

## BOOK REVIEWS

### *The Artist as Therapist*

Arthur Robbins, Ed.D ATR

(New York: Human Sciences Press, 1986. 232 pages. \$29.95)

The author proposes a depth-oriented treatment approach which embraces theoretical aspects of creativity, play, and psychological development. He advances a theory which proposes a parallel between psychological processes and aesthetic form and explores this interrelationship as it applies to various aspects of clinical treatment and teaching. The work is rich in theory and alive with stimulating and provocative ideas that address the value of creativity as a powerful healing force. It is divided into two sections. The first section on theory and technique provides us with a theoretical overview along with an assortment of papers, some co-authored, that develop the theory and explore a variety of ways in which it may be applied to clinical work. Section two presents us with clinical applications using more detailed clinical case material.

Theoretical constructs draw heavily from Object Relations Theory, Ego Psychology, and Aesthetic Form. In particular, much attention is placed upon Winnicott's concept of a 'holding environment' and the need for 'play' in optimal psychological development. Within this framework, the therapy session, with its clear structure, non-intrusive environment, and potential for creative play offers the patient an opportunity to explore his inner object world and discover his true self through the interplay between the evolving symbolic imagery and 'real' relationship with the therapist. Through this process, the patient may play out aspects of developmental arrest or regression, or may confront the therapist with the raw effects tied to primitive unconscious conflicts. The symbolic nature of these communications provides a safe distance for both the therapist and patient to explore, retreat, and advance through the mutually experienced developmental journey. The thera-

pist, as an artist, is sensitized to the developmental issues presented by the patient and their aesthetic counterparts which are communicated through the artwork. He uses this communication to ground himself throughout this journey, developing appropriate interventions or perhaps quietly receiving these communications as confirmation that the treatment is moving on its own energy.

"The artistic, creative and aesthetic element of treatment is understood to embrace the communication process in treatment."

Aesthetic issues of patients can offer clues to the therapist regarding the patient's inner representational world, level of object relationships, and ego development, thus inspiring new ideas for creative therapeutic interventions.

The author's sensitivity and strength as a clinician are clearly demonstrated by the case material. Here, intuition, theoretical knowledge, and a genuine love for creative innovation blend smoothly to present the reader with exciting, unique pieces of clinical work. The respect for and use of creativity by both the therapist and patient are constantly stressed, and a theoretical explanation of the process is presented to support this position.

"The goal of the interplay between art and the 'real' relationship is to facilitate a greater perceptual and affective differentiation between past and present realities. (As) both patient and therapist move back and forth between art form and the relationship . . . a fabric is then woven . . . which is created from the patient's developmental level and the transference/countertransference interplay."

The author goes on to explore the application of his theory in teaching art therapy students Ob-

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ject Relations theory and Ego Psychology. He devises systematically structured drawing exercises that are administered to the students. These are designed to elicit psychodynamic, affectively experienced material through the exploration and verbal elaboration of the images. The students' artwork and descriptive material are included to illustrate the process and demonstrate how students may simultaneously experience, both subjectively and objectively, aspects of their own unconscious reactions to the psychodynamic patterns of clinical patients. This fascinating process leads to identification and exploration of countertransference issues in a safe, supportive environment that is most likely to promote productive insight.

This technique is bold, dramatic, and powerful, thrusting students into an affective experience that confronts the depth of their inner psyche. While one may have questions regarding the proper screening, selection, or preparation of students for this type of emotionally charged approach to teaching, the unquestionable result is that, when properly used, it can provide an affectively potent learning experience that leads to dramatic levels of insight into sophisticated theoretical and clinical phenomena, along with a healthy regard for and sensitivity to the power and importance of one's own personal imagery.

The end result is a powerful learning experience that becomes indelibly woven into the fabric of the students' personality. They are then sensitized to their own unique assets and liabilities which, originating during the early years of life, now interact with and perhaps at times interfere with their work with patients.

Inasmuch as we are all students and continue to learn and evolve as we grow in our lives on many levels, this book has a special message for us all. We should all embrace new ideas that help us in our constant growth process.

This book presents us with some fresh new ways of using ourselves in our work. It attempts to construct a theoretical framework within which we can understand the creative and aesthetic aspects of psychotherapy. It is a work of great potential value for practitioners trained not only in the creative arts, for it talks more broadly about the artist in everyone, and points the way towards learning to apply these universal qualities to our clinical work.

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