I had created simply for me (not as part of any class or assignment). It was also the first to contain the fiery center of bright reds and oranges. In this regard, it certainly brought up a part of myself that was cut-off from conscious experience. However, I did not recognize it at the time, demonstrating the complete detachment of the tacit dimension of my experience, even though its visual representation was right in front of me. I was not ready.

What follows is an excerpt from a case study completed in the first semester of my second year - It describes the incident that inspired *Spontaneous art 1 - Countertransference* and how I understood it at the time. I have italicized the words in this description that came up in the exhibition responses to this work.

Session 5

This session was missed as Ryan was moved to a group home because of

incident with his mother, who, according to Ryan, was high on coke and came at her children with a knife. Transportation was still the parent's responsibility and they were unable to get Ryan to the day program for a few days. The only official note in Ryan's file concerning this incident was that Ryan's mother had "lost it" and had required hospitalization. Youth Protection Services were notified, which resulted in Ryan being placed in a group home. I had found out about this incident a few days prior to our appointment. I was extremely *disappointed* that Ryan did not have the opportunity to use his time with me to explore this traumatic incident. I was feeling such intense emotion concerning this missed session, that I felt I need to do my own drawing to explore it. In looking at this image, I realized that I was very *angry* at the parents for what they were doing to this child, but I was also denying that they were *people who actually do care* about Ryan. Perhaps I was sensing my developing therapist grandiose self which made me feel that I was the only one that could help Ryan through this trauma (Brightman, 1984, 1985) in an effort to maintain my therapist self-esteem and to defend against my feeling of *helplessness* and *frustration*.

This excerpt demonstrates two important elements of my experience which I began to understand only later. First, it mentions my anger. My relationship to anger is a strange one, and, as I mentioned, it is a theme that has been a central part of my personal therapy. Each time it has appeared, it has appeared as a bright orangey-red central core which was, at first, always surrounded by darkness. I have come to understand this entity as not only my anger, but a wide range of intense emotions, intense emotions that were contrary to my neutral method of experiencing I had been strongly cultivating. This cultivation began well before I began the art therapy program, but it was

strongly compatible with the neutral therapist persona we were being encouraged to adopt. This was certainly at odds with my existing artist self which relied on the intense, and often negative, emotions for creativity.

The second important element contained in the excerpt is the idea that I was developing a therapist grandiose self. This concept is related to the narcissistic issues inherent in the developing therapist. Brightman (1984, 1985) argued that the aspirations of omniscience, benevolence, and omnipotence combine to create the “trainee’s grandiose professional self” (p.297).

So long as the idealized ... image of the all-knowing, all-loving, and all-powerful therapist serves as the standards against which trainees measure their professional worth, a subjective sense of inadequacy and failure shall ensue... [T]rainees often reported how a significant measure of their energies in the early phases of training was invested in the service of concealing an image of the professional self as ignorant, destructive, and helpless from conscious recognition or from discovery by supervisors, patients, or peers. The attempt to maintain self-esteem in the shadow of an unattainable professional ego-ideal constitutes a major dilemma and trial of the training period (and beyond), with the trainee being doomed to suffer some degree of narcissistic insult as the real and the idealized professional selves ultimately collide. (Brightman, 1984, p.300)

I would argue that in the case of the art therapy trainee, one who considered herself an artist prior to training, the narcissistic insult was twofold. First, there is, as Brightman argued, the insult that occurs when the idealized professional self crumbles in the face of the real professional self that slowly emerges, complete with ignorance, defenses, and those frequent feelings of *helplessness* and *frustration*. The second insult

occurs when our idealized artist self is pushed to the sidelines in the interest of neutrality and non-directiveness within the therapeutic session. I feel that the artist experiences a conflict concerning personally being seen and admired for what he or she can create, versus being a facilitator of some "other's" artistic process -- a witness to the witnessed, not witnessed himself or herself.

It appears that by creating spontaneous art I was able to gain insight into important facets of my experience as an intern art therapist, an experience that contained the conflictual nature of the combination of my artist and therapist identities. However, I was still mostly ignorant of the specific needs and motivations of each self, particularly my therapist self. The following collage was a spontaneous attempt to explore my therapist self *through* my artistic self -- a potent image that, again, would take me a long time to really understand.

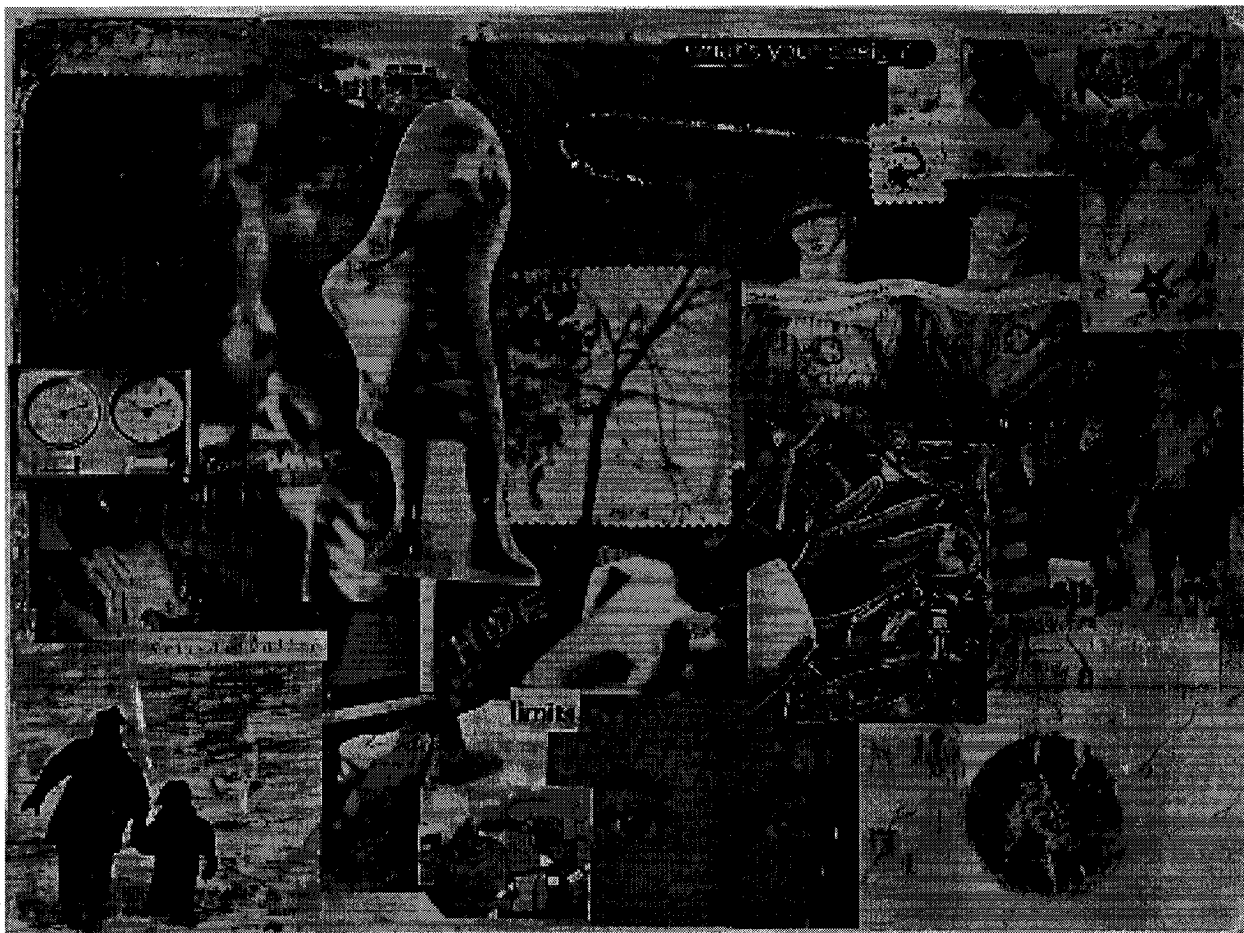


Figure 7 - *Spontaneous art 2: (What) Who am I as a Therapist?*
Multimedia collage, 18" x 24", 2003

Responses

My Own Responses

bodies moving and stretching
 blue - with a red core (1st)
 undefined/blurred
 complicated interlocking.

The Responses of Others

Rich images
Small, little man
Hide behind yourself
 You made me think; to reflect on my
 own art therapist self.
 Confusion.
blurry??? times
questions
No answers
 Pulling art/meaning from the collage
 of daily experience.
Now I need all these things to
remember what's an art therapist
but where am I? It's hard to find
myself in there ...

unfolding, opening, discovery
a sense of adventure and a bit of
doubt of what may be ahead.
 ... and I could see the bus, as if I
 were outside - looking on, not stuck
 to the heated vinyl seats clamoring for air.
La conscientisation de la chose permet
l'ouverture et le déblocage de qui
nous sommes (The awareness of things
allows the opening and clarifying of
who we are).

Distillation

- personal reflection (unspecified)
- Confusion, hard to find myself in there, blurry ////
- need many things
- Questions, no answers
- trying to get a perspective: “and I could see the bus, as if I were outside - looking on, not stuck to the heated vinyl seats clamoring for air”
- unfolding, opening, discovery, doubt of what’s ahead, consciousness opening and moves who we are.
- IMAGE: reaching for a star
- small, little man, hide behind yourself.

CONFUSION - PERSPECTIVE ATTEMPT

My first summary statement was “perspective attempt”. I later added “confusion”. But there was more in this work, the *potential* for more, the *undefined possibly taking shape*. There was something *under*, barely showing. It seemed as though this was another work that I missed the point of the first few times around. The response that moved me the most, that I really felt a physical connection to was “*and I could see the bus, as if I were outside - looking on, not stuck to the heated vinyl seats clamoring for air.*” I saw that statement as related to perspective, but the central idea is the stifling heat, the feeling of constriction in my role as developing art therapist. It’s uncomfortable.

HEATED VINYL SEATS OF CONFUSION

Spontaneous Art and Unconscious Material

Spontaneous art 2 was the first artwork that I tried to create completely spontaneously in the interest of this research.

January 11th, 2003

My art - I feel like the artwork I did in the first semester has helped me understand where I'm at, what I'm thinking about. How I understand the world that I am seeing and making sense of in a different way. Does it impact my work [as an art therapist]? Only in as much as it keeps me centered and sums up my experience in a satisfying way. It also communicates this experience. [at this point I had not admitted that I was actually dissatisfied with my formed expressions]. But can a client who has limited art experience be expected to be able to attain the same type of satisfaction? Spontaneous expression vs. formed expression
Can I still be spontaneous in art?

Let's try.

I used my supervisor's collage baskets and picked the images as fast as I could. I then glued them on quickly, without thought, and added other medium (paint, pastel and sparkles) as I felt compelled. As I worked, I kept the question of what I was as a therapist in mind. Upon completion, I immediately noticed the warm center to an otherwise typically blue artwork. I was intrigued and surprised by this, but the artwork remained shut in the cupboard in our intern office for the rest of the year. I realize now that I had revealed something very significant to myself, but at that time I was unable to integrate it. This warm core remained in my preconsciousness, coming out strongly in subsequent artwork, particularly in my personal therapy artwork.

November 10th, 2003

Something's wrong, something's amiss. When I had my exhibition, I put *Spontaneous art 2* before *Accepting, Growing, Striving*. When I began to create

my wall, I noticed that something was wrong in the order. This is because the associations I had to *Spontaneous art 2* were ideas that came after those associated with *Accepting, Growing, Striving*. I literally found myself too far ahead in my sketchbook/journal and missing some key points. I realized the mistake, reorganized my data, and moved on with my research. Now I am in the writing stage of my process, which is more like short phases of immersion and explication (thus reorganization) of each of the major groupings, and I find myself stuck again. And then I noticed another discrepancy. At the exhibition I titled this work “*What am I as a therapist?*” Since then I have always referred to it as “*Who am I as a Therapist?*”

Okay, so I admit, the mixup in the order of my artwork at the exhibition garnered a brief, introspective “hmmmm” from me. I couldn’t see how my “mistake” was significant, and then it slowly faded from my thoughts. Now I see another seemingly minor “mistake” concerning the same artwork, *and* I’m feeling stuck. What is going on here?

First, the order at the exhibition. It is possible that I wished to show that I had really explored who (or what) I was as a therapist before presenting my visual representation of health and the process of therapy (*Accepting, Growing, Striving*). Why is it this work in particular that seems to be causing me so much trouble? Perhaps I need to explore the what/who discrepancy for more clues.

Who vs. What - What is that about, who does it concern? A look at Merriam-Websters online (2004) has this to say about the words who and what.

Who: Function: *pronoun*

1: what or which person or persons – used as an interrogative < *who* was elected? > <find out *who* they are>

What: Function: *pronoun*

1 a (1) – used as an interrogative expressing inquiry about the identity, nature, or value of an object or matter < *what* is this> < *what* is wealth without friends> < *what* does he earn> < *what* hath God wrought> (2) – often used to ask for repetition of an utterance or part of an utterance not properly heard or understood <you said *what*>**b**(1) *archaic* :**WHO** 1 – used as an interrogative expressing inquiry about the identity of a person (2) – used as an interrogative expressing inquiry about the character, nature, occupation, position, or role of a person < *what* do you think I am, a fool> < *what* is she, that all our swains commend her – Shakespeare>

The words are highly interrelated, but it seems that **what** is meant to refer to an object, whereas **who** refers to a person. Perhaps when I had my exhibition I considered “the therapist” as an object. It would seem that the movement from *what* to *who* reflects a greater internalization of the therapists identity. At first it is examined as something other -- “what is it?” In time, it became more of a question of “who am I now?”

As I look at this piece now I am impressed by how strongly it questions what it is to be a therapist. My supervisor, for this “text”, commented on “the tension of being removed from the subject position when, as therapists, one becomes an internalized object for the client” as a possible source of me originally using the word “what”. As an intern, the experience of that was certainly hard to consciously define. Consequently, in this collage the images are watery and vague. There are lots of people, mostly women and children, three of the women being naked and exposed. The body is contorted, reaching, pulling, stretching. There is a microscope, suggesting the feeling of being examined. Who is examining whom, I’m not sure. There is an egg and sperm, suggesting birth, and an image of an adult and a child making their way across an icy expanse, suggesting accomplishment as a team. There are eyes - frightened eyes, menacing eyes, questioning

eyes, and indifferent eyes. There's one smile. The words I cut out; the unexpected, Self-Actualize, what's your design?, yes.no.maybe.now.later.sometime, Disorientation?, making/achieving, limits. The words I wrote; **WHEN?, HOW?, Reach, constraint, HIDE, WHY?** It isn't surprising that my fledgling therapist self did not want to look too closely, as she still had to function. A close examination may have been intolerable.

At this safe distance, months from the world of a practicing student art therapist, I see now how deeply I was feeling a contortion of my identity. Through my artist self I had expressed a true and accurate visual representation of how it felt to interact with my clients in therapy. It was an uncomfortable image. My previous artwork had all been censored, in effect, by being so formed. This was the first time that she was truly let out of the box, but the message was ignored. Thankfully, there would be other messages which would eventually come together in this "text", pointing me in a direction that is still being defined. One of those other messages was a dream that I had around the time that I created *Spontaneous art 2*. I call it my **OGRE** dream.

My Dream February 1st, 2003

I dreamt that the world had just been attacked by ogre aliens. It was total devastation in most of the city and most of the world. It was chaos and nobody knew what to do. I made my way to an apartment of a lady I knew. I got into her kitchen, but then I heard her come in and she was with one of the aliens. I tried to escape through a small window above the sink, but I didn't have enough time. I had to hide on top of the cabinets, curled in a ball, hoping they wouldn't see me. The kitchen was all white. They came in (I was terrified) but they soon left and I jumped down. Then the lady came back into the kitchen and saw me. She said, "you have to get out of here! I'll keep him away." I then crawled through the window into an alley. I had

the sense that there were ogres down the alley, so I ran the other way. Then I suddenly had a red Mini with a white roof. It was full of supplies. There was a thick dust on the road and people were everywhere so it was really hard to drive. My Mini spun a bit and I decided to abandon it. As I walked down the street some guy tried to threaten me (he may have been an alien). To make peace, and to survive, I walked back and gave him my Mini full of supplies. At that point I wondered why I had abandoned it in the first place. I then was walking again, but someone was following me. I was with other people and I stopped because I somehow knew it was an alien. We suddenly started to fight (we each had small sharp blades) and I stabbed him a few times. But to kill an ogre you had to slice open his stomach and turn the knife in his heart. As I did this the person turned into his hideous ogre shape. I then made it to the river, where people were fleeing on boats. I was then in an apartment with a bunch of other people. We had an amazing view of the devastated city and were drinking tea and eating cakes. The sun was just rising, basking the room in a soft orange glow, and since the ogres could only move at night, in the dark, we knew we were safe for a short while. But we still had to figure out what to do...

This dream, for me, shows that part of me was feeling attacked. I was giving away all my provisions and wondering why. I also decided to fight back. The red Mini was the first car I ever wanted as a child. My older sister even promised me that one day she would buy me one. It is a promise that I am still waiting to be fulfilled: thus the Mini became a symbol, for me, of my childhood longings. The colour red was also very significant to me back then, I loved red. At some point, the blue took over. Now, all these years later, the experience of becoming an art therapist reawakened this young creative energy that had faded unnoticed.

PART VI

Motivations and Needs

As you have likely gathered, the inner-self searching is a vital component of the process of discovery. However, when I chose heuristics I was actually quite opposed to delving that deeply into myself. Don't fix it if it ain't broke. I thought I was totally fine, a great life with a wonderful boyfriend, and a strong family to back me should anything go wrong. At my practicum site, I had a phenomenal supervisor who, while always being constructive, left me feeling like I was the greatest intern that ever walked those halls.

Yes, to use another cliché, I wasn't going to rock the boat. Regardless, the ocean rocked the boat for me, and I realized I didn't have as much as I thought when I experienced two important losses. First, my parents, who lived 3680 km away, moved 6423 km away in the other direction, to another continent. So what's the big deal with an increase of 2743 km? A lot, emotionally. I didn't have their phone number memorized (my family's phone number was the same since I was born), I couldn't visualize where they were, and they were no longer in the city of my birth. At the same time, my beloved supervisor became very ill over the holidays and so was unable to return to work with the rest of us. The nature of her illness was a mystery, so no one could tell us if or when she would be back. Those halls seemed a lot less welcoming without her. One day, when one of my sessions was canceled, I went into her room and painted the following two images.



Figure 8- *Spontaneous art 3 - Supervision Experience*
Poster paint on paper, 18" x 24", 2003

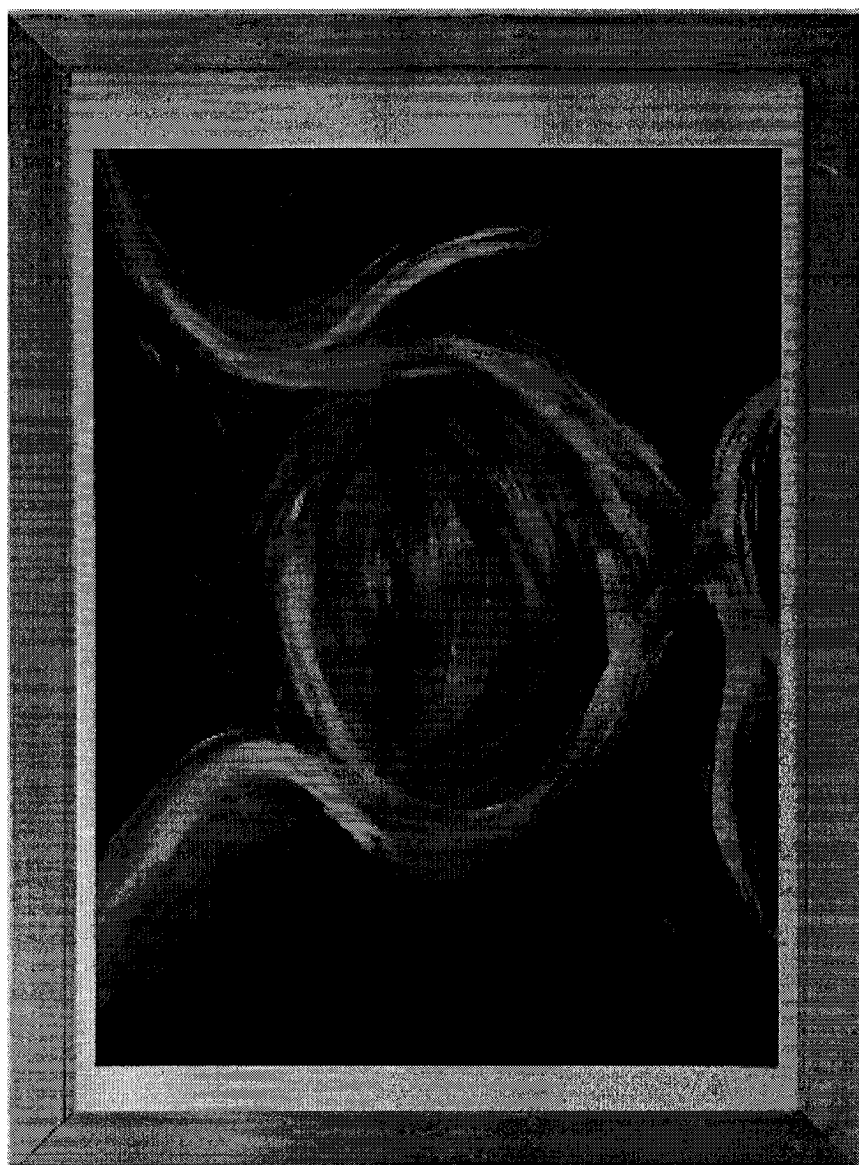


Figure 9 - *Spontaneous art 4 - Supervision Desire*
Poster paint on paper, 18" x 24", 2003

Responses

My Own Responses

Experience (E): askew, shifted, unbalanced
 pushing & pulling
 brighter fire - more anger?
 octopus

Desire (D): held, but encouraged to grow
 eyeball - seeing
 connected and vibrant
 firey
 connected and independent.

The Responses of Others (eight out of eleven respondents responded to the work as a diptych)

a discrepancy ... between what was
 hoped for and what actually occurred. The
 desire is so much bigger and more
 expansive than the experience. I identify
 with this because there was so much that
 did not get from my supervision
 experience.

an egg - a fetus

complete yet joined, connected

the paintings are just the initial spark that
 that pushed my experience deep inside
 of me. What would I say if there was not
 the title?

*Le feu s'allume à l'intérieur et
 grossit de plus en plus.*

I really felt that both [paintings] were
 watching me, or looking at me as I looked
 at them. Big red eyes seem to be staring
 out. I wondered if this was a comment on
 the process of watching and being watched,
 while being a therapist and being analyzed
 at the same time.

*Oh what I want from a mother who could never
 hold me just long enough ...
 yet now I know why.*

Being split & Lost

The expression is... strong and free
 being afraid of changing, angry &
 acceptance

moving forward (there is a lot of I felt I
 movement)

... womb - from one to one's own.

Others who responded separately

E - Male sexuality, creation

D - Female sexuality

happiness/harmony

mysticism

*E - Seed, planting a thought, needing
 a place to put down roots*

D - Hold me, help me grow,

Red on Blue give me strength

Red in blue, yellow, heal

E - Let's Dance, put on your red
 shoes and start the blues (D. Bowie)

D- Ovaries

pregnancy

Distillation

- Womb - from one to one's own - an egg, fetus, ovaries, pregnancy - A Seed.
- Complete, joined, connected /
- Partnership - watched and being watched, help me grow, hold me / - mother
- A discrepancy, between desire & experience
- Being split and lost - afraid of change, angry - accepting and moving forward
- "Le feu s'allume à l'intérieur ... et grossit plus en plus."
- Red and blue /

BIRTH FROM ASHES

I painted these paintings in the same sitting. I titled them Desire and Experience. I knew they went together, yet I responded to them separately. Others saw the story that I couldn't see, particularly the one respondent that spoke of the inner fire, growing and growing (*Le feu s'allume à l'intérieur . . . et grossit de plus en plus*). I saw this work, initially, as only about my need for outside support. Like *Spontaneous art 1* and 2, I didn't go beyond my initial associations to explore the bright and vibrant inner resources that were screaming to be recognized and utilized. Although, this time, I did display these works proudly in the intern office for the remainder of the term. It seemed as though I liked these works.

During this period in my heuristic process, I was incubating the idea of the fire as I struggled to maintain my equilibrium during the last semester. Soon I would be facing the termination of the program and termination with my clients and the hospital staff. The idea of the fire was floating in my preconscious mind, and it would reappear, but for the time being there was an unconscious struggle between the needs and motivations of my artist self and my therapist self. In the following pages I will explore these needs and motivations in some detail, but it is important to remember that at the time of my experience I did not undergo this important analysis.

Narcissism, the Artist, and Art Therapist

There has long been a connection between narcissism and art. The early formulations of Sach (1942) and Kris (1952) saw the artist as a narcissistic individual who successfully transfers his narcissistic tendencies into art. As the art is viewed by others, and the impulse vicariously experienced, the artist avoids the alienation and suffering of his narcissism, and instead experiences its satisfaction (as cited in Fine, 1980). This notion can be tied to the concept of sublimation as denoted by Edith Kramer (1971, 2000) in art therapy, which saw art as the successful transformation of dangerous impulses. As an artist who is a therapist, Lachman-Chapin (1979) spoke about her own narcissistic roots, and saw her art as a healthy expression of her natural personality style.

I can acknowledge in myself a wish to be seen as someone marvelous, to produce something extraordinary - in a word, to exhibit myself and be acknowledged as perfect, great, and so forth ... And when I show my work, however cool I try to be, there is that moment of intense vulnerability: my work - my self - is exposed to possible shame if the work is not received emphatically. I think all artists share these feelings to some degree. And I think it is by acknowledging such feelings that we gain a special entry in offering art as a helping modality.” (p.76)

According to Kohut (1971), a proponent of object relations theory, narcissistic personality disorder likely arises from a basic failure of the primary caregiver to respond empathetically to the child's grandiose self during the separation and individuation stage of development. Thus as the person develops later in life, strong remnants of the grandiose self remain. Lachman-Chapin sees the role of the art therapist as perfectly suited for a reparative experience. As art therapists, we gently watch and contain our

patients as they exercise their exhibitionism in creating art. This, therefore, helps the patient move towards self-individuation because the narcissistic yearnings are confirmed in a way that is different from the archaic (infantile) fashion. In addition to that, the therapist functions as a temporary self-object for the patient, a relationship that will eventually move towards a stronger ego structure as the reparative empathetic experience takes place (Lachman-Chapin, 1979).

Wolson (1995) viewed adaptive grandiosity as vital in order for effective creativity to occur. Wolson described adaptive generosity in the following way:

It is the artist's exhilarating conviction of potential for greatness, the extremely high value that is placed on the uniqueness of feelings, perceptions, sensations, memories, thoughts, and experiences, and on the importance of publicly exhibiting the content of the inner world through the creative medium. This type of grandiosity involves the artist's total confidence and powerful belief in personal capacity to perform creative work . . . Adaptive grandiosity provides the motivational fuel to confront the blank canvas, which psychologically represents the void or non-being. (pp. 578-579)

Once the blank canvas has been confronted, the artist then maintains adaptive grandiosity by moving between individuating and merging with the art product. Wolson argued that if the artist becomes too fused with the work, "in order to avoid the annihilation anxiety induced by artists' experiences of their own creative limitations" (p.586) maladaptive grandiosity will dominate and the expression will suffer. In this sense, there must be discrimination in the artistic process for the act to be balancing and truly healthy. The art product, in order to be an effective self-object in the therapeutic

process, would likely have to reflect some aesthetic awareness on the part of the client.

If adaptive narcissism and grandiosity are necessary components of the creative act, then as an artist who is a therapist I must be especially intent on how these personality traits enter the therapy room. First if, as Lachman-Chapin (1979) argued, art therapy provides a reparative experience for narcissistic individuals, and we ourselves have narcissistic tendencies, then do we not, on some level, crave that very experience we are providing to our clients? In my earlier journal entries I spoke of the frustration of “just sitting there watching” the clients as they created. In the charged atmosphere of the therapy session, under the constant barrage of client projections, I think I felt a strong need to create and, as a consequence of being unable to act on that impulse, I felt a certain degree of jealousy towards my clients. Outside of the sessions, especially during the final year of the training program, I tried to create evocative art in order to regain equilibrium, but with little sense of personal success. This spontaneous art showed me the fiery, intense resource that I possessed, but I was afraid of what tapping that resource would release. At the time, the needs and motivations of my therapist self would not permit an immersion into the more volatile aspects of my personality.



In my personal therapy I had adopted a very spontaneous approach to art making (something akin to the merged state that Wolson (1995) spoke of in order to avoid the anxiety provoked by creating in front of my therapist). As a result, there was red everywhere, my favorite colour when I was a little girl. It was an overall movement back to my intense inner emotions, my core, my self, the source of my drive, my ambition, and my creativity. This core element of myself had been cut off by a personal need to remain detached and protected as an emerging therapist. I did not know how deeply I should connect. Personally, this movement of blue to red reflects a larger pattern in my life that saw the neutral, non-confrontational aspects of my personality (the blue) blocking out the more fiery and passionate elements of my personality. The blue wanted to be a therapist, the red, an brilliant artist.

My Artistic Personality

So who is my artistic self? In order to answer that, I had to answer the important question -- Why do I create art? I create art to externalize an emotion, or an experience (spontaneous art), and I do it to balance and synthesize my understanding of a given experience or emotion (more formed art). These are the intrinsic motivations I have to create art, but I also have a definite extrinsic motivation to create for others. As you know, I have discovered that my artist self has certain narcissistic needs. I create art to be understood, to be *seen* (to exhibit), and to hopefully mediate the experience of others. By this last motivation, I mean that I aim to effect the viewer in a way by which he or she leaves with a new understanding of his or her experience. Creating art allows my grandiose self the exhibition and recognition she craves. Why I have this need is, of course, personal and not the subject of this paper; suffice it to say it has likely something

to do with my early infant experiences as the writings of Kohut (1971), Winnicott (1957) and Robbins (2001) suggest. To be honest, I doubt I will ever “know” exactly where these narcissistic needs arose, as I don’t exactly recall how I felt when I was an infant. However, I do understand that these are forces that continue to affect me, and certainly affected the interrelationship between my artist self and my emerging therapist self, as this need went unrecognized.

My Therapist Personality

Kottler (1993) asked student therapists to really consider why they decided to become a therapist, *beyond* altruism. Of course I have a natural drive to help people and make the world a more tolerable place. But there are other, less noble motivations and needs. First, I feel a measure of the same narcissism and grandiosity that allows me to confront the blank canvas, as Wolson (1995) put it, is also needed for me to enter the therapy room as the helper. I must implicitly feel confident that my natural abilities will help the client, not hinder. I must believe I have the unique ability to identify and focus on the strengths and positive aspects of someone’s personality, despite the walls of negative defenses they may erect. Most importantly, I must believe I can instigate change in the client. My efficacy as a therapist is dependent on the relative strength of those beliefs, convictions that naturally have suffered from time to time.

Second, there is, for me, a certain degree of co-dependency as well. I like to feel needed -- I like to feel as though I can provide my clients with whatever they need in order to grow. In return I get to witness their innermost secrets, pain, joy, and desires. I get to see what people do, what people do *alone*, and what people *really* think (Kottler, 1993). However, during my training, sometimes I witnessed more than I wanted to.

In PART VI I will look at two artworks that demonstrate my experience of my therapist self becoming overwhelmed by the intensity of the therapeutic relationships. Although the therapeutic relationships fulfilled my needs outlined above, there were definite costs.

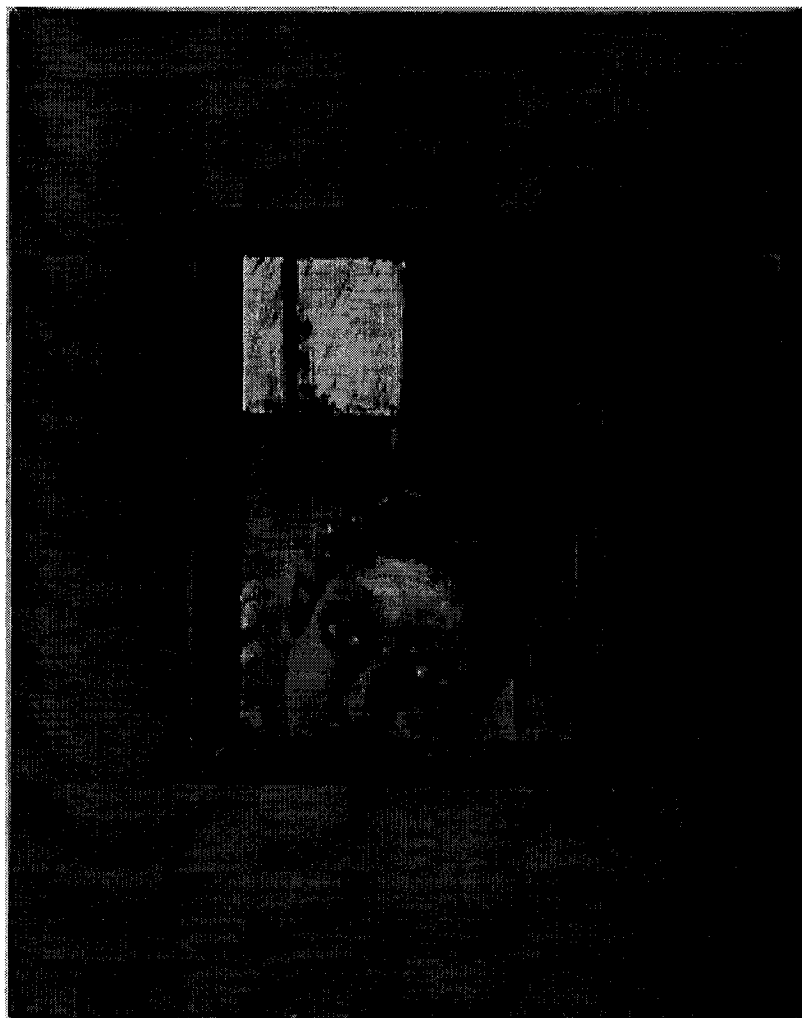
PART VI**Containing.**

Figure 10 - *Quiet Room*
Oil on canvas, 16" x 20", 2003

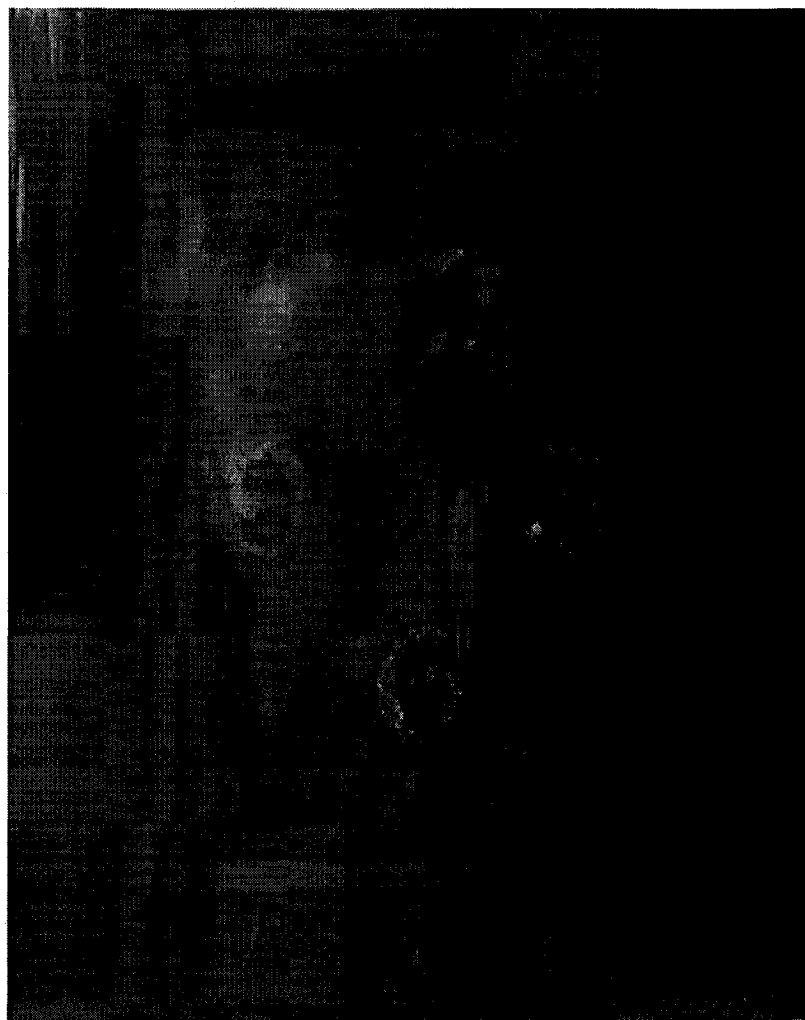


Figure 11 - *That's All The Time We Have*
Oil on canvas, 16" x 20", 2003

I created these two artworks concurrently, moving between the two during each creative session. I used the same mixed paint on each of them, from the same palette. One of the artworks was an attempt to represent, as accurately as possible, a true experience. The other was more of an abstraction, more organic, and dealt with the emotional dimension of an experience. This emotional state was present during the both original experiences, but I felt the total meaning could only be seen if you look at the artworks as a diptych. However, most of the “others” who responded to my work at the exhibition responded to them separately (7/11 respondents wrote separate responses). I hung them separately. They were next to each other, but presented individually. Regardless, some did see the connection and responded to both as one. Thus, for these two images, there are two groups of responses, followed by the ones that responded to both and a discussion of how the separate responses can be connected.

Responses - *The Quiet Room*

My Own Responses

sad, but happy in the locked room
wanting out

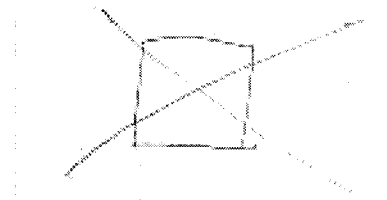
The Responses of Others

Prison, time, Frame

Loving kindness

This painting reminds me of the quiet room at the hospital for the children on the ward. This room seems more hopeful that the one I knew because it did not have any windows ... The face looks sad and is also smiling at the same time.

I was really struck by this image. The child inside has such spirit. I imagine the viewer on the outside to be recognizing that spirit and its creativity and destructiveness. I also felt helpless as the viewer looking in, as I became aware of my desire to reach the child.



Misplaced (?) bliss

Dementia

Lack of focus - ignoring the real - acceptance?

Lock up - Sadness

Fear

Helplessness

looking in

looking out

Jailer

Distillation

- dichotomies: prison/loving kindness, sad/but smiling, creativity/destructiveness, ignoring/acceptance.
- looking /
- sadness /
- helplessness /
- fear, dementia
- prison, jailer

STUCK WITH HOPE

Responses - *That's All The Time We Have*

My Own Responses

time floating, experiences shadowing
empty apologies

The Responses of Others

Not enough time

Never enough time

Not in a lifetime

Guilt - the clock, time running out.

*A strong desire to want resolution or
solution for the client and the therapist.*

Sadness - obsession with the moment
(& losing sight of the bigger picture)

*The words "I'm sorry" really struck
a chord with me. I felt the guilt about
not feeling like you have given enough
during the sessions. I find it hard to be
so conscious of the clock and be completely
there for the client at the same time. My
heart aches when I look at the words in
this painting.*

What it's really.

sadness

You think so? think of timelessness
as in without limits?

Distillation

- sadness / - aching
- guilt /
- not enough time //
- obsession with the moment vs. timelessness

SAD RESTRICTIONS

Responses - to both

(Quiet Room) Reminds me of a painting I made a very long time ago. I think it was about loneliness, I'm not sure ... This one has a bit more hope.

Another enigma - looking out, can see the light behind, yet locked in (perhaps).
(That's All...) *Again*, locked in, this time by the clock.

(Quiet Room) *le temps n'arrange pas les choses (time does not arrange things)*
(That's All...) ... *je me sens bloquer (my sense of self is blocked)*.

No!!! It's sad!

Saying goodbye is really hard.

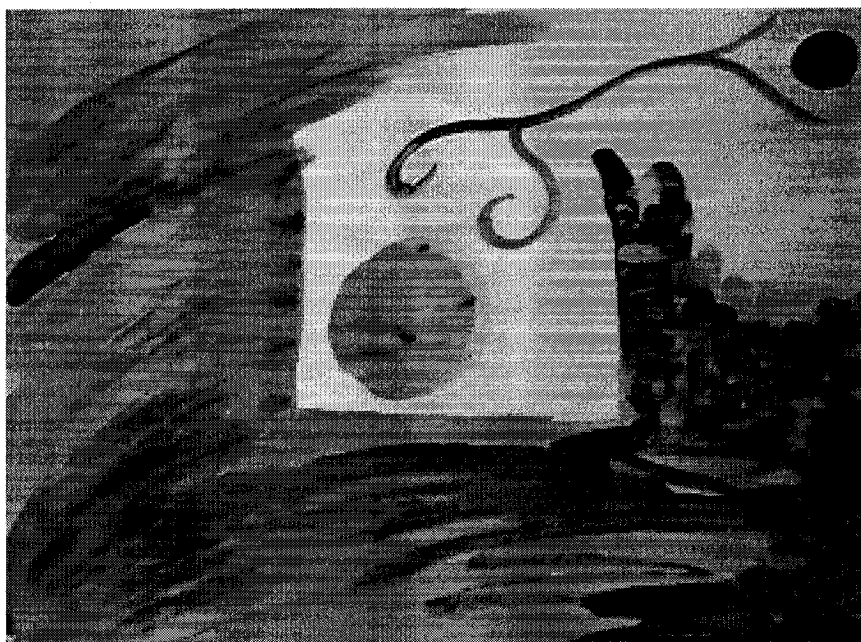
Now he's crept into my dreams (no, not there) and I must help ... but I am failing. Can I accept this way of living - living by accepting my limits.

Distillation

- locked in, bloquer, limits
- sad, loneliness, hard goodbye (loss)
- No /
- dichotomies: hope/locked in, dreams/limits

CONSTRAINED EMOTION

I feel that SAD RESTRICTIONS and STUCK WITH HOPE combine quite well into CONSTRAINED EMOTION. At the time I created these works, near the end of my last year in the program, everything that could have been, that never was, that would continue to haunt, was invading me. And still I had to function, still I had to perform within this general atmosphere of hopelessness and finality. I had to try and make the termination experience okay for all of my clients while dealing with the enormous emotional impact of feeling the end and feeling I had not done enough. Everything, my needs and defenses, was heightened. But rather than explore this heightened sense I tried to constrain it. This constraint is clearly reflected in these artworks, and as a result I did not find them satisfying.



Experience and its Expression

The Story Behind Quiet Room, January 17th, 2003

I have the worst images in my head from today. Today was one of those days where you wonder if you can take it ... He was in the "quiet room" when I went to get B. He was screaming and banging his fists against the door. Then he would wail. Moan. And cry. Again screaming. In the morning we had built a ladder. It was a good, strong ladder. An A-frame which could stand by itself. We had then built a garage to protect our ladder from the natural elements that would assault it if it was left exposed. He screamed again and again and I knew just from the screams that it was him, even though I had never heard him scream like that ... Locked in the quiet room. What was his crime? How can I soothe his pain when I'm going to see another client? And then, 1 1/2 hours later, I return to get my group. He's still in there, but it's quiet now. I know he's in there because fate made me stop there because a kid had to tie his shoe. There's a small glass window on the blue door. He sees me. He knocks on the window and he waves. I wave back. I can't help it, I mouth, "Are you okay?" He nods. He waves. I wave back. It feels like we're stopped for an eternity. He's still waving. I scream his scream inside. Finally, I wave goodbye. He does too. He's now quiet in the quiet room and I leave.

This experience concerns the same child I painted in *Spontaneous Art I - Countertransference*, a child, as I mentioned earlier, to which I felt very attached. There was something about the world he created in the therapy space that reminded me a lot of the worlds that I created when I was a child, lost in my imagination playing with found objects. As a result, seeing him in this state triggered a deep reaction. Once I journaled about the experience, I painted the following image. It was how I thought I saw it, but I soon discovered that there were important discrepancies between reality and my quick expression.

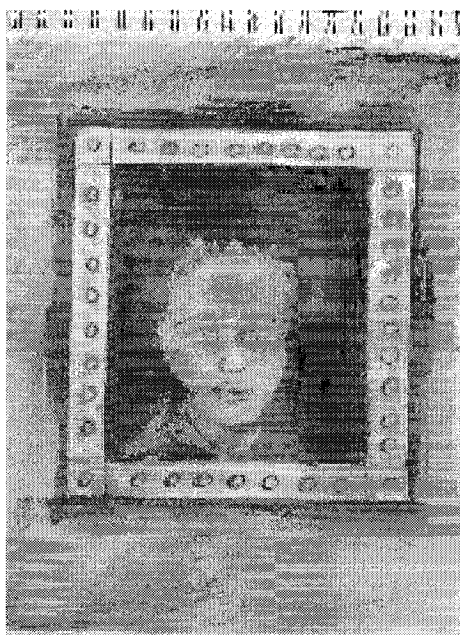


Figure 12 - *Quick sketch*, Watercolour pencil,
9" x 12", 2003

Things I noticed -

the light from the window inside the quiet room is missing
he is much bigger and more central in the window then how I really saw
him. He is facing the window more squarely
the window isn't surrounded by the metal frame with bolts

sometimes - what you do when you transform or sublimate an experience
through the arts is that you change your experience, your memory of that
experience, so that it is more congruent with how you expect to experience the
world.

When I stood outside that door and heard him screaming, I wanted to grab the
keys, free him, and steal him away from his suffering. When he was STILL locked in the
room and hour and a half later, and we looked at each other through that glass, he almost
looked happy -- waving. There was this sense of looking into a jail cell, looking in on an
inmate who sees his fate as normal. This sense was strengthened by the bolts I painted

around the window. The bolts strongly separate him from the viewer.

This quickly painted sketch skewed the reality of my experience in order to express the deeper dimensions of what I felt standing outside of the quiet room after hearing him scream. It focuses on my feeling of helplessness, as well as the concurrent reaction to somehow separate myself from his experience. At the time, I felt that the image of a child looking out of a window was important because I had imagined that image days prior to the experience. I imagined blues and greens, blacks and browns. I imagined that it would be raining. That image came from me, came from my needs (a visual thought concerning my shyness as a child and consequent sense of often “looking on”), when suddenly I was confronted with a far less sentimental, far more upsetting, version of the same image. My reaction was the bolted window (a boundary), but then I felt the need to move it back, to paint a reality-based representation of the experience. I think I wanted to take my emotion out of the experience, see it as it was without my feelings. On a larger scale, I was wanting to take my emotion out of everything.

An art therapy intern soon realizes the great similarity between the patient and herself. However, she is simultaneously expected to maintain boundaries and keep professional distance from the patient. The demands of this emotional balancing act are excruciating. (Robbins & Seaver, 1976, p. 14)

In some ways the final *Quiet Room* says more, it is sadder. In this “real” version, you can feel the space in the room because of the light -- it’s contained. Without the bolts around the window, the glass seems a lot thinner, more transparent. There is so little that separates our suffering from theirs, but in my quicker sketch I betrayed my need to make that barrier stronger. However, in the final version his eyes sparkle more, like they really

did. Also, his small size in the empty room is more apparent. Because of the window, it almost feels like you could move through the work. In fact, the eye does, skipping the trapped child to wonder what is outside the window. His head is tilted, like a puppy, wanting.

If we ever really considered the possible risks in getting involved with a client, we would not do so for any price. Never mind that we will catch their colds and flus - what about their pessimism, negativity, and psychopathology? One just cannot see clients week after week, listen to their stories, and dry their tears without being profoundly affected by the experience. There are risks for the therapist he will not recognize until years later. Images stay with us until the grave. Words creep back to haunt us. Those silent screams remain deafening. (Kottler, 1993, p.14)

It would seem that the quick sketch amplified my overwhelming need to separate myself from his experience. The final *Quiet Room*, in contrast, was a constrained attempt to see the experience as it really was. As a result, there is an honesty to the expression that recognizes his ability to endure and the common humanity between us (the thin glass). However, it has little feeling -- by eliminating my pressing need for bolted boundaries from the expression, I eliminated myself. Thus neither expression truly satisfied my artistic self -- the former being too rough and unfinished, and the latter being too constrained and thus devoid of energy and emotion.



Not surprisingly, while painting *Quiet Room* I was inspired to work on a second, more abstract (and I hoped more emotional) canvas that would become *That's All...* At first I considered it a separate project, an attempt to sublimate another troubling experience with a different client. I have since come to see these works as complementary, something like a question and an answer. The question of *Quiet Room* seems to be "let me out, or come on in", and the answer of *That's All...* seems to be a regretful decline to do either.

For *That's All The Time We Have*, I immersed myself in the helpless feeling I experienced during the incident to which the work refers. The image of the box with the words "I'm Sorry" written underneath occurred spontaneously to me immediately after the experience. The layers and the clock with no hands came to me later as I refined the work.

March 12th, 2003

I've started 2 more painting - "The Quiet Room" & "I'm Sorry". Both come directly from experiences with clients & are meant to convey their suffering (& thus the suffering that I vicariously feel). They seem to go together in form and message. "The Quiet Room" represents their isolation from anyone that cares for them. "I'm Sorry" is a helpless response to their situation. It comes from M. who reacted strongly to those words. He expressed that he was sick of people saying that to him. The point is that saying I'm sorry doesn't take the pain away - it doesn't help. And sometimes I feel that I don't help, that art therapy (and the time we have) does little. Perhaps I should add the element of time to "I'm Sorry" - a clock perhaps, or the suggestion of a clock.

I guess I'm doing these pieces because the end is in sight and these are two experiences that won't leave me alone. I need to face those emotions - trapped, helpless and ... angry? There isn't much anger in the paintings - but they're not done yet. I'll see more when they are done.

The truth is, I did not see more anger once they were done. Surprising, since I expected it. I feel that this is because I was too cut-off from my experience. The above excerpt demonstrates that while I was doing these paintings because I felt strongly about the experiences, at the time I was still prone to arguing that the works were about the clients and not myself. Notice how my "vicarious suffering" is not only vicarious but also cordoned away in brackets. When I do talk about how I feel, I'm not even sure of what I was feeling. I could not recognize my anger towards the children, my clients, for making me feel this way. I could be angry at the institution, but even that I found hard to express forcefully.

Expression and Countertransference

The topic of countertransference is debated within the psychology literature concerning its precise definition and exactly how a therapist is to understand the impact of his or her countertransference on the therapeutic relationship (Allen, 2003; Gillman, 2002; Wohadlo, 2003). Countertransference can be all the therapists emotions towards the client, or only those that are detrimental. Countertransference can provide important clues concerning the plight of the client, but can also impede the therapeutic relationship if it originates more from the therapist's own needs. Most agree that being in one's own analysis, or concentrated self-analysis, is sufficient to understand and cope with one's countertransference. However, the experience of countertransference, even if we narrow the definition to be only that which is neurotic and a hindrance to the therapeutic process,

is layered and complicated. My desire to rescue and my concurrent desire to separate highlighted issues of merging and individuation (Allen, 2003). They are my own issues as well as those of the client. However, rather than explore these issues, I disassociated from them -- why do you think the clock has no hands?

Thus, the form and content of *Quite Room* and *That's All the Time We Have* reflect how constrained I was at that time in my experience. Aesthetically, I placed a texture of straight lines, plains of colour, and shading on the institution to cope with my feelings of inadequacy within the institution and with my clients. I needed boundaries, straight lines and structure, as so much of myself was bleeding into the "other." *"And now he's crept into my dreams (no, not there) and I must help ... but I am failing, Can I accept this way of living - living by accepting my limits?"* (exhibition response).

Although these sentiments were reflected in the responses I gathered at my exhibition, I did not find these artworks to be artistically satisfying. These paintings remained stacked in my basement until the exhibition, and that is where they are now. Remember, the preceding discussion of the needs and motivations of my artist and therapist identities had not occurred for me. I remained largely unaware of that I was experiencing two narcissistic insults: one that challenged my sense of professional efficacy (Brightman, 1984, 1985; Wohadlo, 2003), and one that challenged my sense of artistic efficacy (Wolson, 1995). My therapist self felt inauthentic, and my artistic self was frustrated, as she was not getting access to the deep emotional material she needed to authentically create. I feel that the relative dissatisfaction I felt concerning these works indicated the degree to which my artist self and therapist self were not integrating -- it shows they were still in a state of imbalance, neither being truly effective.

A choice:

- ◇ *If you feel that the art therapist should remain as detached as possible from the therapeutic experience, using her artistic skills to only externalize the emotions post-session (not in a serious artistic pursuit) turn to page 110.*
- ◇ *If you feel that the art therapist's artistic inclinations should be wholly embraced in process and product, turn to page 112.*
- ◇ *If you feel that there can possibly be a convergence between artistic inclinations and therapeutic goals without denying elements of either, turn to page 114.*

Distance

In traditional psychotherapy, the therapist was required to maintain a near complete sense of detachment from the therapeutic experiences of the client. Most theorists currently believe that such a division is virtually impossible, that the therapist not only inspires change in the client, but that the client also inspires change in the therapist (Kottler, 1993). In the same way, our personal experience and our professional life have a two way interaction, which can potentially overwhelm the therapist, resulting in a "distancing aura" (Spray, 1973; as cited in Kottler, 1993). This state of detachment from all interactions is, clearly, seen as negative and unhealthy, and echoes a bit of what I began to experience and thus reflect through my artwork.

April 3rd, 2003

My oh my. Approaching the end (& a new beginning) and I feel myself withdrawing - just like my clients. I hate goodbyes, I don't know why. It's not like I had a traumatic goodbye that haunts me (not that I can think of anyway). I just don't like vulnerabilities of goodbyes - the fact that you have to recognize all the things you didn't do with the person, all the missed opportunities. You have to recognize the limitations of relationships, the finality...

curl up & hide

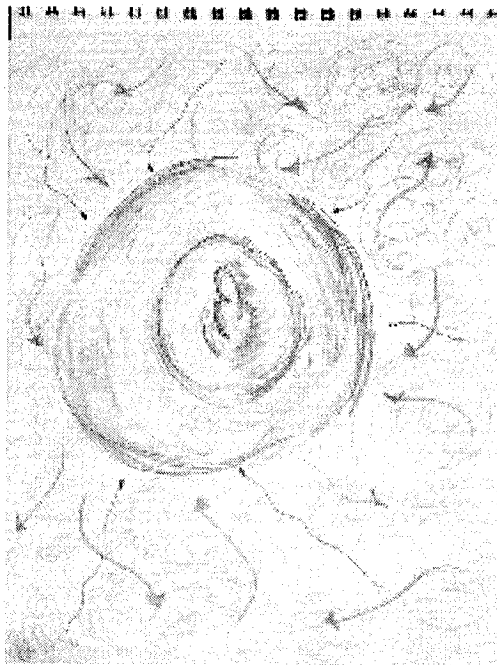


Figure 13 - *Curl up & hide*, Pencil crayon,
9" x 12", 2003.

The above image duplicates, in essence, one of the images from *Who (what) Am I as a Therapist?* that of the sperm swimming towards the egg. Personally, this image, while being strongly associated with birth, is also strongly associated with the uncomfortable vulnerability to invasion that is necessary for the birth to occur. Clearly, we are deeply effected by our client's experience, because it is an experience that we share. Thus there needs to be an outlet because complete detachment doesn't seem to be healthy or attainable.

The End

To continue with my story, return to page 109 and make another choice . . .

Total Abandon

Should we, as art therapist, enthusiastically embrace our most artistic side? For many of us the “artist’s way” (Malchiodi, 1995) is what makes the art therapy process unique and especially suited for healing. Many argue for sustained personal artmaking on the part of the art therapist (McNiff, 1994, 2000; Allen, 2001; Lachman-Chapin, 1983) least we devalue our “special skills”. Some go even further and connect the experience of art therapy to the ecstatic experience of religious ritual.

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. (McNiff, 1990, p. xxii)

By using the language of ritual and spirituality to describe art therapy, I feel we are alienating ourselves from the general population that sees such language as more of a sign of an aging hippie than a viable healing alternative.

April 17th, 2003

the problem with language and how unfortunate it is that art therapy has to be reduced to language - too spiritual and most people will disregard it (even though it is a spiritual process), too psychodynamic and you get the same problem. How to speak about it without sounded like a flake or sounding like you’re desperately clinging to freud’s coattails?

Aside from loosing credibility with your audience, what about the personal implications of sustained artmaking? I wondered if I identified too strongly with the idea

of myself as an artist -- talented, able, and admired -- would I be able to effectively adopt the less glamorous witnessing position of the art therapist? Furthermore, would I really have the energy to immerse myself in the emotional dimensions of my experiences in order to create satisfying art, as well as the energy needed to be attuned to the separate experiences of my clients?

When I created *Quiet Room* and *That's All the Time We Have*, there needed to be boundaries. But this meant that my artist self was restricted, she wanted to delve deep into this painful, powerful material but my therapist self had to stay strong and keep it together (*constrained emotion*). Like Fleming (1993), who felt she could not devote the energy needed to be a true artist while being an art therapist, I felt unable to truly immerse myself into the emotions I was feeling at the time. I thought it would only overwhelm. But would that always be true? Did I have to deny one in the service of the other? Or could both sets of needs be satisfied?

The End

To continue, return to page 109 and make another choice . . .

PART VII

Towards Convergence - The Crack

It was clear to me that my therapist self required a certain measure of protection from the intense experiences she was subjected to while working. But there was no total protection, no complete detachment possible for me: there were hard emotions seeping through. Was it because I was a student and a therapist at the same time, studying while doing, that I felt overwhelmed? Was there simply not any room for my artist self? When I am no longer a student, will there be a way that my artist can draw more of what has seeped through to create evocative art that will make me understood? Make others understand?

When I began to work on the following project, I was still considering the parallels between the artistic process and the therapeutic process, looking for clues that could lead to a convergence. If I could understand my artistic process that led to satisfying art, then maybe I could begin to develop an art therapy approach that recognized and incorporated facets of my artistic self in the therapy room. Upon reading Sweetman's (2000) heuristic research paper, I decided that I should think of an overall metaphor for my experience of becoming an art therapist. Such a metaphor, I felt, could illuminate aspects of the experience that I had not seen yet. I came up with the crack. This symbol, I felt described both my process and the therapeutic process. I decided to explore the image through photography.

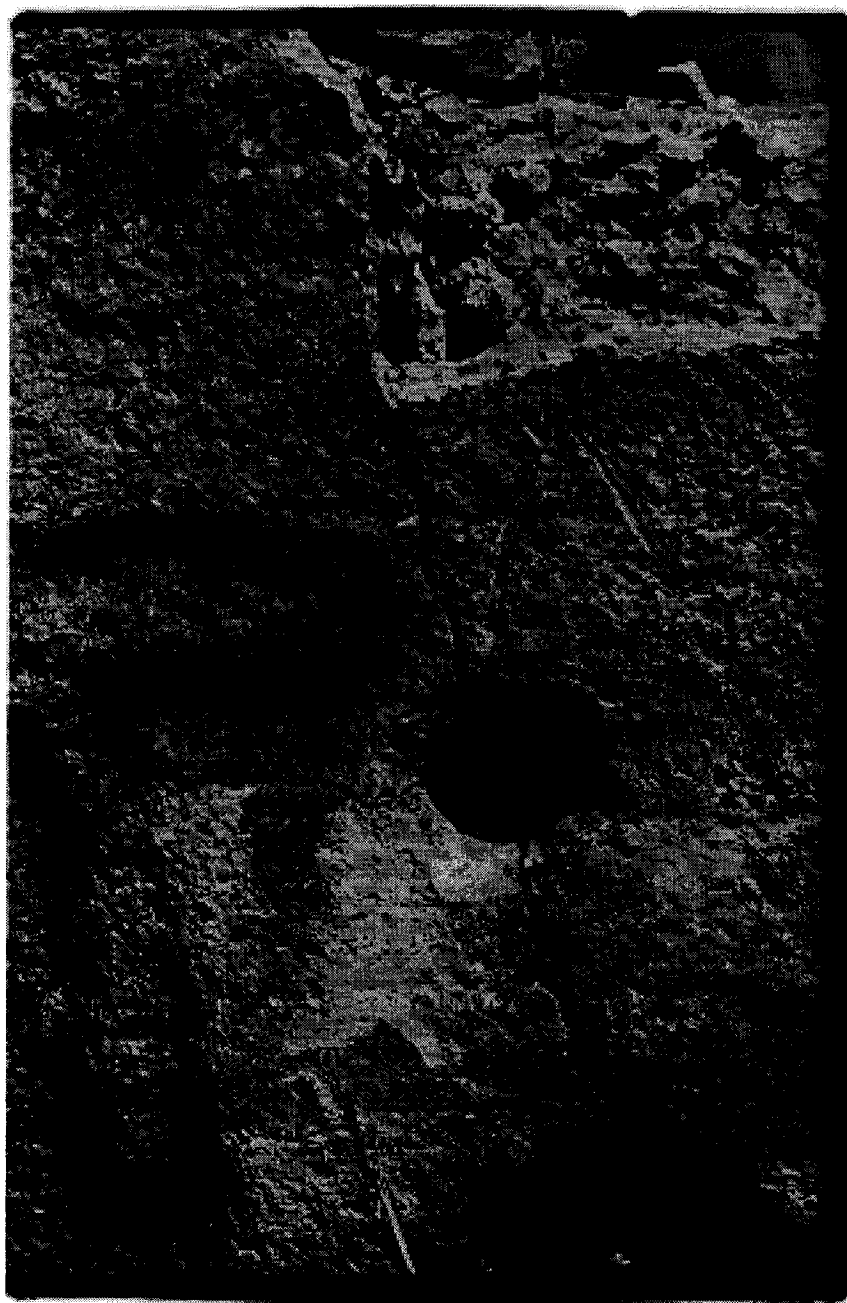


Figure 14 - *A Crack Revised*
Cross processed slide film, 11" x 15", 2003

Responses

My Own Responses (in my sketchbook/journal)

growing as things shift not an empty space, the crack is something
 vulnerable exposing caused by stress
 painful, but can be repaired beautiful
 the façade is cracking, leading me to worry about the state of my foundation.

My Own Responses (at the exhibition)

3 intersecting in a circle
 growing chipping
 man made & natural
 convergence
 what happens in the shadowy circle?

The Responses of Others

la faille de l'histoire la découverte de
 l'imperfection et la beauté des
 faiblesses (the trace of history uncovers
 in the the imperfection and the beauty of
 weakness).
*yes, there is a lot of beauty in
 cracks.*
 i feel broken. will i collapse?

Oxygen H₂O

I like the juxtaposition of the
 concrete with the greenness of
 the nature below.

Ring - structure in spite of change.
Sense of loss.

The color worked really well.
 I love how it's the cracks that
 link the images. It's the crack
 process where things happen
 and shift.

*How I've always cried for
 those signs of wisdom.*

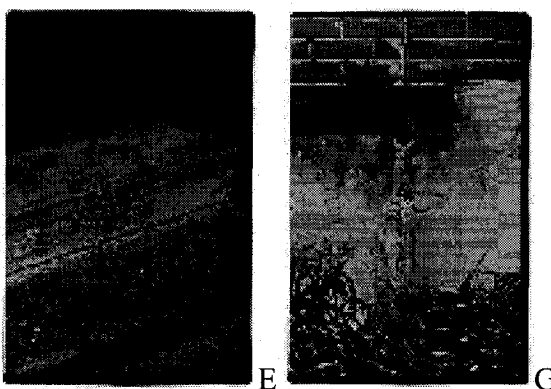
Je sens que je commence à
 sortir de ma bulle. J'enfain de
 nouvelles limites. (I feel I am
 coming out of my bubble -
 new limits)

Distillation

- discovering imperfection of the past
- the beauty / of weakness
- cried for signs of wisdom
- the process, things happen, change, coming out of my bubble
- “i feel broken, will i collapse?”, a sense of loss

BREAK - BEAUTIFUL

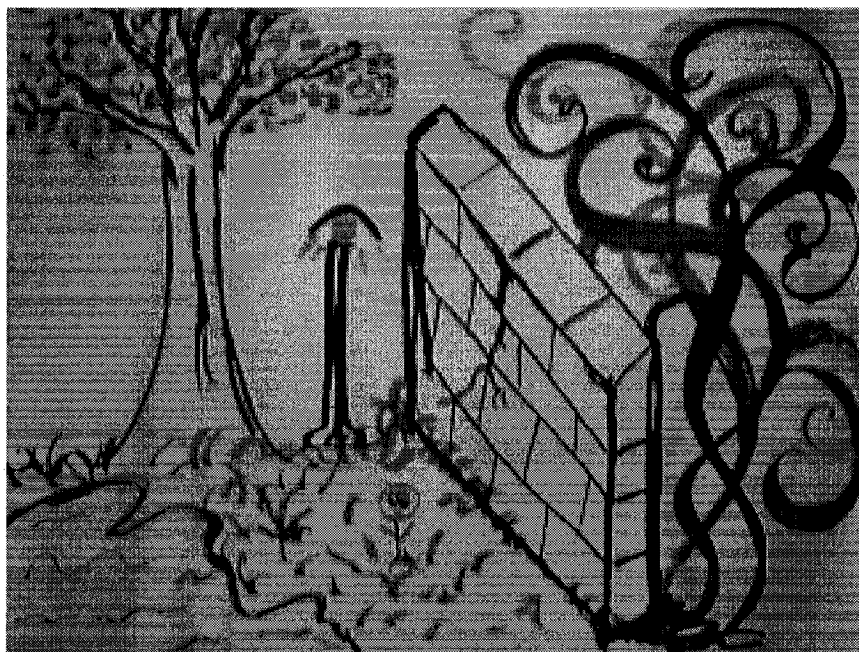
This image was also displayed with eight smaller cross-processed slide film photos of cracks, labeled from A to H. The respondents were given the choice of indicating if they preferred any of the other pictures. Three took this opportunity, two indicating that they were drawn to E, and one commenting on G.



As I struggled with the ensuing terminations with my clients and with the program, I searched for a metaphor that would capture how I felt about my experience. I saw my process as more than a linear experience. There seemed to be the sensation of moving along a main line, but sometimes becoming diverted into side issues, experiences, and ideas which would effect (in large or small ways) the direction of the main line. I thought of a river, but it seemed too benign, too used, too common. I wanted something more “edgy”, something that would challenge us to think about the language we use when speaking of our profession. The notion of the crack came to me. I liked the crack because

it captured the pain involved, but it was also something that could be seen as beautiful. It held together opposites, each side being the complement of the other, into a unified essence -- without denying the separateness. I was very excited about my crack metaphor, it energized me and made me feel like I had captured something important.

To understand something fully, one dwells inside the subsidiary and focal factors to draw from them every possible nuance, texture, fact, and meaning. The indwelling process is conscious and deliberate, yet it is not lineal or logical. It follows clues wherever they appear; one dwells inside them and expands their meanings and associations until a fundamental insight is achieved. (Moustakas, 1990, p.24)



April 21st, 2003

I'm excited about my crack metaphor - my friend pointed out the similarity in shape between a crack and the trees I've been painting. I felt the notable exception was the direction - trees grow up and I'm always envisioning a crack going down - it's interesting to think about different types of cracks - cracks going up or horizontal cracks, or earthquakes (BIG CRACKS). I feel curiosity about those cracks, but right now I feel I have a definite affinity to the crack spreading down a wall, a fairly smooth wall. I want to paint it, photograph it, make it real -- I want to make a frame, fill it with concrete, and then shift the frame to make it crack. Could I do that? Or would the concrete just crumble? I really want to try - should I try to control it? Coax the crack? That's what the therapist does - coaxes, nudges, hints, herds - Is that what the artist does to the art? Or does the art just flow - no, I think the artist does coax the art, but often it's the unconscious that is most influential. Maybe I should try to make 2 cracks - one that I coax and one that I don't. I also want to do a large painting - but maybe that will have to wait until the final "creative synthesis". I think I have to focus on the crack - what's inside it? What makes up the crack if we think of it as more than just negative space - or maybe the negative space is what I should be looking at - other than that, there's exposed, crumbled, vulnerable inner bits - bits that never wanted to be on the outside, bits we try to protect and hide. We patch up the crack, or we tear down the wall and build a new one that fits our new structure ... right now I have no desire to repair the crack - I think it's beautiful as it is.

The above paragraph demonstrates how I wished to explore the balance between coaxing and witnessing (an aim of an art therapist) through an artistic experience.

Unfortunately, I never started this project so I do not know what it would have revealed. I decided instead to take photographs of cracks with slide film and then process the film as though it was regular print film. I had tried this technique before, with variable success. The first time I tried the effect was vibrant and beautiful colours, particularly blue. Subsequent attempts were not as striking. In retrospect, it is not surprising that I

chose a technique which I was still trying to understand the process and materials required to arrive at the desired final product. This research paper has been a very similar attempt, exploring the questions of: how do I create satisfying art? And how do I facilitate successful therapy? In fact, the vision of the crack has been imposed on the entire structure of this "text" - a choose your adventure story follows the same pattern as a crack. So what did I discover from the crack metaphor concerning the experience of my artist self becoming acquainted with my emerging therapist self? First, a consideration of popular associations to the symbol of a crack.

To break without complete separation of parts; fissure: *The mirror cracked.*

To have a mental or physical breakdown: *cracked under the pressure.*

To discover the solution to, especially after considerable effort: *crack a code.*

(American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, 2000)

Dream symbol: crack

crack, cracks, cracking, cracked

Interpretation:

A point of breakthrough

Something that has reached breaking point

Being out of touch with your reality, drugged

Adopting strict or repressive measures, cracking down

Instability

A weakness or weak point

Extreme inner stress, being ready to crack

Deception, needing to face reality, when the cracks start showing

Putting up a bold front, cracking hardy

(Rudman, 2002)

The symbol of the crack embodied ideas of understanding, balance, health, and also facing reality. When I was working on this project I was not really facing the reality of my *conflictual* relationship between being an artist and being a therapist. I only viewed the crack to be a representation of the pain and discomfort that the process of becoming a therapist produced. I recognized that this process forced me to examine my weak (psychological) points for “cracks”, which was often awkward and frightening.

I took many pictures of cracks, and I was fairly pleased with the results. However, the photos were not quite as vibrant as I had hoped, they lacked some energy. As I looked them over, I became attracted to one in particular and I chose this as my central image to present at my exhibition, but was largely unaware as to why. I now feel that its significance is in its form. Previously in this text I spoke of the energy required to be both an artist and a therapist as possibly being too demanding of one individual. I then considered that I had also been a student at the time I was creating and acting as a therapist -- perhaps it was the combination of all three identities that overwhelmed me. In the image that I chose as my central crack image there are three cracks that converge in an indented circle. I think that I was attracted to this particular representation of a crack because it symbolized the fact that I by learning art therapy I was using three aspects of my personality which were not balanced. This caused a shift and a rupture, exposing a volatile red.

At this point in my process I finally made the connection between the red that I was seeing in my personal therapy images and the red that was in my other artwork. In personal therapy I was beginning to understand that this red was related to a vitality that I kept trying to suppress and contain. Then I suddenly “noticed” that the red was there in my other art as far back as *Spontaneous Art I- Countertransference*. However, I

understood this connection in only a limited way. At the time I tended to feel that the red was the volatile emotions we, as therapists, are exposed to *from our clients*.

Subconsciously, I knew that this idea had far more personal concerns. I was finally beginning to take notice of my own anger and volatile emotions, but was struggling with the question of how to get close to it without being destroyed.



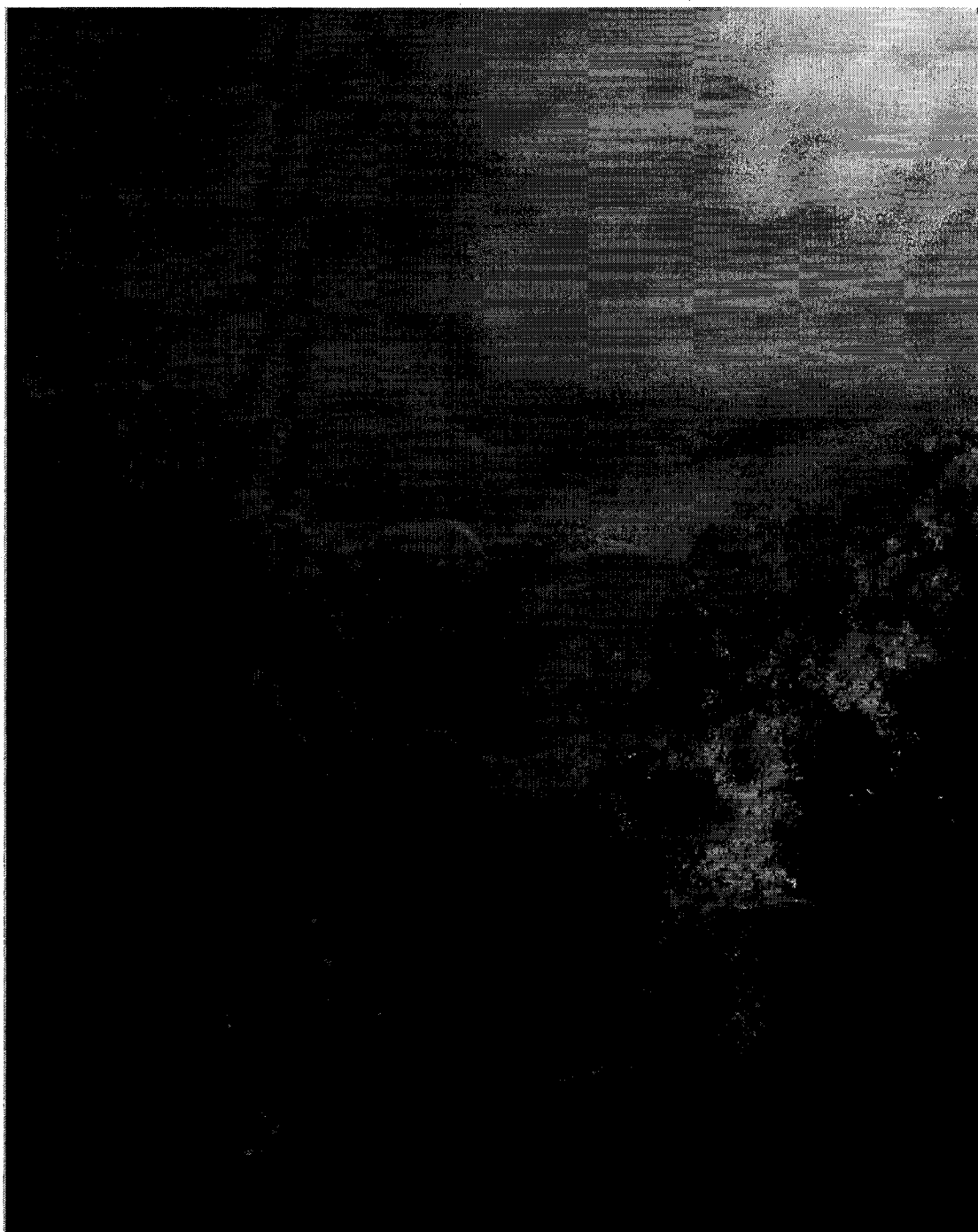


Figure 15 - *Dive Resolved*
Oil on Canvas, 48" x 60", 2003

Responses

My Own Responses

purpose/drive
 curiosity
 steamy and cool
 we see the face - the right arm is stronger
 bubbling, shifting, light - it's not so mysterious down here.

The Responses of Others

At least now you know what you
 are dealing with. You swim alongside
 it, aware, yet not distracted.
*I do not think that there is a
 resolution here, just "accepting,
 growing, striving"*
 And there it is ... to have come all
 this way just to find my old self
 ... wow!

Refreshing
EARTH - MATTER - TERRA
reach the fire in the mother
Ocean -volcano red
reach for the alchemical transition.
 Mysticism, the soul, afterlife;
 peace.
getting in touch with the pain.
unification.

a gasp!
 and a clutch.
 I have it
 in my hand.

This painting seems more dangerous
 but also more hopeful than the first
 painting. I get the sense that this
 person is being swept along by the
 current and not fighting it as much
 as in the first painting.

*Diving down and finding the crack
 really seems to encapsulate the whole
 process and story of all the images.*

*This is a really powerful image as it
 communicates the delicate dangerous
 beauty of going through any process
 that involves growth. It holds the
 ambiguity gracefully.*

*A peaceful yet ominous adventure,
 dangerous, curious and sublime.*

Let me in. Forget time.

*Je sens que j'arrive à mon but ...
 mais j'ai peur.*

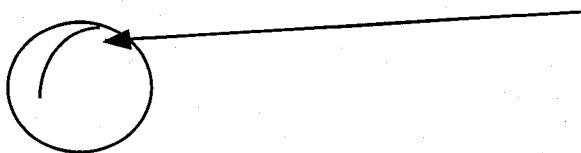
*J'ai peur de savoir ce que c'est
 sélémant.*

*(I feel that I have arrived at myself
 but I am afraid; I'm afraid to know
 this is self-made)*

Distillation

- knowing what you are dealing with, aware no resolution/not fighting
- swim along side it vs. swept by the current
- getting in touch with the pain, a grasp (clutch), reach the fire in the mother, reach for the alchemical transition.
- mysticism, the soul, sublime, forget time, afterlife, archetypes
- unification, came all this way to find old self, encapsulate the whole process
- refreshing, peaceful /, accepting, growing, striving, hopeful
- dangerous /, fear, pain red

DANGEROUS TRANSITION to REACH AWARENESS



It is apparent to me that those who responded to this work saw it as being concerned with a personal journey, although I was still trying to ascribe as much of the experience to *them* (the clients) as possible. However, I then began to see that the red could be my artist self and the blue my therapist self. I felt compelled to include my red in a work of art in a way that could allow it to co-exist naturally with the blue. Notice I attempted this artistic convergence well before I underwent this whole heuristic process and began to define what I actually meant by an artist self and a therapist self. Instead, I thought of this image, “unconsciously” referring back to the original *Dive*. Not surprisingly, I was not satisfied with *Dive Resolved*. I knew it did not have the same impact as the original *Dive*. Some respondents seemed to read into *Dive Resolved* their own capacity to cope with their difficult, disjointed parts of themselves. Others seemed to detach from it, and some saw it as it was - no resolution. It had potential, but somehow I gave too much detail.

Phenomenology and Art

I felt a comparison of *Dive* and *Dive Resolved* could illuminate why I experienced the former as satisfying and the latter as not. To accomplish this, the writing of Betensky (1987) on phenomenology is helpful as it is a methodology that aims to truly *see* an art object. Phenomenology affords the viewer a greater space from which to note everything that is contained in the artwork.

Art has to do with man and his very being, man who is deeply moved and often burdened with being in his own world and in that of the people around him. In art therapy, we often meet overburdened man, preoccupied with his own world and its stresses. At times he is compelled to flee from the burden - into pathology. The art-therapeutic work may become a source not only of immediate release, but also a preintentional record of his experience of stress and flight. Guided by the therapist into the intentional perception and study of his art, truly seeing his own painting or sculpture may open new possibilities for him. (Betensky, 1987, p.150)

Betensky (1987) described phenomenology as seeing an object without any preconceived notions of what one should see. This intentional looking is what brings meaning for the looker, it is directed towards reality, the desire to know something, and comes through all the senses at once. In the body, what is seen stimulates the forces and emotions that are part of the “unity of body-consciousness-feeling” (p.152). By intentionally looking at the two works of art, recording all my observations and associations concerning what I see in the works, I can begin to understand my differing sense of satisfaction.

Dive

- the figure mediates between the lightness and the darkness, heavier than the darkness, lighter than the lightness - sparkles.
- The weight driving down, part of her never wants to come up for air.
- but we all hope she will.
- an idea, a notion, the spirit of a descent.
- this wasn't even as I saw it - the figure dove towards me, from the top right. I painted it this way because I found a photo of a diver in this position. I didn't think it made a difference. Did it? I like the angle of the final product, as simple intersecting 45°.
- the water is soft over the body
- what's in the darkness?

Dive Resolved

- the figure is less transparent
- there is more space in the water - it doesn't deepen as much as it recedes.
- the figure is too defined - it's light
- 2 sources of light
- the figure is trying to catch the fire - that's foolish! AS IF! She's playing with it, curious and unafraid - but she should be afraid. It's hot, it will burn, the steam must be burning her already. It's not a game.
- this work looked so beautiful when it was just a blue expanse ...
- why is she so pleased?
- Is it mocking me again?

The differences between the two works point to a personal dissatisfaction, a sense of trivializing what was “found”. I did discover my “fire” but I wasn’t really aware of its nature. It feels like my artist self was saying, “So, *this* is what you want to see?” in a mocking tone. When I look at *Dive* I feel I am *in* it. When I look at *Dive Resolved* I feel that I am looking into an aquarium. There is a barrier.

When I created *Dive* I was authentically sensing all sorts of possibilities. I was about to begin the art therapy program, but I had not started, so it could be all that I wanted it to be. This was not true during the creation of *Dive Resolved* -- At that time I was sensing more of a *loss* of possibilities. My inability to fully cope with the emotions that I was experiencing in relation to this loss meant this experience remained detached from me. I feel that *Dive Resolved* felt to me like a surface expression because that is simply what it is. The following doodle illustrates more accurately how my blue and red were interacting at the time.

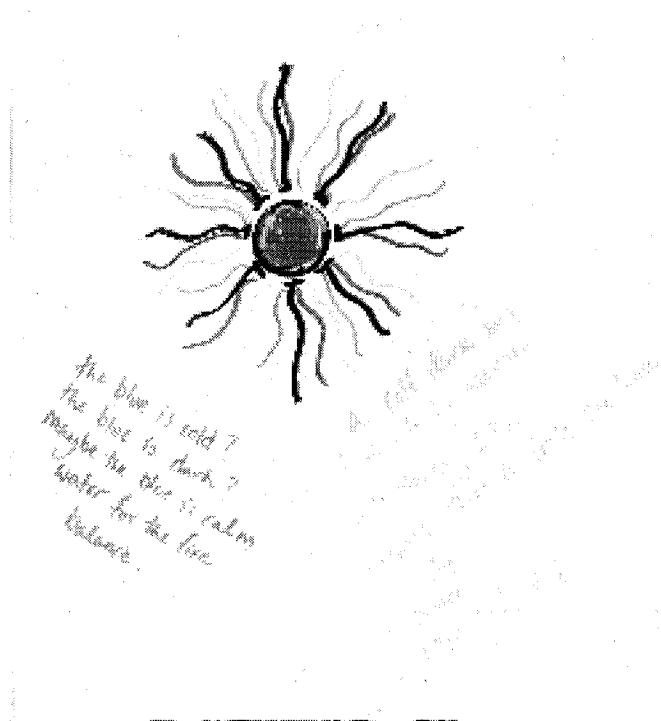


Figure 16 - Doodle, Ink pen on paper, 8 1/2" x 10", 2003

The blue and the black are minor in the doodle, yet their coldness and darkness overwhelms the warmth. My lip-service to balance is not genuine, it has the same depth as the sentiment in *Dive Resolved*. On the other hand, the light yellow writing is more sincere. I felt I could not give the warmth I knew I had, I knew my core was defended. I could not access the inner resources (the motivation, drive, inspiration) that I knew I had because I was too afraid that I would be overwhelmed by the intense emotions that comprise those forces. My relationship between my red and my blue, mediated by the yellow, would not be clear to me until I had undergone the whole heuristic process (an extension of which was my personal therapy). This process did not begin in earnest until after *Dive Resolved* was completed.

PART VIII

Not Resolved At All - Possibility and Balance

Overall, the exhibition was satisfying for my artist self, it was *my* show. It made me want to have a real exhibition, where my sense of acceptance, being seen, being understood, and (most importantly) moving my audience would be reinforced by concrete sales. I was vulnerable, but since my respondents were mostly art therapy students and faculty the feedback was very encouraging and supportive. However, although the exhibition felt like a summary and an end, the real work was only just beginning.

Editing has focused this text on the growing conflict that arose between my artist self and my therapist self. However, during my first draft of this text, that conflict was lost in the web of ideas that I had created. I was focusing too much on the similarities between the processes of heuristics, therapy, and art. This had lead to the discovery of the swirl as a symbol of discovery and change, but it had also clouded a central element of my experience. My artist self and my therapist self were not getting along, even if their process were the same. The following two excerpts document how I thought about the relationship at this time.

Sept 29th, 2003

thinking about the experience of my artist self. Some notes:

at first, curiosity

next, uncertainty

third, jealousy

fourth, desire to contribute artistically in client work

fifth, criticized by therapist self - are you manipulating the client data?

sixth, birth of the question

seventh, losing the question, helpless

eighth, defense, smirk

ninth, apology

tenth, attempt - but

It was quickly apparent that Dive Resolved wasn't resolved at all, but I didn't know what was wrong. I missed it, the desire to give artistically that was rebuffed by my therapist self. That put into question my entire reason for making art and cut off part that I wanted to give. This led to a defensive reaction that effected my artwork.

October 10th, 2003

Looking further into the question. There was certainly a conflictual relationship between my existing artist self and my emerging therapist self. In the end, or maybe all along, my therapist self was asking my artist self why we create art. The first clue was narcissism. My artist self didn't like that accusation. Then, as my artist self grew more and more frustrated with the client art produced, my therapist self challenged my artist self to create great art. If you want them to do, then you have to do it yourself. My artist self couldn't comply, which led to more contrived artwork, and a greater identity crisis concerning who I am as an artist.

At the same time, my artist self, or artistic temperament, was mocking my emerging therapist self for thinking she had it all going on. You can't know everything, and you can't remain detached from all your clients. This sense that I was a "even keeled" person who could sense all the dynamics of given interaction,

and evaluate them impartially, existed before I began the program. In fact, ever since I chose psychology as my major for my undergraduate degree I have identified strongly with that aspect of my personality. But my artist self, on the defensive, was trying to get me to see that I had to experience all the emotions, and really know ALL the aspects of my personality if I were to become a genuine therapist. Yet, the lofty task of creating great art prevented my artist self from really communicating this. It only came to the surface when I let myself go in spontaneous art, and even then, the message only became conscious now.

The spontaneous art that I created on my own and in personal therapy alerted me to the intense reservoir of emotion and motivation that I was suppressing (for personal and professional reasons). The red. As my process progressed, I began to wonder if it was that very reservoir that my artist self needed for true creativity. The dilemma was how to access that energy without being overwhelmed, but still retaining the authentic nature of this intense emotion. Artistically, how was I to form the spontaneous expressions?

Formed Spontaneity

November 16, 2003

Stream of consciousness - Complementary identities, complementary colours, blue and yellow opposing and complementing. Artist or therapist? Artist and Therapist? Art Therapist? Blue and Yellow create Green. I had it wrong. My Artist is blue, my therapist is yellow, and my researcher self is green - I hope. I stopped, reread, a no-no in stream of consciousness. But I can't really type that fast, like I can't verbalize my thoughts, which have multiple layers, and my

experience, which has infinite texture, in one linear way. Reread again, no-no.

This is as hard as being truly spontaneous in artwork. I wonder what it means to make art - why do you create art? Not, what is art. No, the question is personal, and an answer, in terms of aesthetic, recognition, or expulsion, is subjective. Why do I create art? All of the preceding reasons, and then some. recognize me, work with me, see what I see, experience what I experience, but what about your experience, viewer? It's not my experience. am I saying anything? I ask that of myself each time I make a spontaneous artwork in therapy. I always find something I've said. find it. distracted

The question of why I create art has already been answered in this paper, but it led to a second major question, "*how* do I create great art?" From the beginning I recognized the healing potential of the creative act, but I also knew that, for me, some art was certainly more satisfying than other art I created. This difference is apparent in my associations to *Dive* and *Dive Resolved*, but what caused it? So far I have argued that my sense of dissatisfaction with my artworks reflected the fact that I had not authentically explored where these visions had come from (*it just came to me . . .*). I was ignorant of much of what my artist self and my therapist self represented, I was ignorant of my narcissism and grandiosity, and I was ignorant of the conflict between these identities. Now that I was aware, and was aware that most of this "message" had come through in my spontaneous artwork, what was I to do about it? How could this new knowledge impact how I would eventually practice art therapy?

I already considered myself a non-directive therapist, but I also felt that the effectiveness of the art product reflected the depth of understanding that the client had

reached. If I accepted that the product reflected the process, I needed to identify the elements that were required to make an art product successful. The ideas of balance and possibility seemed to apply, but I wasn't entirely certain how. My artwork, to this point, had been either spontaneous immersion or explication (to again refer to the heuristic phases I believed to be corresponding). How could I reach my creative synthesis, which I believed would be satisfying art? Again, I started by examining what satisfying art is and attempted to work backwards from there. I had swirled back around to this interrelationship between product and process, this time attempting to go deeper.

A common controversy in the field [of art therapy] centers in the area of aesthetic judgment. Those who have strong investments in the field of art experience a basic volition when standards of aesthetics are abused.

Others view this approach as overly judgmental and feel it restricts the entire flow of communication . . . Distance from such a personalized point of view on the part of all concerned is needed. Everything expressive is not always beautiful and deserving of praise. For the therapist to help patients harness, cope, and crystallize their feelings and imagery through a cohesive representation of art may offer a new feeling of mastery.

(Robbins & Seaver, 1976, pp. 16-17)

PART XI

How Do I Create Satisfying Art?

By this time in my process, I believed that a satisfying work of art was one that held a very, very fine tension through its aesthetic cues. By aesthetic cues, I am referring to medium, texture, colour, line quality, subject matter and so on -- the physical cues of the artwork. Moreover, the sensation or emotion that the artist used as motivation for the work is clearly evident to the viewer, but evident in a manner that is deeply personal *for* the viewer. Thus, as Robbins (1987) put it, the artwork points to something greater than its parts, it figuratively “touches” the viewer. As a result, as the artist, one has a very personal sensation of being truly able to speak to another person, in a way that only years of conversation, no matter how genuine, could barely accomplish.

I found that this concept of satisfying art related to the goals of art therapy quite strongly, but only if we recognized the central importance of the artwork created in art therapy. As I have mentioned, in some conceptions of art therapy:

... the picture is merely the handmaiden in the partnership, an aid to psychotherapy. The picture may then be reduced to a mode of description of a state, or an illustration of the transference. In such a role it is not understood to be an object of transference and countertransference itself, with implications for the wider therapeutic relationship. (Schaverien, 1990, p.4)

Schaverien argued that the art object has a tremendous impact on the therapeutic relationship. She discussed two types of images, the descriptive (or diagrammatic) and the embodied image. The artist's investment in the art making process determines the type of image that is created, and the two qualities of images have a different impact on

the countertransference and transference (the therapeutic relationship) experienced in therapy. When an artwork is genuinely embodied, the therapist is authentically moved by the image, a reaction that naturally impacts the client/artist. Schaverien's (1990) discussion concerning embodied versus diagrammatic images seemed to relate to the differences I felt between my personally satisfactory artwork and that which I found unsatisfactory.

When I speak of aesthetics, I am referring to the making of the inanimate animate, giving form to diffuse energy or ideas, breathing life into sterile communication. Communication is a key word here, for a completed work of any medium becomes art only when it touches us as living truth.

(Robbins, 1987, p.22)

Robbins also spoke of authentic expression and the artist. He believed that artwork that integrated polarities (often fusion and separateness) was compelling artwork. Coming from an object relations perspective, where the separation and individuation process between the mother, or primary care giver, and the infant is the primary source of personality later in life, this union of opposites as "effective art" is not surprising. Robbins cites Deri (1984) who says, "when symbolic form includes multiple levels of communication and transcends its individual parts to communicate a larger meaning, it approaches the level of aesthetic communication" (p.23).

In these descriptions I saw ideas of balance, possibility, and multiple layers. It seemed that the artist or client would have to have a deep and personal understanding of these notions in order to create satisfying art. Through my personal therapy (spontaneous) images, I was attempting to balance the red and the blue (in a sense, the strong personality components of my artist self and therapist self respectively) within

me. I was working in a spontaneous manner, revealing a lot of unconscious sensations. Yet something deep inside of me was wanting to create form out of the chaos. It was my artistic inclination in response to the art therapy context. But as the art therapist, where did this inclination fit? Van Marissing (in McNiff, 1988) spoke of “shaping” the art therapy experience as we shape materials. Robbins (1988) wrote about the art therapist giving form to the psychoaesthetic experience (art therapy) through “verbal interpretations, or the giving of aesthetic structure to a patient’s art expression” (p.96). Kramer (2000) argued that art therapy is not only about spontaneous art, but about finding form and integrating the spontaneous material. So, on the one hand I had my overly constrained “formed” expressions outside of therapy which I experienced as unsatisfactory, and on the other hand I had my completely spontaneous artwork from therapy that I did find satisfying. How to combine the two.

This dilemma is not unique. Most people who find themselves in therapy, whatever its form, are constantly attempting to generalize their discoveries in therapy (newfound confidence, for example) into their everyday lives. I had found my old reservoir of volatile emotions -- reawakened my creativity and motivation -- in the therapy space. There were some vibrations of this change in my daily life, but it was not reflected in my artwork. This made me doubt depth of the integration I had reached. Was I wrong to equate my artistic satisfaction with my level of success in therapy? Would embodied art, as Schaverien (1990) described it, be categorically experienced as satisfying art, and would it necessarily reflect success in the therapeutic process? Or is the experience of satisfaction completely determined by the reception of the artwork by a viewer (who picks up on the embodied essence contained) -- thereby validating the internal change (therapeutic success) experienced by the client/artist? What was the

specific relationship between the product, the process, and the other?

A choice:

- ◇ *If you feel that satisfying art is simply art that embodies the internal therapeutic change, turn to page 141 .*
- ◇ *If you feel that satisfying art is defined by another's reaction to the artwork, which then determines whether the artwork has succeeded, turn to page 142 .*
- ◇ *If you feel that there is an interaction between these two ideas that results in satisfying art, turn to page 144.*

Embodied Art = Satisfying Art

I feel that we can have aesthetic goals in art therapy -- a move towards fully embodied artwork. As a client's propensity for creativity and expression increases, so does their sense of efficacy in the world. Does this mean that I want to turn every client into an artist? In some way, I think I do. . . . As an art therapist, I can have aesthetic goals in mind for my client, just as I have therapeutic goals. I can also comment, as my art therapist does, on what I see in the art. As the client, I experience her comments as a deepening dialogue, not unlike the process described by Linesch (1994). And I know when she has said something that is certainly true for me, but I have not recognized -- even if she has to repeat it a few times.

For a moment, I almost thought that that was my conclusion. I now know that it is only a part of it. Again, I had swirled around and found a better description of *what* satisfying art was (embodied and authentic), but I was still searching for *how* one accomplishes this. Furthermore, this "conclusion" claimed that everyone has the capacity to accomplish embodied art, but does not address the possible need for artistic skill. It recognizes that the therapist could verbalize reactions to the client art, but does not explore this complicated relationship either.

It seemed there was much more work to be done. To blindly claim that embodied art was satisfying art and reflected a true synthesis of understanding in the artist or client felt too simplistic. Again, *how* do I accomplish embodied art?

The End

To continue, return to page 140 and make another choice . . .

Opinion = Satisfying Art

Did you look at that enormous red and blue “painting” that hung in the Ottawa National Gallery (for a significant amount of government money) and wonder who thought this was great art? Your average person doesn’t care much for artwork that looks like *anyone* could have done it. But the critics do, if it is talked about right. In art school, they could hang spoons from the florescent lighting and talk about the limbo of the average woman in the home versus the workspace. Hummmm, we would say, that’s very conceptual. Maybe you’re the next big thing; pushing the envelope. But how many limits can you push before you’re like Wile. E. Coyote standing a meter from the cliff on nothing but air? “Great art” is nothing but marketing, nothing more than someone in authority saying this is so -- be it the Church or some insecure art critic living the lie in New York City. It’s only perspective, opinion.

I would argue that perspective and opinion are only a part of it. I do look to others to gauge the success of my work, perhaps not the Church or the professional critic, but some “other”.

When a work of art is viewed by others it has a chance of being seen by the artist in a different light, from the point of view of another, as part of the real world. The connection to another person which this promotes perhaps allows the artist to acknowledge, tolerate and gain distance from the affect and imagery expressed in the picture. The knowledge that the picture is something outside of the artist’s self while containing the self, something to which others can resonate, helps the artist feel a commonality with others as well as to gain a better grasp of others’ reality. For many of my clients, the inner satisfaction of creativity was not

possible without being in the presence of benign others, the group and the art therapist, who would receive the work. (Kramer, 2000, p. 229)

The above quote demonstrates that, in the context of art therapy, the reception of the other can be very important in the experience of artistic satisfaction. However, my true sense of success or satisfaction was, at least partly, reliant on my own perception of my artwork. A friend gushed that *Accepting, Growing, Striving* was a wonderful “zen” painting -- but I wasn’t swayed towards satisfaction. He was right, but I felt that it had not gone deep enough into the sense of balance. Kramer (2000) spoke of the artwork resonating with the viewer, which in my opinion suggests a sense of embodiment, something that I feel lacked in *Accepting, Growing, Striving*. So there is the other, the outer, but there is also you, the inner. How do we reach that inner satisfaction of truly embodied artwork?

The End

To continue, return to page 140 and make another choice . . .

PART X**The Experiment and the “Other”**

November 5th, 2003

I reached the point of discussing my ideas concerning formed expression in artwork, and the whole task of writing seems to have stopped. There's something wrong here. So I have started an experiment of sorts.

I am having difficulty reconciling artistic pursuit and art therapy. Something in me seems to be convinced that there is an interrelationship between attaining therapeutic goals and attaining artistic goals. Something like the artwork being a mirror, a record, proof of inner change, of goals reached, one that truly shares the experience with the other. And so my personal experiment begins. I have been seeing my own art therapist for nearly eight months now. In that time I have discovered the value of creating very spontaneous and very abstract artwork during the sessions, artwork that can relate to many aspects of my life simultaneously, but artwork that also contains a certain visual vocabulary of symbols and colour that are often repeated. It is these reoccurring elements that interest me, and it is their “secrets” that I wish to unlock. I can project anything onto my artwork, but I remain convinced that there are also subconscious messages that come forth through my physical act of spontaneous creating -- body memories, if you will.

Consequently, I have started a large canvas in therapy, a canvas I plan on returning to for about five or six weeks. When I work on this canvas, I still work in automatic manner, but I constantly refer to the single session spontaneous artwork previously created. I try to keep the important elements in mind as I

work (eg. feelings toward colours, and overall sensations such as 'push and pull'), but still relinquish conscious control. I have no idea what the work will look like upon completion, whether I will like it or not, whether others will like or not (whether I'll be able to show it to others at all). It is a strange process, working on a longer term project in therapy. But I feel it is necessary. The structure of the therapeutic session, specifically the time limit and the three way dialogue that occurs, seem to be helping me break down my reliance on formed expression. Whether this artwork will be an explication or a creative synthesis, I don't know.

The following artwork was created under the conditions explained above. It was a spontaneous expression *informed* by spontaneous art. It reflected a lot of my experience, my attempt to integrate my more volatile emotions (the hot colours) with the neutral or detached parts of myself I used to contain and balance the emotions of others (the cool colours). However, there are no responses from others to this work, as it was completed after my exhibition. There is only my sense of how my therapist reacted to it, the reactions of friends (or lack thereof), and my own reactions. But before I explored my reactions to this work, my sense of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with regards to it, there occurred a long incubation in my process. Right after I finished *Raven*, I went traveling in Europe for three months.



Figure 17 - *Raven*.
Acrylic on Canvas, 3' X 3', 2003

PART XI

The Great Incubation

I finished *Raven* and left. Three months in Europe, armed with a railpass and my boyfriend (who would later become my fiancé), I thought little about this project. We flew into Vienna and had a ticket to fly from London three months later. Everything that happened in between was open for negotiation. Two months into the adventure, when we had some quiet time in southern Spain, I finished a book of fiction that gave me an idea that seemed to bring me right back to my research project. I felt like I had found, or perhaps accepted, an important piece of the puzzle.

February 2nd, 2004

It has been almost two months since I have written anything concerning my research project. I had planned on having the whole affair done with before we left for Europe, but something told me that the things I would see here and the things that I would experience would likely shift what I had written previously. I wasn't wrong. At points this work has circled around the question of what makes great art [this is how I originally referred to satisfying art], under the guise of what makes my art great to me in the interest of staying within the parameters of a heuristic inquiry. Who am I to tackle such a vast question as what makes great art -- that is more in the realm of philosophy than the small field of art therapy. Nonetheless, I have circled, often broader circles than those that confine my own art. And then I went to Europe.

We started in Vienna, have been to Prague, Zurich, Florence, Rome, and Marseilles, just to name the big cities. In each there have been countless museums dedicated to art in its various manifestations over the centuries . . . I found myself

along the way, perhaps as I looked at the Roman ruins, feeling that this "text" was entirely inconsequential. The magnitude of history that I have felt here seemed to dwarf any musings about what great art was or is, mine or anyone else's'. I was hoping that I would find the essence, the thing that makes art the embodied art spoken of in aesthetics -- the great art. Then, a late night, semi-inebriated discussion with my sister's boyfriend in an english pub in a small coastal town in Italy brought up an idea. He argued that great art is all a matter of perception. I was still arguing for an essence, something more. He wasn't buying it, and I was barely holding onto it. Then some weeks later I began a book called *American Gods* by Neil Gaiman. I finished that book today. In my journal, I wrote;

Just finished "American Gods" by Neil Gaiman - an extremely interesting commentary on belief. It's got me thinking, about numerous things, but also about my research project. So far I had understood great art to be about possibility & balance. I think, also, like the gods of the book, it's about the thin line between the real and the unreal. The mysterious. And I'm also thinking about our profession. A few have tied it to shamanism, there have also been notions that we are the new priests, our offices the new confessionals. What ties all this together is apparent in the book - BELIEF. We do little more than listen, repeat, and clarify - we lead people to believe what their inner voice is telling them. As long as they believe it - it is true, and we exist as long as some believe that we have helped, that we know something, if only that we know that we believe in them. And isn't great art about the belief that it is great art? The great artists of our time come and go like the old gods in the book. I'm in Europe, there are countless museums full of old masters whose names I do not know. Perhaps I saw them in the pages of an art history book, but only a few truly know them. I know, or recognize, the modern artists, but will they 400 years from now? Whose name, whose image, will be familiar to the many, the masses? 1000

years from now will they know who Michelangelo was? How much can the common person from any epoch know? But if they unearthed fragments of the Sistine Chapel, will they still feel its power? Or does its power only come from belief?

But I am no Michelangelo, and neither are my readers. My research project is meant to be about great art in "my opinion" - but it's not. It's about the other - being believed by the other and felt by the other - even if there aren't millions of tourists flocking to see my work. How many others do there need to be? How many need to believe in a god so that it still exists?

BELIEF - POSSIBILITY - BALANCE - MYSTERY

STRENGTH

FROM OTHERS

Back in PART VI, if you chose TOTAL ABANDON concerning the role of the artist in art therapy, I'm sure the irony has not escaped you. I felt that those that were too artistic in therapy invariably started to speak of the spirituality and transcendence of the process, which alienated a large amount of the general population who viewed such language and ideas not within the realm of the scientific or logical. I felt it marginalized our profession. And here I am speaking about belief. What can I say? Belief was speaking to me and I couldn't ignore it.

February 2nd, 2004 cont.

James (my sister's boyfriend) was right, I think. It is about perception, as perception and belief are closely linked. In the book there are ancient gods that were brought to America by the belief of those who traveled from other lands, and they exist as long as someone believes in them and remembers them. There are also new gods, gods of the internet and the automobile, that have come into existence. They all fight for belief. In Rome there were pagan temples upon

which were built Christian churches, and if they crumbled, on top of that they built roads. It seems that there is only so much belief to go around. But let us bring this back to a manageable scale - my art and art therapy.

The original question, my original question, is *what was the experience of my artist self becoming acquainted with my emerging therapist self*. In the process, I have had to discover the nature of both - what drives me to create art and what drives me to want to heal. I found the motivations were often conflicting. I then left for my trip, and I discovered, *experienced* belief. So what does this have to do with the profession of art therapy?

I think what I'm trying to get at is this -- there is a place for aesthetic achievement in art therapy and it has to do with belief, ie. there is a place where my artistic motivations can converge with my therapeutic motivations. First there is the mistaken belief that many have that they are not artists, and therefore cannot create great art, or even good art. Perhaps few of us can create great art, but we are all certainly capable of good art. I feel good art speaks of possibility, balance, and derives its strength from the *other* that believes in those possibilities of balance. Therapy, too, as I have said, strives for balance and the awareness of possibility - possibility being linked with change. But for any of it to work, there has to be belief. The belief, perhaps, starts as a matter of course from the therapist believing in the client. The client then begins to believe in him or herself - but only when others, significant others, friends, co-workers, seem to believe in the client as well. I say "seem" because this is a chicken or the egg dilemma - which comes first? I would argue it all swirls and spirals like a dialogue coming to a point, a temporary conclusion, which leads the client to feel that this belief has

spread.

So there's the parallel, but where is the convergence between aesthetics and therapy? I ask you - what purpose has the making of marks had since we first started to make them on cave walls? To remember, to honour, to learn ... to make the impermanent permanent. Long after we have finished seeing the art therapist, the memory or feeling of truly believing in the possibilities and balance may falter, may fade in the face of new obstacles. We could go back, and depending on the magnitude of the obstacle, perhaps we should. But if it is only a minor falter, a minor skip, we can maybe look at the truly embodied artwork we created in therapy and regain a part of the essence of that balance. If we still fancy ourselves as working artists, we can also create something new from that essence, making it stronger with the experiences that surround us.

This is my illumination, and explication in words. My journey is not over.

Belief and Art Therapy

The notion of belief being a necessary component for therapy is not new. Kottler (1993) describes the process (for the client) as "You trusted me; I learned to trust you, then myself" (P.8). Sweetman (2000) developed a soul approach to art therapy that had links to the concept of belief. Of course, that is meant to read "soul approach" -- but I think that part of me is very skeptical about venturing into this territory. The soul, belief, what are these concepts? Can we capture how they operate? What does it mean to believe?

Main Entry: **be·lief**

Function: *noun*

1: a state or habit of mind in which trust or confidence is placed in some

person or thing

2: something believed; *especially* :a tenet or body of tenets held by a group

3: conviction of the truth of some statement or the reality of some being or phenomenon especially when based on examination of evidence

synonyms BELIEF ,FAITH ,CREDENCE ,CREDIT mean assent to the truth of something offered for acceptance. BELIEF may or may not imply certitude in the believer <my *belief* that I had caught all the errors>. FAITH almost always implies certitude even where there is no evidence or proof <an unshakable *faith* in God>. CREDENCE suggests intellectual assent without implying anything about grounds for assent <a theory now given *credence* by scientists>. CREDIT may imply assent on grounds other than direct proof <gave full *credit* to the statement of a reputable witness>

(Merriam-Webster, 2004)

Am I talking about blind faith or well-founded belief? I feel it is the latter.

Whereas faith can exist without evidence, belief is always open to accepting new evidence. Miller (1981) wrote about the role of faith in psychoanalysis, although it seems she was really referring to *belief* in poor or positive outcomes (i.e. personal belief that one possesses the resources to make decisions that will result in positive life outcomes). Miller argued that this sense of faith is a result of the successful reparation and completion of the separation-individuation phase of development in therapy. According to Miller, during this process the therapist provides “enabling constructs” which are “plausible constructs that account for old data in new ways. Ideally this construct will contain more options and open-ended possibilities than have ever been seen before” (p. 16). Belief is the ability of the client to leave the therapist’s office, knowing that he or she will survive until the next meeting. Belief is also the courage of the artist to confront the blank canvas or raw materials, knowing that he or she can create an effective visual representation.



Figure 18 -*The stairs inside the tower of la Sagrada Familia, Barcelona, Spain.*
Digital Photograph, 2004.

Art Theory and Art Therapy

So far I have identified balance (tension) and belief (which contains a sense of possibility) as necessary components of the experience of satisfying art. These constructs, I soon discovered, were already a part of art theory.

March 25th, 2004

For my birthday last year, my friends decided to pay for art classes for me. The idea was that I could undergo an independent study in my chosen medium, perhaps culminating in an exhibition. Today I went to meet the director of the program (it's an independent arts center). She had asked me to bring some work, so she could see what I do. When I arrived, she was disappointed that I had not brought any original work. I explained they were mostly large oil paintings and sheepishly showed her my photos. She immediately commented that, although I "clearly" had talent, she felt that I was naïve in form and colour use. Ouch.

As a result of that meeting, I decided that I would forgo the independent study and instead take some technique courses in painting and drawing. After my initial shock (a narcissistic wound if I ever felt one), I had to admit that she was right. If nothing else, this "text" demonstrates that I was heavily in favour of my cool colours at the expense of my hot colours. Also, although I have linked my varying sense of artistic satisfaction with my depth of understanding, I was always slightly suspicious that I simply did not have the skill necessary to make my vision effective. The director commented that the independent study would likely be frustrating for me because of this "naivety" in form and colour use. Our conversation, at that point, turned to the fact that many artists attempt to operate without a strong background in technique. The director quickly

rattled of an example of a student of hers that had no idea of Hofmann's (Goodman, 1986) push and pull theory, the balance of art never saying too much, and the simple didactic expression that results from this ignorance. The parallels to my discoveries in this "text" were immediately obvious, as well as the parallels to art therapy as a whole.

So why don't we, as *art* therapists, use this material from art theory in our approaches? It would seem that, at some point in the therapeutic process, there must be space for us to bring these constructs to our clients. Muri (1996) argued that there can be a role for art history in art therapy.

[A]rt history can be integrated successfully into art therapy treatment and can play a valuable role in enhancing self-esteem, sublimation, socialization skills, introspection, and creativity. . . This approach creates a connection between client art and fine art, promotes group cohesion, and clearly increases the understanding of the many ways art can be a medium of psychological integration. (p.102)

Muri reported that this connection to fine art not only inspired her clients to try new methods of expression, but also reduced their anxiety through this motivation. One would wonder, however, if exposure to accomplished artists would effect the clients in a negative way, perhaps making them feel that they could *never* accomplish that level of expression. To this, Muri countered that she also exposed her clients to "art brut" or "outsider art" (artists with no formal training) in order to demonstrate that there is no single definition of art, and that, by extension, anyone could do it. However, I would argue that therapists such as Muri who use art history within the sessions are, on at least one level, attempting to inspire their clients to *more effective* expression. Muri claimed, "I do not teach techniques or evaluate art products" (p.102) but in her conclusion wrote,

“incorporating art history . . . can motivate a wide variety of clients to take greater risks, resulting in art that is often more complete and richer . . .” (p.107). The last sentence betrays her evaluation of the product, and I would wager that, from time to time, she does offer technical advice to her clients. After all, we are artists and this is what we do. Yet, although the prerequisites for the graduate art therapy program at Concordia favour fine art credits over psychology credits, the program is almost entirely focused on psychological theory. I do not deny that we need to know these theories, as our role as therapists is the same as a verbal therapist. However, there is a difference, and that difference, I *believe*, is the art product produced.

In the last month of our European adventure, we went to a lot of galleries. We saw a few in Madrid, Paris, Amsterdam, and London. What was in those galleries was a decision of someone, but there were artworks that seemed to really speak to me. Of course, for the viewer next to me, different artworks also spoke. But in London, there was one piece that seemed to grab everyone. Perhaps it was the size. In the entrance to the Tate Modern Gallery (the Turbine Hall) is a space that invites various installations as part of the Unilever Series. Currently there is a piece by Olafur Eliasson called *The Weather Project*. Words can't describe what it feels like to walk into the space, but perhaps the following picture will help. The thing is, it wasn't simply visual, you felt the warmth and the mist. Everyone did. There was something post apocalyptic to the atmosphere that forced everyone who saw it to take a moment and reflect on where they were, what they had, and why they were always in a rush. In the following picture you can see the reflection of people sitting and lying in front of the sun in the mirror on the ceiling. According to the artist's statement, it was an attempt to get people to be aware of how they perceive their environment, but it resonated deeper.

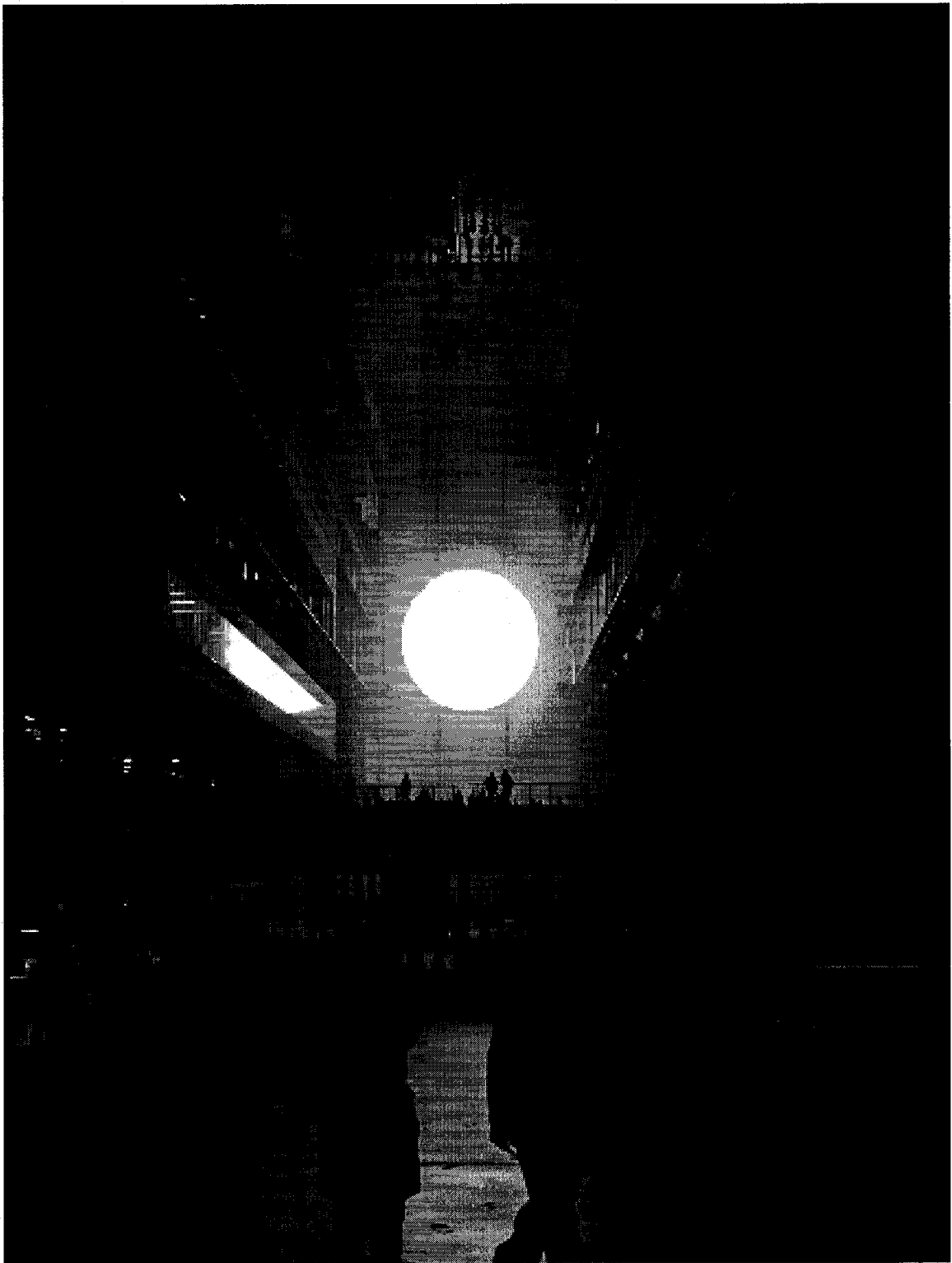
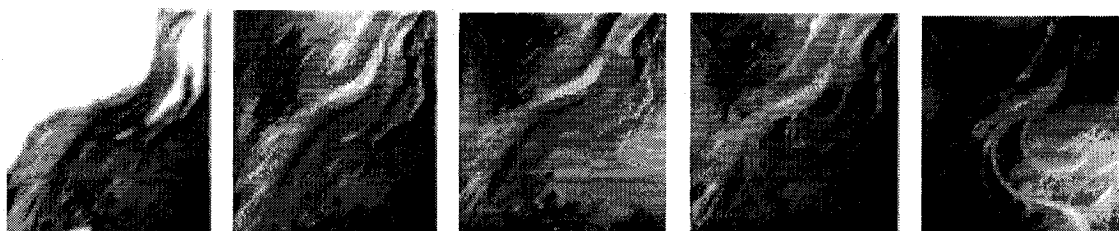


Figure 19 - Digital photograph of *The Weather Project*, installation piece, Olafur Eliasson 2003-2004

When I looked at *Raven* after returning from Europe, I thought it was slightly flat. However, when I looked at the process that I went through in creating that artwork, there is a sense of adding a fair amount of depth to the work once it is done. Observe the progression.



Both my therapist and myself were struck by the final transformation -- there seemed to be an opening and escaping of the warm inner colours, which ended in an overall taming and smoothing of those colours without totally obliterating their vibrancy. We believed in it. But since then, no one has noticed it. Friends and visitors do not comment on it (they do comment on *Dive*), and the director of the art program practically skipped right over it. It seems that *Raven* cannot really stand on its own, it does not move the viewer. As a result, my sense of satisfaction has diminished. "An artwork, functioning as a symbol designed to communicate, can only fulfill its function when viewed and experienced by another person" (Schwartz, 1996, p.244).

It is my opinion that, in the therapy space, *Raven* functioned well enough as an expression of how my process had progressed. I had seen my vibrant colours, but I was still not sure as to how much I should tame them. I am still surprised, when I view the work, at how dark it actually is. Perhaps *Raven* accurately reflects this experience, but thus falls short from being truly transcendent communication -- art that speaks to a deep truth of humanity. I had not yet reached that truth, answered the question: how do we experience genuine emotions without being overwhelmed by them? Or maybe the simple

answer is that it is a constant struggle. Genuine emotions will always threaten to overwhelm, and thus striking this delicate balance in an artistic expression will always be a challenge. There is no simple recipe for artistic satisfaction -- for inner satisfaction.

My supervisor wrote the following:

I would encourage you to hold 'the Raven' in high esteem, as an embodiment of your therapeutic process, and to continue to inquire into the message(s) Raven brings to you over time, now that it is in the world. Ravens often herald the nigredo stage. This "diminishment", disappointment, eclipse of ideal hopes, is that stage which cultivates in us "the capacity to be at home in the darkness of suffering and there to find germs of light and recovery with which . . . to bring forth Asklepios, the sunlike healer" (Edinger, 1985, p. 165). (Anthony, 2004, personal correspondence)

When I titled this painting *Raven* I was reacting to the bird shape that I saw in the painting, but I chose "raven" specifically because of the Native American myth of the raven. To the Natives, the raven is the trickster who stole the sun from the bentwood box of the selfish chief, therefore giving the people the sun, the moon, and the stars. He created the world, but he also loved to tease, cheat, woo and trick the people (Stewart, 1979).

This movement from darkness to lightness, but being comfortable with the darkness (accepting the deception of the raven) are contained in both of these cultural associations to the raven (the former being a reference to alchemy and Greek mythology). In this sense, *Raven* is a successful and satisfying expression, but I still feel that it could have reached deeper. Perhaps eight months in therapy was not enough.

Conclusion

It began with a sense of discomfort in the art therapy program. I felt it had something to do with my inability to understand how to be artistic in the the therapy sessions. I came up with a question: *What was my experience of my artist self becoming acquainted with my newly emerging therapist self?* I was looking for ways to bring my artist self closer to my therapist self. I looked at the process of therapy and the process of creating art for similarities and points of convergence. I spent a long time demonstrating how both could fit into the heuristic process and calmly declared that we all had the same goals. But something was still wrong. I had missed the point entirely, something that my spontaneous artwork brought to my attention. There was something red. I began again.

If there could be aesthetic goals in art therapy, then perhaps the artist in me could participate to a greater degree in the therapy room. I read literature concerning art-based approaches. All these theorists agreed upon the centrality of art in the therapeutic process. Some went as far to agree that there could be aesthetic goals in art therapy, creating a link between evocative works of art and therapeutic success. But I was still left to consider how we reach these goals. I swirled back to the heuristic process as a template for the artistic process. It seemed that if the process was authentic then the artwork should be evocative. If the researcher/artist fully surrendered to the phases of immersion, indwelling, illumination, and diligently went through the acquisition and explication phases, she or he would arrive at a truly compelling research project/work of art.

And so I dusted off the paint box that my mother had given to me when I was twelve years old. It was the paintbox she had used before she stopped feeling the need to

paint. I created, I tried very hard to create something good, I tried too hard. But there was a clue - Balance.

The tension that occurs when two opposites balance is very hard to achieve. The margin is tiny. But when successful, this tension exudes from artwork making it compelling. My first attempt at achieving balance was *Accepting, Growing, Striving*, but it did not succeed in my mind. My equation was simple, I felt that formed expression = creative synthesis = satisfying art. But there seemed to be something more. I felt I had to be more spontaneous in my artwork, I had to swirl deeper.

My first experiences of being spontaneous certainly were revealing. *The Institution* came from a spontaneous image, although I spent time preparing for the final work. It satisfied me. Perhaps spontaneity that led to a more formed expression was the key to creating successful art? *Countertransference* and *Who (what) Am I as a Therapist?* also revealed something important, but I wouldn't notice at first. Swirled around and I would eventually notice the colour, but it would take time to see what it was. The responses to *Countertransference* alerted me to my anger. When I realized that I had been in the habit of constantly denying my anger, I realized that there were many powerful emotions that I was denying in the service of equilibrium. The bright core that was pushing through the blue and the back spoke of some part of myself that was being denied. When I began to put this text together, I noticed that I had never truly looked at *Who (what) Am I as a Therapist?* It had remained in a closet for the whole year, dusted off for the exhibition, and then relegated to the chaos we call our basement. In it I saw confusion and discomfort. I saw bodies contorting and eyes staring. I saw questions, including the title. Questions I had never answered. It finally occurred to me that I required a close examination of what the motivations and needs of both my therapist self

and my artist self were.

Supervision Experience/Desire was a spontaneous work of art that came from a time when I was feeling vulnerable. My parents had moved to another continent and my practicum supervisor had suddenly become ill and wasn't going to return. I suddenly felt that as though I had lost most of my support. But what I painted spoke to more than that. It had the fiery core, and I desired that it grow and become rounder, balanced. At the same time, I was forced to recognize the fallibility of my therapist (grandiose) self, and examine the grand artist self I had also cultivated, if only in the past. That self was coming back. So who were my artist self and my therapist self?

My artist self - she creates art to be understood, to externalize, to balance and synthesize opposites, to be seen and to be understood. She is self-indulgent and narcissistic, but she tries to transform these impulses into art that is for the other. She creates art so that others can better understand her, and perhaps themselves.

My therapist self - she is altruistic, using her natural ability to mediate and be empathetic in the service of others. But she is also slightly narcissistic, believing that she has it together enough to alleviate the suffering of others. She is the wounded healer (Hayes, 2002). She is also slightly co-dependent, needing others to need her. She's a glutton for punishment.

In the meantime, I was creating *Quiet Room* and *That's All the Time We Have*. The above understandings, as I have just outlined them, were not so clear to me at the time. I painted blue. I contained. I tried to make sense of the distressing experiences I was exposed to at my practicum site. My practicum was almost over, the program was almost over. There were going to be so many goodbyes. Go numb.

A Crack Revised and *Dive Resolved* are both attempts to contain the entire

experience. The former, the experience of the program, and the latter, the experience of noticing this strange inner fire. But because the experience of the program was so intense, and an true exploration of this fire seemed too terrifying, the art that resulted was constrained. There seemed to be only so much energy to go around, and my therapist self wasn't about to let any of it go. And so it occurred to me, my artist self feels shunned, abandoned, and when she is asked to do something, she's not allowed to have the resources to do it. Could my therapist self and my artist self come together at all? What were the limits?

When I began my own personal therapy, the fear of performance led my artist self to be completely spontaneous in her artmaking approach, which brought the firey core closer and closer to the surface. I was satisfied with what I saw, as an art product, even though I was challenged by what I saw in it. As my therapy came closer to an end, I decided to try to be spontaneous on a large scale, creating *Raven* over the course of five weeks. It was spontaneous, but informed by all my other artwork completed in therapy, inspired by it. I finished it, finished therapy, and left for Europe for three months, wondering if *Raven* was it. All along, I felt that if I could understand the process of creating successful and satisfying art, then I would better understand the conditions necessary for successful therapy, the conditions necessary for people, for me, to really change. If I could identify this point of convergence, then maybe I could find a way to be artistic as an art therapist.

Adventure, inspiration, experience -- the highs and the lows, the pitfalls and the joy, the ignorance and understanding. The trip was extensive. This text began to become clearer. Satisfying art required balanced tensions, and the hint of something more, of possibilities. The artwork that I had created that I found satisfying contained these

criteria, conditions that were also required for the process of change and discovery to move forward. It seemed that both the artistic process and the therapeutic process followed the swirling spiral pattern I outlined (inspired by the heuristic process). It was true that successful discovery required that there be a new understanding that is then balanced within our old way of understanding in a new expression. The process of success in therapy (attaining balance and awareness of possibility) should then be closely mirrored in the aesthetic qualities of the product. However, there seemed to be something beyond just the aesthetic qualities of the product that made it an authentic expression of reaching an important discovery, something that was both subjective and objective.

Belief. I found that the product needed to be exhibited to some “other” (if only the therapist) and be believed in in a deep and mutual way by both the client and the therapist. This experience of mutual belief would foster far reaching belief in the client concerning his or her ability to be effective in life, but only if the artwork was considered satisfying by the client. In my own exploration of the works that I found satisfying, not only was I authentically experiencing that which I wished to express, I was also able to reach a more sophisticated level of aesthetics. Otherwise, I was “naive in form and colour” as the art director put it. This concern with basic technique to overcome the frustrations of expression (even if the experience is authentic) seemed to indicate a point of entry for my artistic self into the therapy room.

My artist self and my therapist self have needs, some of which converge, some of which don't. Both mediate, both use creativity and spontaneity in the service of expression and equilibrium. On the other hand, both serve my narcissistic needs and both have issues with co-dependency. Within the therapy room there is a deep conflict between personally being witnessed and doing the witnessing. There is also, I feel, the

nearly constant urge to intervene aesthetically in the client's product, whether or not this urge is acted on. So, whereas the artist has special skills that certainly aid the therapeutic process, there are also tendencies that conflict with the therapeutic process. Perhaps these conflictual tendencies can be overcome if we allow and vindicate a special emphasis on the aesthetic values of the art product produced in art therapy, when this supports the therapeutic goals. A final choice:

- ◇ *If you feel that the art therapist should rarely, if ever, intervene aesthetically, turn to page 166.*
- ◇ *If you feel that the art therapist's involvement in the product can be a therapeutic benefit, one that is distinctive to art therapy, turn to page 168.*

Aesthetic Intervention Not Justified.

I can look at this entire work and say that it has all been an effort by my artist self to be accorded more importance and attention in the art therapy room. I want the artistic process recognized, understood, applied to therapy and, of course, a greater focus on the art product produced. I assume that a client will be capable of creating a satisfying work of art when there is a moment of creative synthesis in the therapeutic process. But am I projecting my own artistic needs onto my clients, expecting from them an aesthetic sophistication I can rarely achieve myself? Do I find their expressions too rudimentary, and therefore intolerable to my artistic sensibility? Is there no argument for aesthetic intervention beyond my own narcissistic needs?

I would argue that any client that volunteers for art therapy is expressing a conscious or unconscious wish to explore and improve visual expression. This excludes clients that may be in a hospital or community program, as often the choice is made for them by professionals. Once that choice is made, I can allow my artistic self to feel the urge to intervene aesthetically in the artmaking process of the client. Such an urge, if explored, can illuminate the therapist's personal frustration with regards to the process of the client. Or, if it is an appropriate recognition that the client is facing undue frustration in trying to express an authentic experience, it can illuminate a need for the client to be given greater tools to enhance expression. This could be simply giving technical advice on perspective and figure drawing, or suggesting a material, or exposing the client to art history that addresses his or her particular struggle. This way, the art therapist can avoid the frustration of completely suppressing his or her aesthetic sensibility. Of course, I do not pretend that it will be an easy for the client to attain enhanced expression (and therefore deeply satisfying expression) -- but I do not deny the role of the art therapist

can play in moving the client towards this goal. Attaining aesthetic sophistication is extremely difficult, but so is the authentic experience of change and discovery in therapy.

However, another question remains, am I projecting my needs as a developing art therapist on all art therapists too categorically? Cahn (2000) pointed out that approaches that emphasize the “core self” of the art therapist as an artist deny the fact that, “practitioners come to art therapy from many different directions, and perhaps not all of them are or need to be artists in the same way” (p.178).

I am aware that I am only speaking to half of the practitioners on the art *as* therapy to art *in* therapy continuum. As it stand now, we are all under the banner of art therapy. But those of us who emphasize art as therapy recognize the importance of the art process and product in exploring and recording the personal process of change and discovery. As a result, I feel our techniques and approaches should reflect this focus, and thus we need a stronger recognized distinction between art therapists and therapists who use art as an adjunct to verbal therapy. For the latter, I would propose that the title *art psychotherapist*, and for the former I would reserve the title *art therapist*. For those of us who emphasize art I would go beyond defining art therapy as simply psychotherapy with a bit of art --I would say I must be an *art* therapist that uses her special skills to promote healing and enhanced expression in our clients, therefore unlocking new possibilities and finding balance.

The End.

To continue, return to page 164 and make another choice . . .

The Artist's Way

The primary difference between an art therapist and a verbal therapist is the art product produced. It seems illogical to me that we should deny or down-play this distinctive element of art therapy and our unique skills as artists to engage the product. It is my contention that the art therapist should allow for optimal unfettered expression from the client during the initial stages of therapy. This non-directive approach allows for the therapist and the client to truly see and examine the conflicts (and resources) that the client possesses. However, eventually, in the later stages of the therapeutic process, I feel that the therapist can begin to offer tools, techniques, or ideas to help further the client's expression. This is the enabling construct Miller (1981) spoke of and the effect of incorporating art history as Muri (1996) did. It is Allen's (1995) own artwork in the studio, an implicit recognition that we all have artistic urges that maintain our emotional equilibrium.

Omitted so far from this argument and paper is the question of innate talent or artistic temperament. Perhaps not all clients would appreciate or benefit from increased artistic expression. This is undoubtedly true in hospital settings or other institutional settings where the client may or may not have chosen art therapy themselves. However, I would argue that anyone who walks into a private practice of art therapy wishes, on some level, to use visual expression and develop a visual language. In fact, I feel that the more someone says "I can't draw" the more they wish to be able to, and so the therapist may supply more technical intervention in order to ward off intolerable frustration.

This exploration of the experience of my artist self becoming acquainted with my emerging therapist self has highlighted the need for our profession, as a whole, to better define the role of the art product and the therapists' artistic knowledge in art therapy. It

is not enough to simply view the creation of art as an adjunct to verbal therapy, as then there is little to distinguish us from verbal therapists who occasionally use art, as well as many occupational therapists who use art regularly.

Just as an image is diminished in quality when it does not hold the emotion or idea aesthetically, perhaps art therapy education is diminished in quality when it does not hold art at its center. When art is not the heartbeat of art therapy education, it is not the heartbeat of art therapy -- possibly indicating a lack of trust in art's ability to heal.

(Wix, 1996, p. 178)

I feel that, within the art therapy training programs, there not only needs to be a greater focus on art, but also some instruction concerning the possible impact of the artistic temperament (grandiose and narcissistic) on the developing *art* therapist identity (should the student possess these qualities as I did). Primarily, many developing art therapists, and perhaps many who are already practicing, need to closely examine the effect of an artist, who thrives from being witnessed, becoming the therapist who is expected to be the witness. Furthermore, I believe our attitude towards the art product can go a long way to define the uniqueness of art therapy. If we recognize that the product always reflects the process, then I feel we can hypothesize that evocative and satisfying art will accompany the later stages of resolution and integration in the therapeutic process. It is in this later stage that the art therapist, just as he or she would help clients verbalize their experience with more sensitive language, can begin to use his or her special artistic skills to refine and expand the client's visual language. My argument is not revolutionary -- many art therapists, myself included, often find themselves suggesting material and techniques to our clients (Allen, 1995; Henley, 1992; McGraw,

1995). However, during my training, I often felt guilty about such interventions. I was constantly reminded to consider *why* I had done such a thing, and *how* it may have impacted the client. But the conversation often ended there, requiring that I do an independent search of the literature in order to find my answers.

I believe that, as artists, we constantly feel the urge to share our knowledge of aesthetics and our technical skills in order to further the expression of our clients. The crucial issue is being certain that you are helping the client express where he or she is in his or her therapeutic process, not where you wish they were. If we can incorporate these concerns and considerations into the art therapy training programs, I feel we can go a long way towards helping all art therapists understand the unique role of their artist self in art therapy.

I'm asking whether or not we are ready to identify, research, and embrace the unique knowledge of the artist's way of thinking, knowing, and problem-solving to shape a lasting vision for the field of art therapy. This is a difficult task, but to do anything less will never be enough if art therapists expect to authenticate their field once and for all.

(Malchiodi, 1999, p.3)

The (final) End.

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Appendix A

The Creation of the Wall and the Discovery of the Swirl Symbol.

I had become attracted to the symbol of a spiral after reading about the hermeneutic spiral which Linesch (1994) used to describe meaning and interpretation in therapy.

[H]ermeneutics is a theory of understanding and interpretation. Central to the theory is the idea that the meanings we attribute to events and experiences are created by the individuals in conversation and action with one another and with oneself and are always open to a variety of interpretations.

(Linesch, 1994, p. 186)

This creation of meaning through dialogue deepens, according to Linesch, like a spiral, until a joint meaning is constructed. In this manner, the art object or image points the therapist and the client (or the researcher and the respondents) to a constructed meaning, not a meaning that is “hidden” in the art.

The spiral illustrates the way art psychotherapy provides and, in fact, creates a backdrop for therapeutic conversation and then engages the client and the therapists in a dialectical experience out of which emerges joint constructions of meaning on which can be based new understandings and the possibility for change.

(Linesch, 1994, p. 190)

The Swirl - Heuristics

The Creation of the Wall - immersion and organization.

I'm staring at a white wall covered in index cards. You see, I've been buying office supplies along the way so that my researcher self can appease my artist self, who likes to play with index cards, multi coloured pens and multi-coloured highlighters.

I even got those little coloured sticker tabs to mark where my pertinent information is hidden among my many books and papers. I began by printing out thumbnails of all my artwork. I placed those in a line along the middle of the wall. The structure then follows like this:

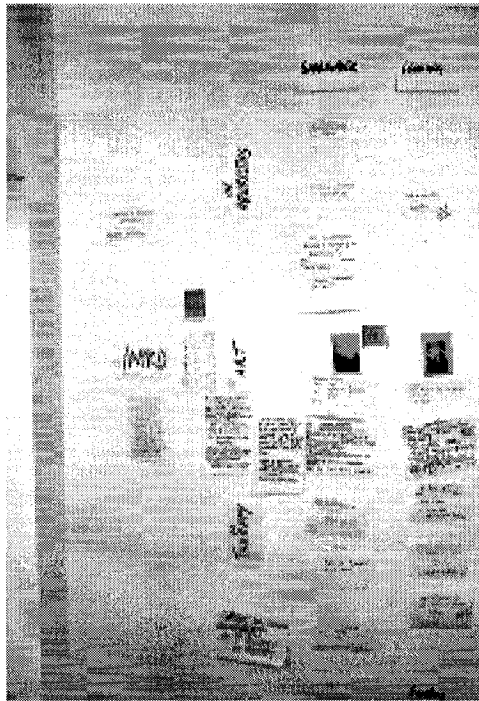


Figure 20 - The Wall

On the top is the heuristic thread. Below is the art therapy thread. My images down the middle form the backbone of my understanding. Everything branches off of the images. The images reflect my earlier heuristic process because they reflect the important elements of my artist self becoming acquainted with, or let's say, negotiating with my emerging therapist self. However, my later heuristic process, the process that I'm in now - one of organizing, grouping, and looking for important units of meaning - occurs from the entire pattern, from an extensive exploration of the many meanings it contains.

As I said, I first put the images in a chronological line down the middle of the wall. On an index card under each image I wrote down the key reflections that I had recorded either in my journal, or at the exhibition, both if they existed. Then, from the image and the words, I associated the parts of my experience in the art therapy program that seemed to relate to each. I also included articles or theorists

that fit in with the theme I was getting from my work. Alternately, I also associated a stage in the heuristic process that seemed to fit with the images and their corresponding words. Once this was complete, a state of incubation occurred (or maybe it was because an old friend came to visit). I then came back to the wall. I looked at what I had, and then for each section (each heuristic grouping of index cards, and each art therapeutic grouping of index cards associated with a particular image) I tried to summarize in one word. Not too surprisingly the words were often the same for each two sections associated with the same image. However, some were different. This particular pattern of convergence and divergence between the summary words helped me realize how to structure my text. It seemed to me that the heuristic thread was naturally informing what was contained in the art therapy thread, and should therefore come first.

There were five discrepancies (out of a total of 10 images, or grouping of images) between the summary words describing the heuristic thread and the therapy thread. It was these discrepancies that gave me the strong sense that the heuristic thread informed the therapy thread. For example, for *Growing*, the heuristic thread was summarized by the word "LOOKING", whereas the art therapy thread was given the word "FINDING". In the heuristic process, I was looking for my question. These questions helped me "find" the art-based approaches which proved to be the initial kernel on my path to understanding how my artist self could fit with my therapist self. Also, the grouping of the heuristic index cards above the *Supervision Experience* and *Supervision Desire* images were summarized by the word "FEELING". The corresponding art therapy index cards, this time, were summarized by the word "FINDING (SUPPORT)". I saw that this particular diptych was a heuristic immersion into the need for support, and thus the (then still preconscious) "finding" of my own forgotten internal resources. It is no accident that soon after doing these images I finally began my own personal art therapy to explore the kernel of firey red that I had begun to see as possibly significant.

What wasn't entirely obvious to me then, but is to me now, was that my artist self was trying to remind my therapist self of the strong inner resources that I

have. You know you have them too. The red fire core - a source of motivation and passion, the fire that gives you the ability to get up after being knocked down. But it is also a dangerous force, a tempest that, if left unchecked, could easily overwhelm you. And sometimes, when it does, for those brief moments you fear that you're going to be destroyed by it.

The above was written almost immediately after I had completed the wall, and right before I discovered the swirl. I think it is apparent that I sensed the interrelationships between the groupings, that there was some sort of pattern. I, as mentioned previously, was attracted to Linesch's (1994) description of the spiral as being illustrative of the process of change and discovery. I tried to fit my summarized words into a spiral, but was largely unsuccessful. Table 1 shows how I summarized my process, and the following two illustrations demonstrate how I tried to fit those into the swirl pattern.

Table 1 - Summarized Groupings

| surrender | looking | narrowing | feeling | balance | realization | feeling | feeling | accepting | looking/ comparing |
|-------------|----------------|------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------|---|----------------------|-----------------------|
| <i>Dive</i> | <i>Growing</i> | <i>The Institution</i> | <i>Counter-transference</i> | <i>Accepting, Growing, Striving</i> | <i>Who Am I as a Therapist?</i> | <i>Supervision diptych</i> | <i>Quiet room & That's All the Time We Have</i> | <i>Crack revised</i> | <i>Dive Resolved</i> |
| unknown | finding | narrowing | feeling | (attempt at) balance | struggle | finding (support) | feeling | (attempt at) balance | finding |

The way I had summarized my experience did not fit easily into a spiral pattern.

This was partly because I lacked full awareness of my process, and partly because the spiral is inadequate for fully describing the pattern of discovery. In this “text”, the spiral appeared spontaneously in *Accepting, Growing, Striving*, as well as in two of my personal art therapy pictures. I saw it as a metaphor for a deepening understanding, a pulling downward that can be illuminating, but also terrifying. However, during my first review session that I had in my personal art therapy, I noticed that I would create one painting that was filled with many meanings. I would then create subsequent artworks that seemed to zoom in on, or expand the various meaning contained in the singular artwork. I sensed that I was not spiraling towards one central understanding, but swirling. The swirl pattern is my favorite doodle, and has appeared in my personal art therapy work on many occasions. I seemed to be swirling down a spiral to understanding. In my research, I placed my summary words on a swirl to see how they would fit. The following illustrations show my results. In the first (illustration 3) I show the swirl pattern with the summary words. The second illustration (4) includes blue arrows showing how I spiraled through the swirl in tightening circles. You may notice that it doesn’t work perfectly, but I feel that this reflects the fact that I was relatively unaware of the totality of my experience when I did this. However, in essence, I strongly believe that in the process of change and discovery, we first believe that we can do it (leap of faith/surrender), we look, we find, we feel, and then we balance that total understanding with what is already understood, with our existing perception of the world.

lost the focus of the question. At one point, I felt that maybe I should discard the entire heuristic thread as it wasn't about the question (what is my experience of my artist self meeting my emerging therapist self). I delayed, but eventually I would.

What I had originally documented on my wall was my general process of becoming an art therapist, but it wasn't focused on the specific relationship between my artist self and my therapist self. That's where the split happened, because my original question was; "what was my experience of my pre-existing artist self becoming acquainted with my new, emerging, therapist self". However, my wall had actually structured my paper to demonstrate the process of change and discovery - heuristic inquiry, the process of creating art, and the process of essentially changing core aspects of my identity (in becoming a therapist). In the latter, there are elements of my artist self and it's attitude towards the emerging therapist self, however it did not turn out to be the focus.

My previous journalling into the original question, after realizing that this split had occurred, revealed a more negative and defensive relationship between my artist self and my therapist self. My artist self felt questioned by my therapist self, and that threw into doubt why I create art at all. It was, essentially, a crisis for my artist self, a crisis that likely led to my original search for the question. I don't doubt that the original question is the one that I need to answer, because I feel it more strongly than the need to demonstrate how the swirl visually captures the process of discovery and change. However, that said, I also feel that the swirl was something that I did need to discover - but again, how exactly does it relate to the original question?

I have now realized that it is very relevant in illuminating *how* I answered that question. It also seems to be common among heuristic researchers to also write about the

heuristic process, appropriating it in various ways, trying to unlock the mystery of the process of unlocking a mystery. This is, as I have said, the process of change and discovery. Once I discovered the swirl it replaced the sense that I was getting nowhere (just touching on the same issues over and over again) with the sense that I was swirling down a spiral. This helped direct my research, but also helped me become more comfortable with my personal process of change in therapy. The going in circles was acceptable, as long as the circles deepened.

The End

To continue, return to page 5.