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Inscape

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The observations made by the character in Gerard Manly Hopkins's poem as he sat by the window looking out reminded me of one's reaction to the world and how simple and different experiences draw us into a shift in consciousness. For example looking at certain imagery may bring back memories of a celebration at a family gathering because all of the weather conditions outside are exactly the same as a specific moment in time past. It may also take us somewhere totally bizarre, something that we have no control over and we think – why did I start thinking about that now?

The connection to the unconscious is not unfamiliar to artists. When they come to art therapy study they have already embarked on a great deal of inner-work. It is a natural process for artists to do some form of self exploration within their art training. A definition of the self being the wisdom of the organism and the totality of the purposefulness of that which we are. When we do not pay attention to this wisdom and dishonor the self it will show up in relationships, attack our body, occur in our dreams and produce emotional states. The Jungian approach to this is to explore its purpose with the work being constant. Certainly there are limitations to working through issues alone. I am not suggesting that this is the only way that artists can achieve good mental health, but practicing artists have experience in moving between the conscious and the unconscious. This can only be an advantage when engaging clients in process work.

The self for Jung (1971) is a totality of the psyche, both unconscious and conscious. The aim is to work on our conscious awareness rather than be swamped by something within. When writing about patients who came to see him, complaining about a vague sense of meaninglessness and emptiness in their lives, Jung's approach was to encourage the patient to get in touch with the depths of their own psyche. The way to do this was by paying careful attention to their dreams, fantasies, and imaginal life. Jung (1966a) believed that because of the psyche's innate tendency towards wholeness, which can be achieved by the gradual assimilation by consciousness of the products of the unconscious, his patients would heal by establishing a dialogue with the unconscious.

How we deal with and what we do with the unconscious imagery is important. The client in a therapeutic situation may speak words, play, act, and dance or be encouraged to express the imagery with art materials. The artist conversely has a natural compulsion to externalize these internal images on a habitual basis. For some artists the act of exhibiting in a gallery situation is a disclosure to be witnessed. Just as in therapy where one may find a release in speaking the words, there may be a release in giving imagery to an audience. This can sometimes alleviate issues and on occasions make our demons and gods shrink to a manageable size.

As an artist, much of my work begins with a single mental image or series of unrelated images. In my early art practice I would take this material to a visual diary and try to connect it to my experiences and current life. This would change the original images and mould them into a new identity which I would try to make aesthetically pleasing – (for the viewer). Often this failed. I had to leave some bizarre content in the work even though I did not understand what it was or why it was there, but I knew that it had to remain. Now I just put all my imagery out there. I do not try to attach meaning at the time of making. Maybe I have discovered a way of entering my inner world by not questioning. I enjoy this ambiguity. I can now read new meaning each time I view the work which corresponds to where I am in the here and now and

hopefully other people will also connect to the work when it is shared in a public space. This leads to transference.

Transference, whether it is acknowledged or not, is inevitably present in any therapeutic interaction. A painting in a gallery may reveal an aspect of the world of the artist. This may prompt a personal response from the viewer who connects the imagery to their own experience. This is a similar experience to the transference and counter transference in a therapeutic relationship. When speaking about analytical art psychotherapy, Schaverien (1992, p.70) makes a similarity between the patient and the therapist to the artist and viewer in the gallery. "As with the stage and alter, there is a central focus for the shared gaze, a space where in the gazes of both people, who together regard the picture, mingle. Here the transference and counter-transference meet."

An image made in the confines of the therapeutic relationship acts like a window with a view into the inner world of the client. So does art in a gallery, but there are limitations. Firstly, in a gallery there is a much larger area to contain the psychic space. There isn't the intimate boundary of a small therapeutic room shared with a therapist. Secondly, there is no therapeutic alliance. i.e an agreement to work together by client and therapist. And finally, the artist is not often present in the gallery when the viewer engages with the work, therefore there can only be a two way relationship formed between the viewer and the artwork. As a result the artist must be able to lure the viewer into a relationship with technique and materials creating honest communication at a visceral level.

It is this genuine interaction that is also essential when forming a therapeutic relationship with a client. To do this the therapist must be true to themselves and have searched for an awareness of their own inner world. Jung (1966a, p.71) considered the necessity for analysts to pay attention to their own defenses and needs. "We could say, with too much exaggeration, that a good half of every treatment that probes at all deeply consists in the doctor's examining himself, for only what he can put right in himself can he hope to put right in the patient..." Therefore we look to the events and our interactions with the outside world to try to make sense of what is going on in the inside. It is the communication with one's own inner landscape that gives us the equipment to become good art therapists.

References

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