



ESTABLISHING A MODEL OF COMMUNICATION BETWEEN ARTISTS AND CREATIVE ARTS THERAPISTS¹

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Tens of thousands of years ago, long before the word art had entered the language system of any culture, there existed a human need for creative expression beyond that required for the completion of utilitarian tasks. That which we now call art, the making of events or objects of contemplation through an act of the imagination, displayed or performed in special environments, was then simply another aspect of everyday existence. Yet, though a natural and accepted activity, art making was once removed from the business of hunting and gathering. Its otherness was marked by its detachment from the profane aspects of daily existence. The adornment of the body with scars and tattoos and jewels, the painting of caves, the choreography of stone monoliths, the chanting and masquerading and dancing and telling of stories upon a feast day or during an ordinary gathering all pointed to the sense of the doubleness of human life. It was as if the human being was also another form of being—an animal or deity, a spirit or part of nature. It was as if by being human, one had the option or right or obligation to transcend the limitations of body and mind and enact a drama of super-human proportions.

In its original form, art-making was a natural human expression of transcendence, sanctioned in cultural practices and community life throughout the world. Human beings made art, paradoxically, to transcend their human limitations. Certainly there were other, more grounded functions of traditional art-

making—for example, documenting an event such as a hunt or a battle, beautifying the body, and entertaining an audience gathered for the purpose of entertainment. However, from the point of view of the creator of the art object, the making endowed the maker with extraordinary powers. As creator, the traditional artist fashioned images of an alternative reality, that of the imagination, different from the one given by nature and taken in through the five senses.

Art objects are now regularly called works of art or art works. In former times the juxtaposition of art and work would have seemed rather strange to one who believed that movement and painting and storytelling were playful means of expression.

Like other natural human endeavors, art has become compartmentalized, split off and ultimately, commercialized. It is generally made and performed in spaces far removed from community life and accessible only to a few. Or if art is accessible to an audience, it is generally conveyed through the mass media which tend to, like Andy Warhol painting soup cans, blur the boundaries between the two realities of the everyday and the imagination. Art has been split off not only from community life, but also from the original internal impulse to create, that is, a transcendent one pointing to the doubleness and paradox of human existence. A transcendent notion of art still exists in the minds of many artists but often the transcendence of Self is onto other selves like Cindy Sherman photographing herself in endless media-inspired persona or the novelist Philip

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Roth creating a fictional novelist named Philip Roth in his book, *Operation Shylock* (Roth, 1993). The notion of storytelling and myth-making, of playing God or gods and creating a universe or two, is often missing in contemporary art.

There are many exceptions to this statement as some post-modern novelists and playwrights, musicians, dancers and visual artists have deconstructed conventional texts and images in an attempt to create mythic environments within communities and within the psyches of the individual spectator/participant. And as a harbinger for the future, experimental artists have attempted to do the same through focusing upon the body as if it were a canvas or stage and using and abusing it by piercing, tattooing, and in the case of film maker, Peter Greenaway (see his recent film, *The Pillow Book*), constructing entire texts upon every fold of the flesh.

In a most compelling way, occasionally a community will respond to a tragic event through a spontaneous outpouring of feeling through art. Two recent examples occurred in Israel and England. The former was the creation of the poetry wall in Tel-Aviv in 1996 adjacent to the spot where Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin was murdered. To express their horror, despair and hope, Israelis and others from all around the world adorned the drab concrete structure that framed Rabin's place of murder with poems, songs, and drawings. These creative expressions exist as a memorial to a brave, inspirational leader and as a reminder to the bereaved that images can aid in healing.

The second example is the explosion of poems and drawings, collages, flower arrangements and personal gifts that appeared at the entrance of Buckingham Palace and Kensington Palace at the time of the death of Diana, Princess of Wales. The profundity of grief experienced by millions who participated in the symbolism of the people's princess found expression in art objects displayed publicly at the gates of power.

These examples, however, as powerful as they are, are exceptions to the trend toward the profane and commercial in art. Generally speaking, art is removed from the community and from its transcendent function within the psyche. As brilliantly demonstrated some 25 years ago by Berger, Blomberg, Fox, Dibb, & Hollis (1973), art has become de-contextualized, removed from a sense of place or occasion, as easily seen on a tourist hotel wall or in a print ad in a tabloid magazine as on the ceiling of a holy cathedral.

In part, the profession of creative arts therapy arose as a response to the evolution of art making. Creative

arts therapy, modeled in part on the early forms of creative expression and healing rites, is also in the tradition of twentieth century artists who conceived of their work in extra-aesthetic terms. I think of the French theatre artist, Antonin Artaud (1958), who conceived of his work in spiritual terms; the German Bertolt Brecht (see Willett, 1964), who conceived of his work in political and sociological terms, the British Peter Brook (1978), the Polish Jerzy Grotowski (1968) and the American Richard Schechner (1985), all of whom conceived of their work in anthropological terms; and I think, especially, of the Russians, Constantin Stanislavski (1936) and Nicolas Evreinov (1927), who conceived of their work in psychological terms. But it was an Austrian psychiatrist, J. L. Moreno, who ultimately provided the clear modern link between the arts and healing. In his early theatrical experiments with the dispossessed in Vienna and later with the mentally ill in the United States, Moreno (1947) offered an alternative to what he called the cultural conserves of art, that is, an art removed from an immediate connection to the lives of people. It was Moreno's wild idea that modern social and psychological illness could be counteracted by taking on dysfunctional roles and playing them out within a psychodrama theatre until people indeed become like God, that is, creator and shaper of their own destinies.

The impulse of these and other artists and performance theorists looking for ways to envision their art as an integral force in making meaning in human life was shared by an emerging group of creative arts therapists in drama and psychodrama, dance and movement, music and art and poetry throughout the second half of the 20th century. Like their counterparts in the arts they, too, searched for ways to restore some of the essential functions of art making. From my point of view as a drama therapist, one essential function is that of transcendence, the playing of the other, the not-me, the not-human, in order to better understand and appreciate what it means to be me, a not-god, an imperfect human being.

If it were possible for creative arts therapists to speak with the aboriginal art makers or even with the performance theorists mentioned above, all would, I think, share many common opinions. For one, they would recognize the creative expressive activity of human beings as healthy and as a means of releasing, if not unhealthy tendencies, then at least fearful ones. Further, all would probably assert the significance of the human need to impersonate the super-human, that is, to transcend their own limitations. In doing so, they

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