

What Do You Care About?

Arts therapies in support of civil courage in a “world gone slightly mad”

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Introduction

In this paper, I will draw inspiration from protest arts, deep ecology and critical psychotherapy to inquire how the arts therapies could play a part in restoring the world to its place in the therapy of the psyche. I will describe my search for a middle-ground between my roles as a music/arts therapist and as an environmental community arts activist, a search which has led me to a workshop framework in which art-work-centred expressive arts therapy combines with community arts ritual. I will suggest that such work can serve to counter the an-aesthetizing effects of “too much bad news” in the daily media, overcoming apathy and despair to contain and make communal our responses to world-dis-ease through the arts. Mobilising such responses may be necessary for a truly healthy democracy.

Although examples are given of protest songs which express a political viewpoint, I would ask readers to distinguish between the “polemical” content of the songs themselves and the purpose of this paper, which is to highlight the potential role which arts therapies can play within the broader socio-political context.

Art in protest

As global citizens, how do therapists support their own sanity when the daily news media contain so much evidence of dysfunction on national and international levels—enough to perhaps numb individuals into resignation and even despair? While as therapists we may spend our working lives supporting people with recognised forms of personal and family dis-ease, it could be argued that many in our population who pride themselves on their “normality” continue with agendas that are (to say the least) environmentally and socially suspect. We may even, to our horror, discover that inadvertently “we” support “them,” even are “them,” especially through our inaction. The question I have been grappling with is this: how can the arts therapies help both arts therapists and concerned-but-disempowered citizens to find our voices and re-engage in the democratic process?

*Don't just stand there watching it happening
I can't stand it—don't feel it
Something telling me—don't want to go out this way and
Have a nice day, then*

*Read it in the headlines
Watch it on the TV
Put it in the background
Stick it in the back
Stick it in the back
For the beautiful occupation
The beautiful occupation
You don't need an invitation
To drop in upon a nation*

*I'm too cynical I'm just sitting here
I'm just wasting my time
Half a million civilians gonna die today
But look the wrong way, then*

Read it in the headlines...

*...so much for an intervention
Don't call the United Nations*

(Lyrics to "The Beautiful Occupation" by Fran Healy)

Fran Healy of the Scottish band Travis described in a radio interview (Healy, 2003) his process of writing "The Beautiful Occupation" after hearing George Bush's State of the Union address in January 2002. He had felt almost helpless, and sat down with his guitar. He said it was a song to himself, asking "...*what can you do? ...you can only go on your guts.*" (The *Hope* CD, containing Healy's song and others from well-known songwriters, was put out by WarChild to raise money for children in Iraq [www.hope-CD.com].)

"The Beautiful Occupation" is part of a long tradition of "trouble songs" (Estes, 2002, Ma'anit, 2003, Marqusee, 2003) and other forms of protest art. Do these serve parallel functions at a community level as psychotherapy serves the individual and family?

- to allow disenfranchised "voices" to emerge
- to allow the "shadow" side to become conscious
- to develop insight
- to explore new possibilities
- to restore hope that change is possible

James Hillman, in his famous critique of modern psychotherapy (Hillman and Ventura, 1992), has called for "therapy as an aesthetic activity" (p. 128), the role of which is in "de-anaesthetizing" and awakening aesthetic sensitivity and civil courage in the citizen. The therapy room could be "a cell in which revolution is prepared" (p. 38) by "redefining self as the interiorization of community" (p. 40).

The arts therapies are ideally suited to contribute to such a metamorphosis in psychotherapy. Natalie Rogers (1993, p. 221) states: "I believe that those of us who are midwives to

the creative process play a crucial role in today's troubled world." She describes her own strong response to the Gulf War and a poem that "poured out" of her, mobilising her toward public radio and letter writing.

Lacunae in psychotherapy/arts therapies?

The professionalization of an occupation born on a growing edge of society is fraught with the danger of it being reassimilated into the existing power structures and serving to maintain them (House, 2003). The worst case scenario is that psychotherapy (including the arts therapies) has adapted so well to the status quo that it becomes a vehicle for interpreting people's concern and outrage at the dysfunction of the world in terms of the individual's "lack of fit" or personal neurosis, to be "expressed" in therapy so that the person can go back into the world (pollution/dehumanizing job/traffic/etc) and "feel okay" about it (Wessan, 1994).

James Hillman has been exposing this danger for twenty years. In his 1982 essay "Anima Mundi: The Return of the Soul to the World," he wrote: "to place psychopathology solely in personal reality is a delusional repression of what is actually, realistically being experienced" (Hillman, 1982, p. 93). In his own psychotherapy practice he encountered "problems that are no longer merely subjective... sickness is now 'out there'" (p. 96).

In the book *We've Had a Hundred Years of Psychotherapy—And the World's Getting Worse* (Hillman and Ventura, 1992), James Hillman referred to "aesthetic disorders of the environment" and asked "What about the world's soul?" (p. 51). Ventura also asked: "What is the real

price we pay for how we live?" (p. 46). The world's soul had been written out of psychology by focusing solely on the individual's subjectivity as the place where healing is needed. In Hillman's opinion, the myth that inner growth produces worldly power has been a disaster for political intelligence and democracy. "Every time we try to deal with our outrage over the freeway, our misery over the office and the lighting and the crappy furniture, the crime on the streets, whatever—every time we try to deal with that by going to therapy with our rage and fear, we're depriving the political world of something." (p. 5). Therapy as a self-centred project fails to acknowledge that the self is an "interiorization of community" (p. 40), a gap in the field, Hillman and Ventura argued, which needs to be addressed. "We're not attacking therapy so much as trying to extend it, reveal its blind spots and begin the enormous task of redefining its premises." (p. 53).

Ecopsychology, green psychology and deep ecology

The emergence in the '90s of ecopsychology (Roszak, 1992; Roszak et al, 1995), ecotherapy (Clinebell, 1996) and green psychology (Metzner, 1999), has continued to point to the need for the redirection of some of psychology's energy toward broader social and environmental issues. One guiding principle of ecopsychology holds that "there is a synergistic interplay between planetary and personal well-being... the needs of the planet are the needs of the person, the rights of the person are the rights of the planet." (Roszak, 1992, p. 321). Clinebell (1996) uses the word "ecotherapy" to refer to "both the healing and the growth that is nurtured by healthy interaction with the earth." Metzner prefers the term "green psychology," arguing that "those of us in this field (including Roszak) do not mean to advocate the creation of a new subdiscipline of psychology... Rather we are talking about a fundamental re-envisioning of what psychology is, or what it should have been in the first place—a revision that would take the ecological context of human life into account" (Metzner, 1999, p. 2).

These developments in psychology draw from the deep ecology movement, which, since the early '70s, has been challenging the anthropocentric world view and offering an alternative, ecocentric philosophy. The term "deep ecology" was coined by Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess to distinguish between "shallow" environmentalism,

founded on materialistic science, and a new form of environmentalism based on a deep respect and concern for non-human beings (see Sessions [1995] for a comprehensive overview of this field). Environmental activism which recognizes the value of deep ecology is concerned not only for the physical world, but also for the Anima Mundi, the World as part of Psyche.

Joanna Macy's "Despair and Empowerment" work brought together deep ecology with Buddhist practices (Macy, 1983; 1991; Seed et al, 1988), and she has continued to develop effective ways to support citizens to voice their concerns in community (Macy & Brown, 1998). Bill Moyer also contributed to such citizen empowerment by broadening the concept of activism to include not only those "rebels" on the front line, but all those who work toward social change and engaged citizenship (Moyer et al, 2001). Kellen-Taylor (1998) has called for the incorporation of deep ecology themes and methods into what she calls "ecological expressive therapies."

As a student of both Joanna Macy and the expressive arts therapist Paolo Knill, it has been a natural step for me to attempt to envisage the ways in which the art-work-centred Expressive Arts Therapy, as developed by Knill (Knill et al, 1993), Levine (1992) and colleagues, lends itself to the emancipation of the Anima Mundi. The therapist holds back from psychotherapeutic interpretation of the art work, entering with its creator into the realm of *poiesis*, where the art work can itself reveal its significance. Within this frame, the de-souled world can once again be ensouled and speak to us of its suffering without the fear of being reduced to projection

and neurosis. And if the work asks to go further than the confines of the one-to-one therapy space, community art rituals offer a vehicle for this sharing which can inspire others who resonate with the same concerns.

Community Arts Therapy

In the rest of this paper, I would like to give a personal account of my own community arts therapy work and self-support work.

Since my earliest experiences of environmental community arts events on the Central Coast of NSW, Australia (Cameron, 1997; Henkel & Canin, 1994; Faire, 2004), I have been excited by the possibilities at the interface between community art and the arts therapies, particularly in facilitating the clarification and sharing of concerns among communities about social and environmental issues.

The following are three examples of my own explorations of the forms that community arts therapy might take.

1) "Soundasations"

Short for "Sound and Dance Conversations," Soundasations is a monthly music and movement improvisation ritual which has been evolving over the last twelve years in Sydney (Faire, 2002b). As a co-caretaker of these leaderless gatherings I have witnessed the holding function of the therapist being created by the community itself and the organic unfolding of supporting structures for improvisation. For example: the sound-makers begin softly, listening to one another; a rhythm gradually emerges which entices dancing and miming; sound-makers,

watching the movers, amplify their gestures in sound and this feedback “looping” spins off into a spontaneous song; the song and the dialogue end and we enter a deep silence.

Participants at these gatherings were asked in an informal survey I conducted in 1995 to list key words or phrases which sum up what these gatherings mean to them and to describe memorable moments. From their responses, I drew together five meaning-clusters, summarized by the following terms:

- i. Play-freedom-spontaneous-improvising-exploration
- ii. Community-kinship-tribal-communication-connection
- iii. Earth-ancient-ritual-sacred
- iv. Deeper-self-expression-healing-safe
- v. Fantastic-spectacular-joy-fun-ecstasy

Transpersonal/ecological themes (category iii) were particularly prevalent in descriptions of gatherings which had occurred outdoors in parks. Participants described “archetype emerging through dance,” “singing the earth,” and “feeling myself being danced by the drums.”

One meaningful moment was described as “...enter[ing] a timeless, spaceless dimension united with people gathering in such places to celebrate the earth and the spirit, the fire and the trees, the whole cosmic cycle—it was like bringing together Aboriginal and European tribal energies and creating a new energy of our own time. It was a wonderful contradiction to the alienation and sense of disconnection I sometimes experience living in the big city.”

Disturbing themes from current world events (such as nuclear testing

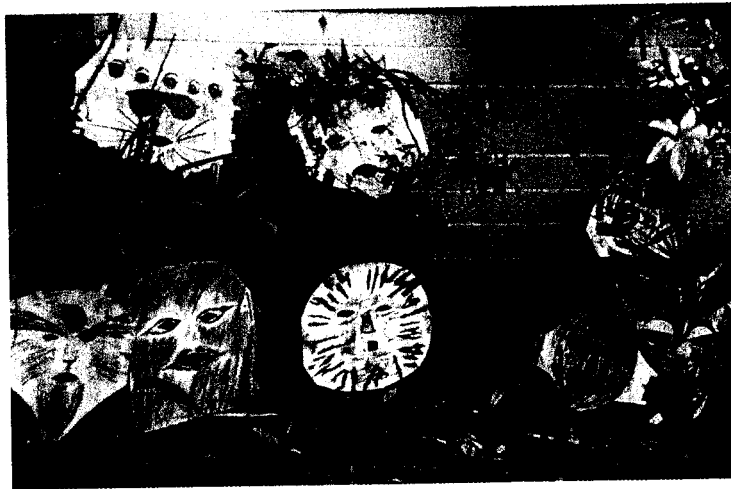


Figure 1. Masks made and worn by participants in a *Council of All Beings* workshop. The masks represent “allies” from nature which “make themselves known” to participants during a part of the workshop in which they take a walk by themselves in the bush (or if this is not possible, an imaginary walk).

or the plight of refugees) have often incorporated themselves into spontaneous songs, dances and dramatic enactments. It has been very interesting for me as a therapist to watch my community creating a container for itself in which it has been safe to unleash and artistically explore powerful feelings of a political nature which tend to be socially disenfranchised.

2) The Council of All Beings

A deep ecology workshop developed by Macy and Seed (Seed et al, 1988; Kellen-Taylor, 1998), the Council of All Beings is a series of structured processes which support participants to imaginatively enter into, and speak from, non-human perspectives about current global problems. Arts therapy methods have been incorporated into these processes to deepen the experience, although again the community itself forms the container, and facilitation of processes is shared by group members. During the process of "Evolutionary Remembering" (Macy, 2003), participants imaginatively embody the movements and sounds of our animal and human ancestors, giving rise to direct experiences of "ecological self" (Bragg, 1996). Making a mask of an "ally" in nature (Fig. 1) and then moving, sounding and speaking from behind the mask during the council process also enables us to glimpse beyond our human-centredness. Drumming together and singing songs of dissent help to reinspire those who feel isolated and despairing by connecting them with the broader activist community.

The Council of All Beings structure was adapted to explore the theme of reconciliation using creative arts therapies in a workshop called *Towards Creative Reconciliation* held at the

NECTA (Network for Exploring Creativity in Therapy through the Arts) conference *Hand in Hand* in July 2000 (Faire et al, 2000).

3) "What are you concerned about?"

In December 2000, I co-facilitated a workshop entitled "Expressive Music Therapy: Empowering Engaged Citizens and Communities" at an Education and Social Action Conference. Participants wrote and shared "trouble songs" about their concerns (Faire and Langan, 2004). The following year I developed this further into the "What are you concerned about?" workshop open to both University of Technology Sydney Music Therapy students and members of the general Sydney community. The structure of the workshop is diagrammed in Fig. 2.

Participants shared their current concerns about community, environmental and global issues and the feelings associated with these concerns. Arts modalities were then used to express these concerns, and after a process of dialogue with them, the art works were shared with the group in a ritual designed by the participants. The highly creative and individual forms and themes that these art works contained are summarised in Fig. 3. I was inspired by the sincerity and vulnerability of these works and their creators; they showed me how much creative energy is locked inside us when we despair of being heard and making a difference to the world's suffering.

I have lately been encouraged by the emergence in the music therapy discourse of socially-oriented Community Music Therapy (<http://www.voices.no>; Kenny and Stige, 2002; Pavlicevic and Ansdell, 2004), which has the potential to serve both individual

The Group Prepares

Self-care and confidentiality agreements
Broadening "activism" (Moyer et al, 2001)
Brainstorming of concerns about the world

Beginning Individual Explorations

"Creativity contour map" to establish comfort zones and growing edges in various arts modalities (Faire, 2003)
Somatic grounding processes (Faire, 2002a)
Constructing "cairn" of natural objects representing concerns (Macy & Brown, 1998)

"Decentering" Through Art

Individual time for art works to emerge (Knill, 2000)

Encounter With Art Works (Knill, 2001)

Groups of three: facilitator supports dialogue between creator and work; scribe notes dialogue

Group Ritual

Opening ceremony
Individuals share in community through art
Closing ceremony

Closing Words

Dialogue: "sensitivity to others" set to drum & double bass

Dance with veils: "we are all united like part of an ocean" with group musical accompaniment

Tree mask and song duet: "concern for trees"

Drawing: "tolerance of difference"

Mask dance: "dancing diversity"

Story: "the broken soul" recited to piano improvisation

Mask and song: "marginalised peoples"

Figure 2.

Diagram of a general workshop structure incorporating individual artistic expression of concerns about the world, small-group dialogue with the art work, and final group sharing through a community arts ritual, based on art-work-centered expressive arts therapy.

Figure 3.

Forms and themes of art-works created in the *What are you concerned about?* workshop facilitated by the writer in November 2001.

and community in “giving voice to experiences that have been silenced” (McLeod quoted in Stige, 2002, p. 242) and in which (echoing Hillman) “therapy may be considered an emancipatory practice” (Stige, 2002, p. 243). I was also recently inspired by the “music and social action” workshop of Phil Nunn and Simon Ronk (2002), youth workers in Sydney, which gave rise to a group song called “Too Much Bad News.”

My Own “Trouble Song” Writing Process

As a final illustration, I would like to describe the way in which the writing of trouble songs are part of my own struggle to maintain my sanity as a person and a therapist in what Wilber has so aptly called “a world gone slightly mad” (Wilber, 1997). I will focus on the most recent of these songs to insist on being written.

Iraqi Girl

*I heard about you on the radio
As I was driving home
They were talking about a photograph of you
Being carried by a man
Probably your father
You looked quite faint
Which is no wonder
Since your feet had been severed
And were dangling from your legs*

Iraqi girl

*They talked about how that photo
Was too strong to put in the newspaper
It might put people off their breakfast
So they cropped the photograph
They cut off your feet
So that people—the “over 50% of people”—
Who approve of this war
Could eat their breakfast
Without facing your horror*

Iraqi girl

*Afterwards I found myself wondering:
Which cut was the most obscene?
Which cut was the most obscene?*

*I wondered if you had survived
Or what future lay before you
Even if you had*

*If you had been here in Sydney
They would have rushed you
To Royal North Shore Hospital
And your feet would have been
Sewn back on with microsurgery,
Or at the very least
You would have been fitted with
Prosthetic feet to walk on*

*I wonder what lies before
An Iraqi girl
With no feet*

When I first played a recording of this song to a friend, I was told that it was too strong and that no one would want to hear it. I sent it to an activist song site but received no reply, so I gave up. Then, about a month later, I heard Fran Healy being interviewed about his song "The Beautiful Occupation," and this inspired me. I also heard about a Truth Mandala workshop based on the work of Joanna Macy (Macy, 1998), the focus of which would be to share our feelings in the aftermath of the war in Iraq. At that workshop I found people who were willing to hear my song. I felt grateful that some people could bear to face the strong emotions I had expressed.

A few weeks later I came across a discussion of the complex issues surrounding the war in Iraq by Ken Wilber (Wilber, 2003). Outlining the many possible attitudes to the war in terms of "value-Memes" (based on Don Beck's "Spiral Dynamics Integral" described in Wilber, 2000), Wilber concluded:

"I personally believe that any protest movement that does not equally protest both America's invasion and Saddam's murder of 400,000 people is a protest movement that does not truly represent peace or non-aggression or world-centric values."

Wilber (2003, p. 6)

After reading Wilber's critique of the "green vMeme" I had to admit that my song espoused typically "green" values (eg: postmodern, multicultural, sensitive, pluralistic) with their own blind spots (eg: imagining these values to be the only correct values and being intolerant of other perspectives). I began to look more deeply into the complexity of the debates surrounding the "just war" and the censorship of war reporting in the media. I also searched for and found the shocking photograph, trying to find out what had happened to the girl: was she still alive? Some references to her on the net imply that she was already dead when the photograph was taken and that she was being carried off the back of a truck by her grandfather. I wrote to sites displaying the photo to try to find its source but so far have been without success.

Final comments

What determines what we care about? For me, this process is mysterious. An image comes to my mind of a tiny Tinkerbell-like fairy who flies on ahead of me with a glowing light, beckoning me to my next "growing edge." At times

when this light has been almost extinguished by feeling overwhelmed at the one-way media bombardment of bad news, my artistic responses have been a way to venture out again from under my paralysis.

In a post-modern world, the political nature of therapy is undisputed. Aware that the trap in individualising pathology is a failure to recognize and treat social dysfunction, arts therapists are growing ever more mindful of social contexts.

All of us have been led to engage with the arts therapies because we care about something. Whether as a “calling” or as a “profession,” and whatever our client groups, the arts therapies also offer therapists and clients the possibility of responding as artists to global events and sharing our protest art and trouble songs in the community, thereby contributing toward a more inclusive democratic process. I would like to suggest that a radical community arts therapy which questions the status quo and explores alternatives is essential to counterbalance the tendency for the arts therapies to become part of the consolidation of power by professionals in a society in which we are all increasingly giving over our decision making to “the experts.”

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