

Introduction to

Art Therapy

Sources & Resources



ROUTLEDGE


JUDITH A. RUBIN

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*"It Is Only in Being Creative
That the Individual
Discovers the Self."*

D. W. WINNICOTT

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Preface

Art as a helper in times of trouble, as a means of understanding the conditions of human existence and of facing the frightening aspects of those conditions, as the creation of a meaningful order offering a refuge from the unmanageable confusion of outer reality—these most welcome aids are grasped by people in distress and used by the healers who come to their assistance.

Rudolf Arnheim

Map of the Territory

This second edition of a book written a decade ago reflects my wish to bring its contents up to date in a field that continues to grow at an amazingly rapid rate. This growth is reflected most dramatically in two areas that were beginning to be apparent when the first edition was finished in 1997, but are increasingly evident a decade later.

The first is an exponential increase in the literature, reflected in the number of books cited in the References, almost twice those noted only ten years ago. Increasingly specialized, they are often edited or written by multiple authors, indicating an awareness of the complexity of the particular knowledge and skills required to conduct art therapy with different sorts of individuals in diverse settings. This is true whether the content to be mastered is the nature of particular disorders, the cultures within which practitioners work, or the latest developments in attachment theory, neurobiological development, and ways of reconceptualizing therapeutic paradigms (Jones, 2005; Riley, 1999, 2001). The literature also reflects a growing level of sophistication about both psychology and art (Maclagan, 2001), and a thoughtfulness not always apparent in the past. It has become more profound, at the same time more poetic, and, paradoxically, more pragmatic.

The second is an awareness and acceptance of the idea of art therapy in mental and physical health care, as well as in the culture at large. As with psychoanalysis, whose concepts have permeated our society, there is often considerable misunderstanding. While the pervasiveness of the notion that art can be healing is a testament to the success of the profession embodying this idea, it has also created confusion because of the different kinds of people who offer therapeutic arts activities.

For this reason, Chapter 2, which deals with the definition of art therapy, may be even more pertinent in the 21st century than it was in the 20th. Since art therapy is indeed an idea whose time has come, the history of the discipline in Chapter 3 is not only timely, but also essential for a comprehensive understanding of the profession. The spread of art therapy around the globe is an impressive phenomenon, which will no doubt continue in this era of instant and easy communication.

Ten years ago I was persuaded to write the first edition of this book because I agreed with my editor that there was a need for an introductory text that would provide a fair and accurate overview of the field. In the decade since then, two books have been published which led me to wonder whether this text was still needed. However, after looking carefully at each, I believe that the two recent books are complementary, but not identical to the mission of this one.

It is probably no accident that both are entitled the *Handbook of Art Therapy*, and because they hope to introduce readers to many ways of working and thinking, both cover some of the same territory as this text. One (Malchiodi, 2003) is an edited collection of chapters by different specialists about particular subjects. The other (Case & Dalley, 2006) understandably reflects the way in which art therapy has developed in the United Kingdom, which is similar to, but different from, how it has evolved in the United States (Gilroy & McNeilly, 2000).

After serious consideration, I concluded that an overview of the field by a single author is still a good idea, especially because of art therapy's continued growth and development during the past decade. My goal remains the same: to make this text broadly inclusive and reflective of the rich past and present of this new discipline. My aim has been to review and to distill the story of this still-evolving profession. Looking at the past as well as the present has been greatly encouraging, since art therapy continues to grow, not only in size and scope, but in sophistication as well.

It is my wish that, despite its necessary brevity, this book will be sufficiently informative that the reader will want to explore the discipline in more detail, going to some of the more specialized literature noted in the chapters and listed in the References. My plan is to broadly outline the history and current shape of the field, and my hope is to do so in a way that is both fair and accurate.

This book is something like an *aerial map* of the territory, to be further explored at ground level by the interested traveler. As with a map, the reader may explore specific areas (chapters) in whatever order is most appealing, since they are essentially independent of one another.

Getting to know a person or a profession takes time. It is always risky to generalize from insufficient data. A little knowledge, in art therapy as elsewhere, can be a dangerous thing. And a little knowledge *about* art therapy is just that, only one aspect of a multifaceted discipline, with almost as many possible permutations as there are practitioners. No single instance represents the whole, yet each is part of a richly varied panorama. Hopefully, the overview provided in this book will give the reader an orientation with which to further explore this fascinating field.

Perspectives: Personal and Historical

In addition to providing an overview, I have attempted to give the reader a feeling for the drama of art therapy's evolution, as well as an introduction to some of the key players. Since I have participated in the development of the profession in a variety of ways, I shall include some personal experiences, when and if it seems that they illustrate the story of art therapy.

On the DVD (0.1) you can watch “My Life in Art Therapy,” in which I briefly outline my own experiences, some of which are described further in later chapters.

I believe strongly that the shape of the present can best be understood in the context of the past. Whatever kind of knowledge you want to acquire, knowing what came before is extremely useful. In psychotherapy itself, clinicians differ greatly about the need to deal with the past in the treatment. But all agree that some kind of *history* is vital to developing a sense of the problem and of possible solutions. Even cognitive-behavioral therapists, whose focus is on the here-and-now, need to obtain what they call a *baseline* before initiating the process of therapy. For this reason, many chapters include early work as well as current thinking and practice.

This volume can offer the reader breadth, but it cannot provide depth. Missing is the intimacy and immediacy of what actually goes on in art therapy, especially over time. The brief clinical vignettes included here offer but a glimpse of the drama of the treatment situation. Even the longer stories in this book are mere summaries of a richer and more nuanced process. There are, however, more substantial case studies in the literature, which the reader can explore to get a sense of the unpredictable narrative of a creative therapeutic adventure. These will be referred to within the chapters.

Words and Pictures

In addition to the story of each individual, family, or group in art therapy, there is the powerful nonverbal drama of the moment-to-moment encounters among patient(s), therapist, and art materials. I believe that the dance that ensues is best illustrated through the medium of film. I had planned to create a videotape to accompany the first edition. Because a change of publishers led to the abandonment of that plan, I ended up creating a film overview of the field of art therapy, which is independent of this volume but is a useful supplement. A recent review in an art therapy journal said of the film, “It really tells you everything you need to know about art therapy.”*

Art Therapy Has Many Faces (Rubin, 2008a) is a visual introduction to the field, and has been remarkably successful for an educational film. At the time of this writing it had sold over 2,500 copies with no advertising or promotion, simply by word of mouth, and a version with Chinese-language subtitles is being distributed by the Taiwan Institute of Psychotherapy. This suggests that it has met a need, which cannot be met by words alone. For that reason, it is recommended that the reader obtain a copy of the film from Expressive Media, Inc. and use it as a supplement to this text (www.expressivemedia.org).

As the Art Lady on the public television program *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* during its first three years, I was introduced very early to the power of the media. After that experience, and with Fred Rogers' encouragement, I made three teaching films (Irwin & Rubin, 2008; Rubin, 2008c, 2008d) and was instrumental as a board member of the American Art Therapy Association in recording four pioneers in *Art Therapy: Beginnings* (American Art Therapy Association [AATA], 1975).

This is because it has always seemed to me that only in vivo could the therapeutic power of art be effectively communicated. The very elements that make art therapy so effective are difficult—if not impossible—to fully convey in words, even with pictures of the creative process and the artwork created.

* Burt, H. Video review. *Canadian Art Therapy Association Journal*, 20(2), 2007: 54.

Expressive Media, Inc. (EMI, www.expressivemedia.org), a nonprofit organization founded by my drama therapy colleague and me in 1985, now distributes not only *Art Therapy Has Many Faces*, but also remastered versions of our early films with special added features on each DVD (Irwin & Rubin, 2008; Rubin, 2008a, 2008b). In addition, EMI distributes a remastered version with related features of *Beyond Words: Art Therapy for Older Adults*, a film originally sponsored by the American Art Therapy Association to inform legislators about the healing power of art (Rubin, 2008b).

In the years since the first edition was published, the world has seen many changes in communication patterns, thanks to the computer and the Internet. People are learning more and more through electronic avenues. I am pleased that Routledge agreed to include a DVD in this second edition, which will allow the reader to see many more of the images referred to in the book. Compressed video files have also been included on the DVD to be played on a computer. These, though brief, serve to illustrate the text more dynamically than any still photograph can ever do.

Because it is essential that the reader be able to locate specific images and video clips while using the book, the *Contents of the DVD* is available as a text file on the disc, to be printed out for easy reference. These specific images are also referred to in the text itself in **bold type**.

Expressing and Reflecting

In a way, the complementarity of film and images with the text of this book parallels the nature of art therapy itself. The combination of genuine expressive art activity (**Figure 1**) with some kind of thoughtful reflection on that process (**Figure 2**) is really the essence of this field. In fact, it is what distinguishes it most clearly from related disciplines.

In almost all approaches to art therapy, there is an image-making time and a reflection time. The proportions may vary, and the thoughtful component may be silent, and can involve movement, music, drama, and poetry, as well as written or spoken verbal



Figure 1 A woman involved in creating.



Figure 2 The same woman looking and reflecting.



Figure 3 A blind boy involved in finger painting.

commentary. Art therapy, however, always includes involved doing (**Figure 3**) plus relaxed reflection (**Figure 4**), with or without words.

This combination, like psychotherapy plus medication for depression, is more powerful than either one alone. Creating art can indeed be therapeutic, and verbal therapy can be very effective. But there is something about the two together that is really spectacular. Of



Figure 4 The same boy talking about the experience.

course, there are times in art therapy when expressing or reflecting is the focus of a particular session or period of time, but the discipline by definition includes both elements. As with most alloys and hybrids, the synergistic mix is sturdier than the individual elements alone.

Seeing and Doing

Although a film or an image can offer useful illustration, there is nothing like observing an actual session for finding out what art therapy is all about. Even better than watching is participating. This kind of active personal engagement in learning may also occur in a workshop experience or in treatment—as an individual, as a member of a group, or as part of a family. Nothing conveys the power of art therapy as much as doing it, even if it is no more than a brief involvement.

Some of the recent books in the field include suggested art activities and exercises to extend the experience of reading about art therapy. Although it would be possible to add that component, I am more comfortable recommending that the reader attend a workshop given by someone who can create a safe environment to hold what emerges.

Art Therapy: A Rapidly Growing Hybrid

I am convinced, in fact, that it is the synergistic potency of the combination of art with therapy that accounts for the rapid growth of this still-young field. This is especially remarkable, because recent years have seen economic belt tightening in all kinds of institutions that educate and employ art therapists in the United States. Although the rate of growth has fluctuated, the field has been steadily expanding. New training programs and job opportunities have continued to develop, most often through the creative efforts of individual art therapists and others who believe in its potential. The professional association in this country has grown since its founding in 1969 from a membership of 100 to 5000. And, as noted earlier,

there has been a worldwide expansion of the field of art therapy, with pioneers and new programs appearing around the globe.

Although I imagine that the majority of readers are likely to be students of art therapy, I hope that others will read this book as well. For if more administrators, colleagues, and concerned citizens were aware of the power of art in therapy, I feel certain they would want to promote it. Perhaps even a brief introduction to this rich and wonderful discipline will stimulate the development of opportunities for more people in more places to have access to the healing power of art.

Judith Aron Rubin

Acknowledgments

Many have helped in the work on this book; I can express my gratitude to only a few. I was astonished to find that approximately 200 books on art therapy and related areas had been published in the decade since I wrote the first edition. I am grateful to my publisher, Routledge, for making its books on art therapy available to me. My special appreciation to Jessica Kingsley for her generosity in allowing me to obtain her many recent publications in the field at a price that a retired professional can afford, and my thanks to Charles C. Thomas for a discount on its recent books.

There are many individuals to whom I am grateful for their work on the photographs that illustrated the first edition of this book, some of which are on these pages, while others are now found on the DVD. Most of the illustrations are from my own files and were shot by Norman Rabinovitz and Sheila Ramsey of Children's Hospital or by the Media Services of Western Psychiatric Institute & Clinic. In addition, some of the photographs, such as the picture of Edith Kramer with Eleanor Roosevelt by Herschel Stroyer, and the one of Bruce Moon by George Pugh, were taken by freelance artists. Several images were taken by the late Jacob Malezi, a few were photographed by Richard Hurst, and some were donated by Lynn Johnson.

Pictures of the pioneers were generously provided by art therapists from their own records or the archives of others. My thanks to: Gladys Agell, Frances Anderson, Robert Ault, Sandra Graves, David Henley, Don Jones, Cliff Joseph, Edith Kramer, Mildred Lachman-Chapin, Myra Levick, Bruce Moon, Aina Nucho, Arthur Robbins, Mary Cane Robinson, Rawley Silver, Patricia St. John, Harriet Wadson, Christine Wang, and Diane Waller of Goldsmith's College in London.

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A Few Words About Style

Before getting into the text, I should like to explain some stylistic decisions . . . Since the vast majority of art therapists are women, I have chosen to use the female pronoun when talking about the therapist. Although patients are of both genders, I have arbitrarily chosen to use the masculine pronoun when referring to them in a general fashion. I hope this decision will not mislead or offend the reader, since it seems to make for a smoother flow in the text. While I have tried to be “politically correct” in terminology, I apologize in advance to anyone who feels offended by my preference for language that is familiar to me.

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