

## THE USE OF INSTANT PHOTOGRAPHY IN CREATIVE EXPRESSIVE THERAPY: AN INTEGRATIVE CASE STUDY\*

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### INTRODUCTION

After several years of development and refinement (Wolf, 1976) we have integrated the use of instant photographs with other creative expressive treatment modalities to provide our adolescent population with a therapeutic method which is both engaging and productive.

The following case illustrates how this method may be introduced into ongoing treatment in order to facilitate growth and promote change in a difficult-to-reach adolescent patient.

### BACKGROUND

Ricky is thirteen years old. He is the youngest of six siblings. His four older brothers range in age from 19 to 23 and his sister is 17. The two oldest brothers are currently out of the house, one in a drug residential rehabilitation program and the other in a residential psychiatric treatment facility. Ricky's parents are divorced and his mother, who currently heads the family constellation, is a generally fearful, dependent and overwhelmed woman.

Ricky was reported to be demanding and manipulative at home. He fantasized excessively, had no close friends and was often scapegoated by peers. He was seen as crazy or bizarre because of his lack of regard for social conventions and rules. Ricky was also given to random verbalizations which lacked logic and clarity. His ability to distinguish between fantasy and reality was limited.

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### TREATMENT

During our first session I explained to Ricky that we would be working together twice a week and using various kinds of art materials to create projects. I further mentioned that we would talk about these projects as well as any other things he might wish to discuss. He was enthusiastic and eager to begin a drawing of the Twin Towers (Fig. 1). He then made up a story which, at times, didn't unfold in logical thought processes but had, as its central theme, the idea of travelling up to the top to look around, talk and take pictures. Through this drawing Ricky was acknowledging our work together in which, using the pictures he created, we would look at and talk about things in his life.

His next drawing, produced during our following session, was similar in feeling and content to a first dream presented by a patient in psychoanalysis. It had in it many elements which represented what was going to develop between us in our therapeutic encounter. Again Ricky made up a rambling story. Its main theme involved the burning and destruction of the two towers while a boy, with the help of a man, tried to stop the fire. While all this action took place, a rocket plane flew overhead safely holding all the people until a new building was completed to replace the ruined towers.

From a clinical perspective, one never analyzes the first dream in an analysis. The patient has not yet established a sufficient therapeutic alliance with the

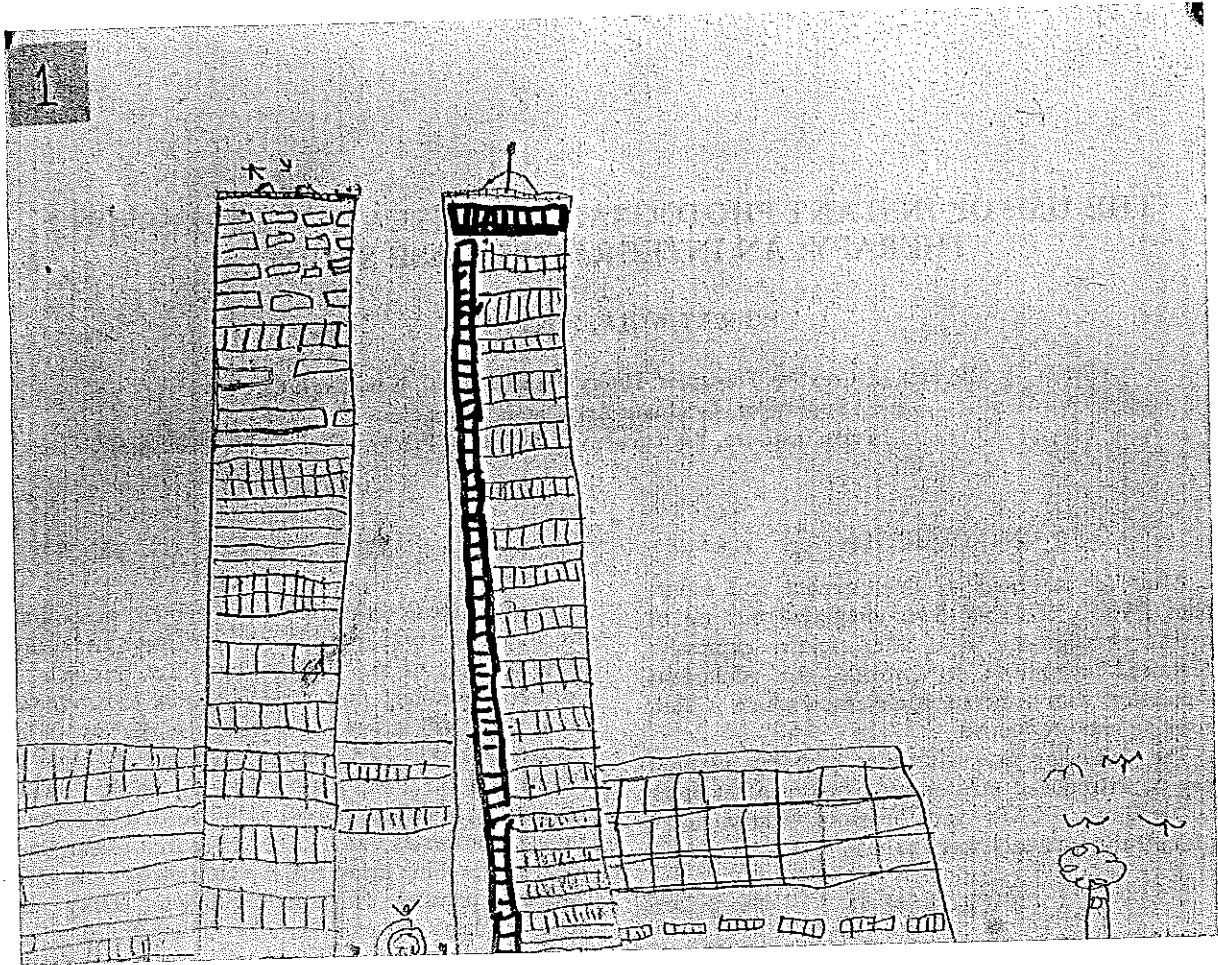


Fig. 1.

analyst to enable him to endure the storm of resistance which would be prematurely provoked by such an intervention. I therefore chose to accept this "special picture," as Ricky called it, as a gift, without searching for its deeper symbolic meaning.

We will see later how, in many ways, this picture was a prophecy of the future course of treatment.

After this drawing, Ricky began to create a whole series of pictures of cars. They took on all possible shapes, sizes and functions. Ricky was quite comfortable communicating symbolically through these images. He made up elaborate stories describing the

particular function of each car, and we played out many of these fantasies on paper. Into this safe, playful atmosphere, I introduced instant photography\* and demonstrated its use to Ricky.

In Fig. 3 we see the initial result. First he drew a monster in the space which his own figure had occupied and then he created a double-figured picture of us fighting with each other. Another image also appeared at this time which further elaborated the theme of a "monster." In Fig. 4 we see a monster, created from a photo of Ricky, threatening to shoot a man (the therapist) in the head and kill him. It

\*Several years ago the Polaroid Corporation introduced, to the consumer market, a process whereby a photograph develops immediately after the film has been exposed. The developing, printing and neutralizing chemical agents are all included within the film cartridge, enabling the photographer to view his finished print within seconds after the shutter has been depressed. This process has greatly reduced the length of time previously needed to develop film and make enlargement from the film negatives.

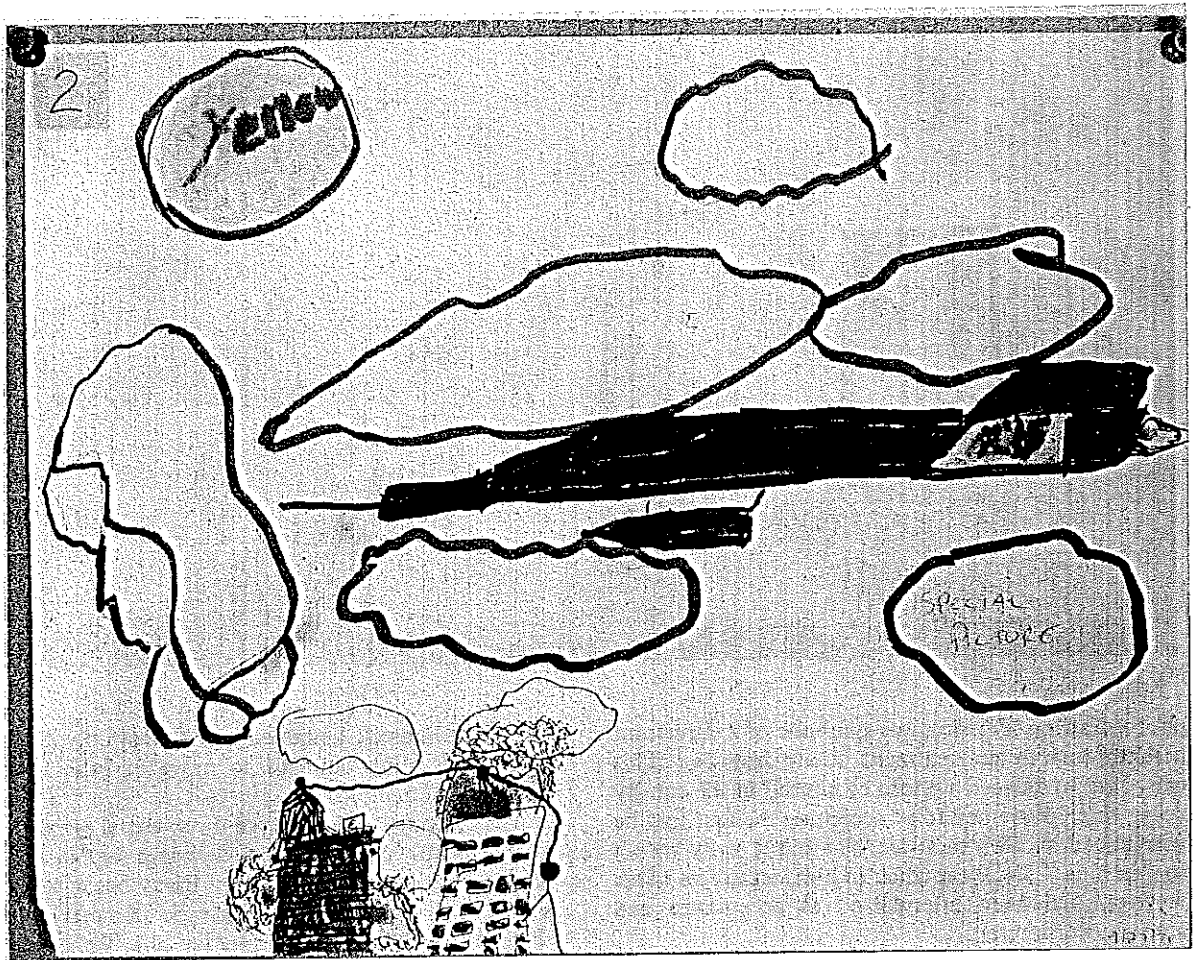


Fig. 2.

became clear, as these images appeared and were elaborated upon, that the "monster" was symbolic of his aggressive and sadistic impulses which he disowned as being "unacceptable." This is not an uncommon phenomenon. By externalizing or projecting all their "bad" feelings onto a monster of some kind, children reduce anxiety connected with drives and feelings which they fear will not be accepted by significant adults.

The transference feeling began to change at this time. Ricky increased his testing and provocative behavior. The "monster" had entered our relationship, not only on paper, but in the form of a "bad" robot Ricky pretended to become during our sessions. We employed role-playing techniques to encourage Ricky to explore these impulses. Although

I tried, at all times, to create an atmosphere of acceptance, I held firmly to the limits which had been clearly set in our relationship. Slowly, at his own pace, Ricky was able to give up his "Robot" and, as he came to see that I was not put off by his feelings and drives, he was able to own them as "belonging to him."

His drawings during this period reflected this process. In Fig. 5a we see a monster appear in a drawing of a car. Sensing the need to explore this monster further, I suggested that we play a scribble game together (Winnicott). As we drew upon each other's scribbles, a monster finally appeared (Fig. 5b), but this was a playful, silly monster with a benign smile upon its face. Ricky was able to see that his monster wasn't really so terrible. The next instant

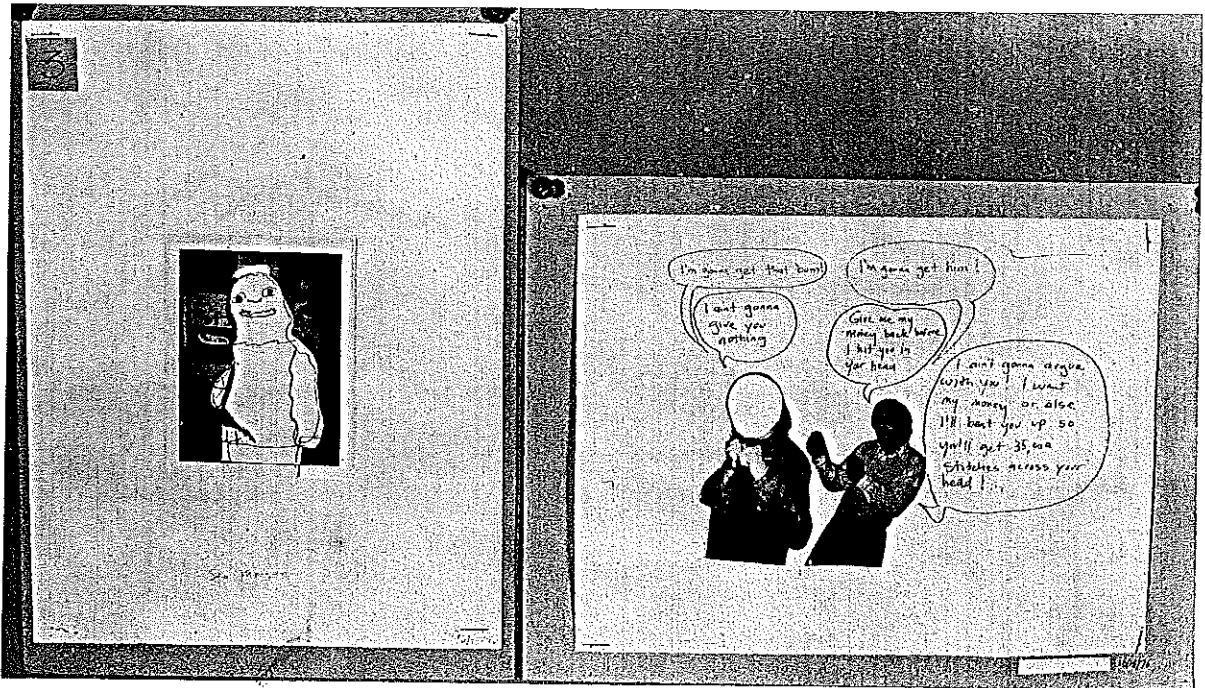


Fig. 3.

photo/drawing (Fig. 5c), was symbolic of a significant breakthrough in our treatment. Ricky drew one of his cars, and introduced a photo of himself in the car. By doing this, he seemed to be accepting the fact that he was indeed his own monster, but that it really wasn't so "terrible." My acceptance of him, regardless of his feelings, had been internalized as acceptance and empathy for himself.

His provocative behavior reached a peak at this point, with Ricky, instead of the "robot", acting out. He would, for example, enter my office early for his session and accuse me of not being ready for (caring about) him. Then he'd storm out, slam the door, complain bitterly to other staff and refuse to return. I had to actively pursue him (proving that I did care) (Alexander), clarify reality, hold firmly to the physical limits of his acting out, and be there for him after his rages subsided, all in a sympathetic and understanding way.

Again there was a concurrent change in his drawings. He began to draw scirrbly, messy drawings, as in Fig. 6 which was a picture of me drawn in brown, with bugs and feces all over me. Through this drawing, he was acknowledging how he was in a sense "shitting all over me." By not engaging in his anal battles and consistently pointing out how his actions

only hurt himself, I enabled him to leave behind this period of acting out and to move in other, more productive directions.

His drawings took on more overt sexual symbolism at this point. In the series of drawings seen in Fig. 7, we see an interesting transition. Ricky began to draw simple line drawings or pictographs (Kramer) which depicted various aggressive sexual acts. We began to talk of sexuality, sexual feelings and physiological functions. I was seen by Ricky as one with whom he could say anything, and voice any anxiety, fear or misconception, without being put down for it. As time passed, the aggressive component of his sexual drive began to share center stage with more tender and sensitive components. His drawings reflected this change and we see, toward the end of this series, his increased concern for, and preoccupation with, the theme of "love" for a girl in his class. This integration of aggressive and tender sexual drives is crucial for more mature emotional functioning (Freud).

These tender feelings began to be expressed through the transference. Ricky told me I was his best friend. The fighting had subsided and he now openly accepted me as a person who would help him.

During one session he told me that he felt like a prisoner at home when he was sick and had to miss a

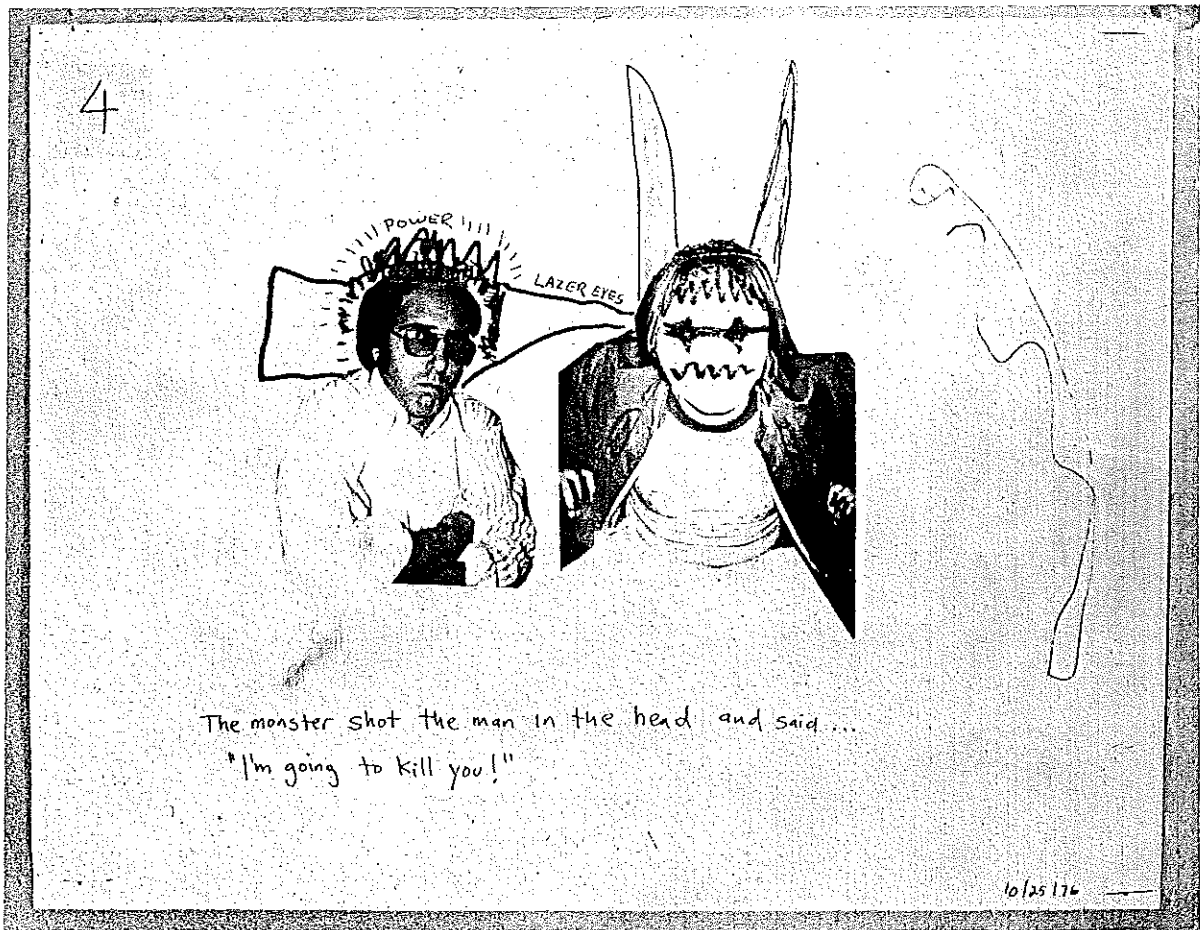


Fig. 4.

class. We created an instant photo image of this scene (Fig. 8a). This led to another image (Fig. 8b) in which he saw me as a person who would help him escape from "jail." He began to talk about feeling sad that he had few close friends besides me. I used this opportunity to open up the issue of his provocation with peers. His relationships with classmates began to improve. He no longer needed to set himself up to be a scapegoat in order to justify his feelings of being a bad or worthless person.

This opened the way for us to enter a phase of treatment where we engaged in many competitive games. Ricky selected a special mural project, using instant photos and drawings, to depict us playing basketball together (Fig. 9). His aggressive drives had found a new, more socially acceptable outlet which

now permitted us to develop a new closeness to replace the constant fighting which had previously dominated our relationship.

Next he chose to make a project which required a great deal of attention and time to complete. Together we designed a racetrack on cardboard (Fig. 10a) and made paper race cars, with paper clips on the underside to allow them to be moved by magnets under the board. We playfully raced our cars around the track, screeching and revving our engines in a gleeful display of enthusiasm. These races inevitably ended with both a pile-up of cars, and a great deal of frantic laughter. When he had exhausted his need to compete and "win" all the races, Ricky suggested an idea for his final project of the school year. It was a magnetic board again, but this time it was to be of a



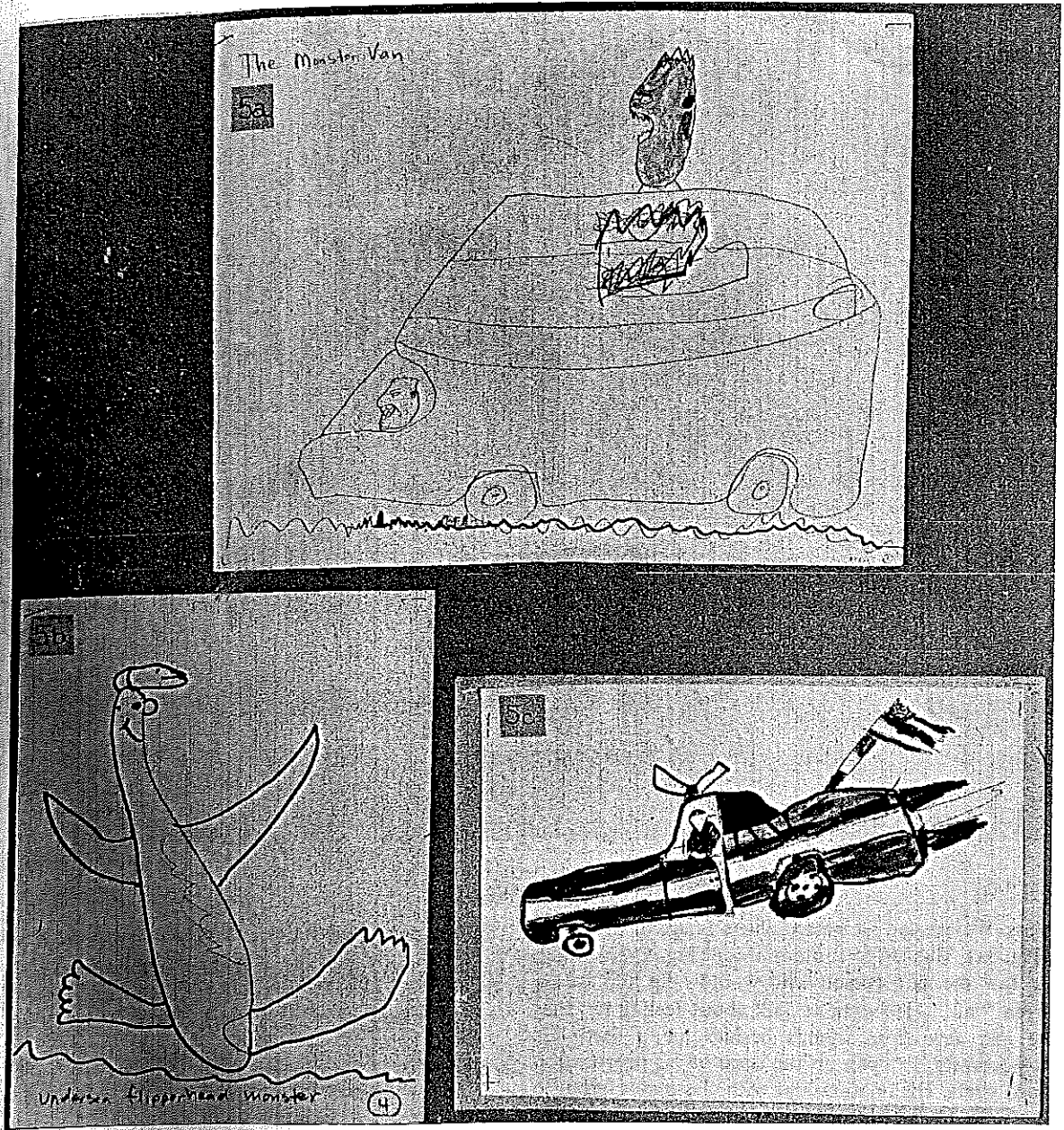


Fig. 5.

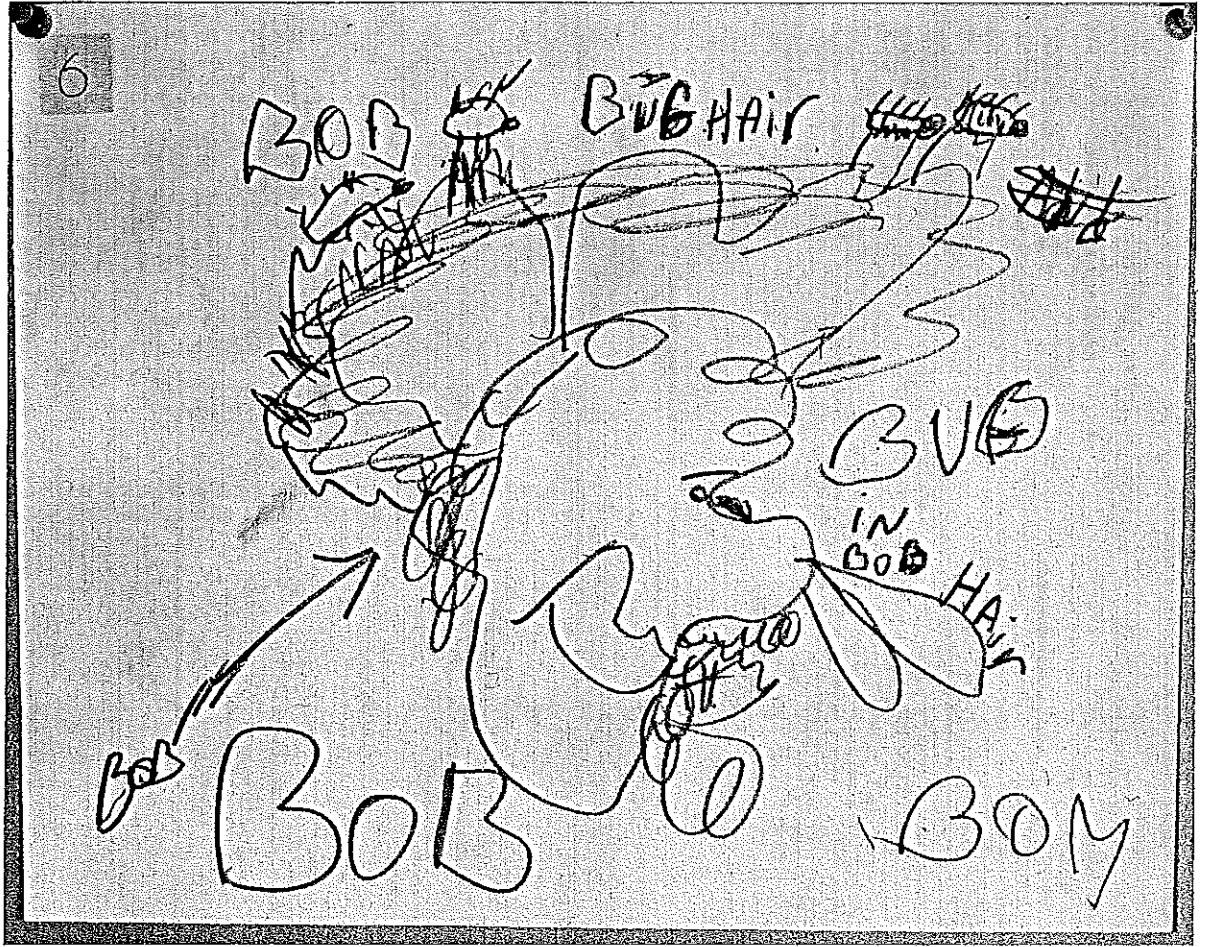


Fig. 6.

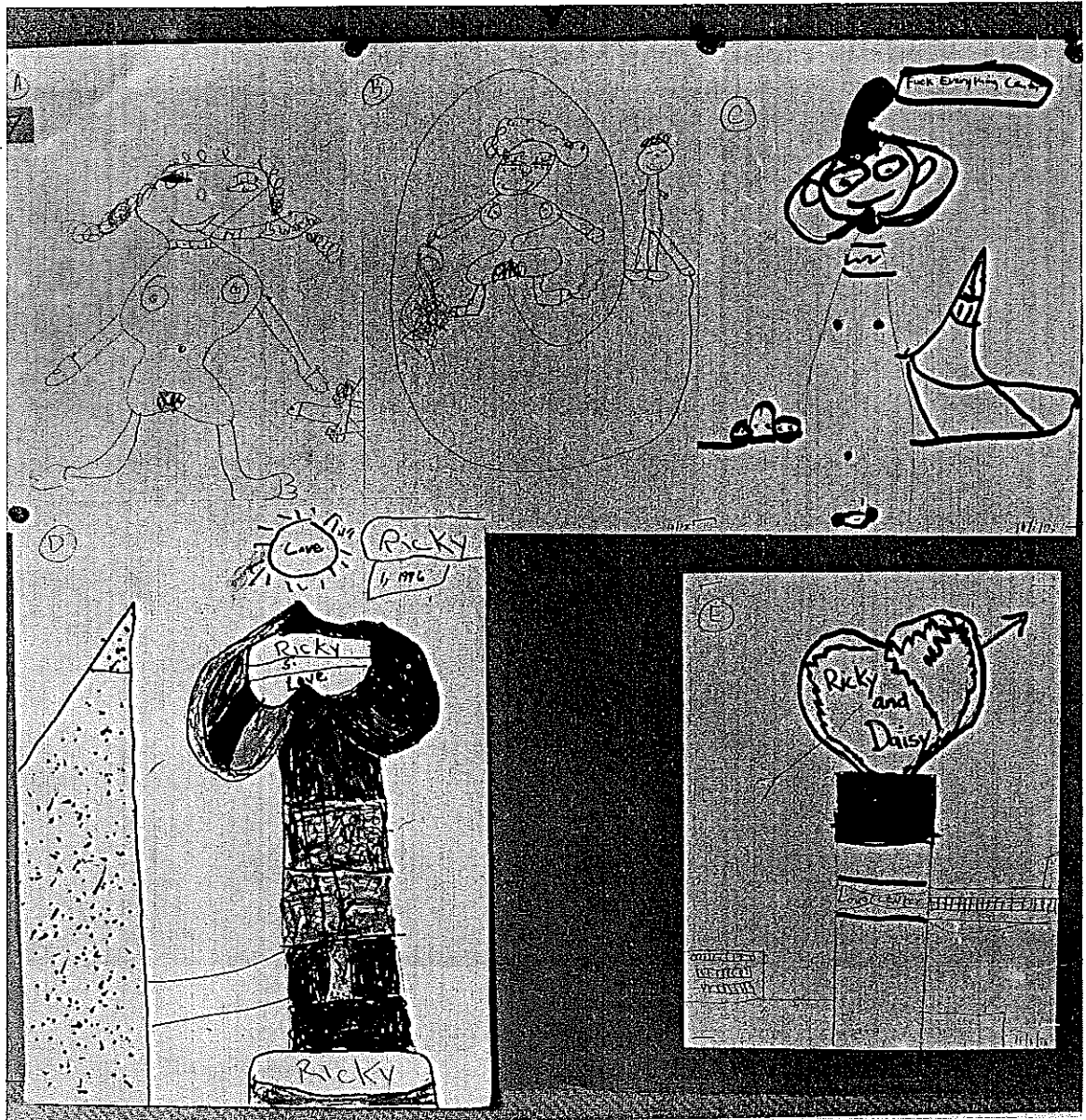


Fig 7.



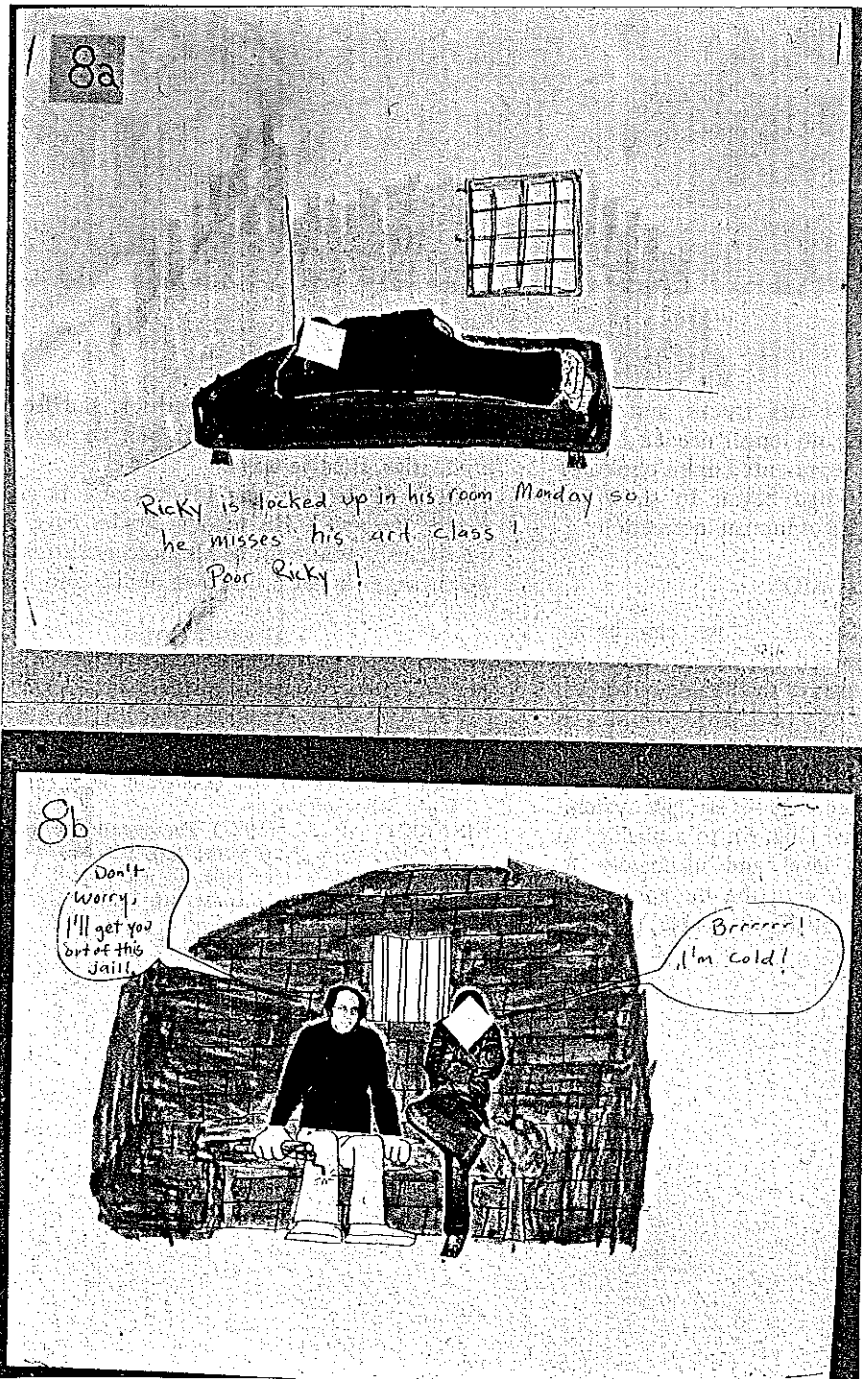


Fig. 8.



Fig. 9.

city street with all kinds of cars, trucks, and social interchanges (Fig. 10b). He no longer needed to win the race. As symbolically represented in his choice of this final project, Ricky had begun to show his appreciation for the richness of human interaction.

#### CONCLUSION

If we now return to Fig. 2 we can better understand how it represented the future course of treatment. The burning down of the phallic buildings, along with the emergence of a new, single building in their place, was quite similar in many ways to the stormy transference battles and ultimate harmonious reuniting which was to occur. As his struggle systematically moved from an anal (Fig. 6), to a phallic, to an oedipal (competitive) level and ultimately to resolution by identification with the therapist as an empathetic guiding force, Ricky was able to form

more gratifying peer relationships, and free a great deal of energy which could then be used in more productive, creative ways.

Over the school year his behavior in classes has greatly improved. His reading grades have increased significantly as a result of his increased attention span and stronger belief in his own ability and self-worth.

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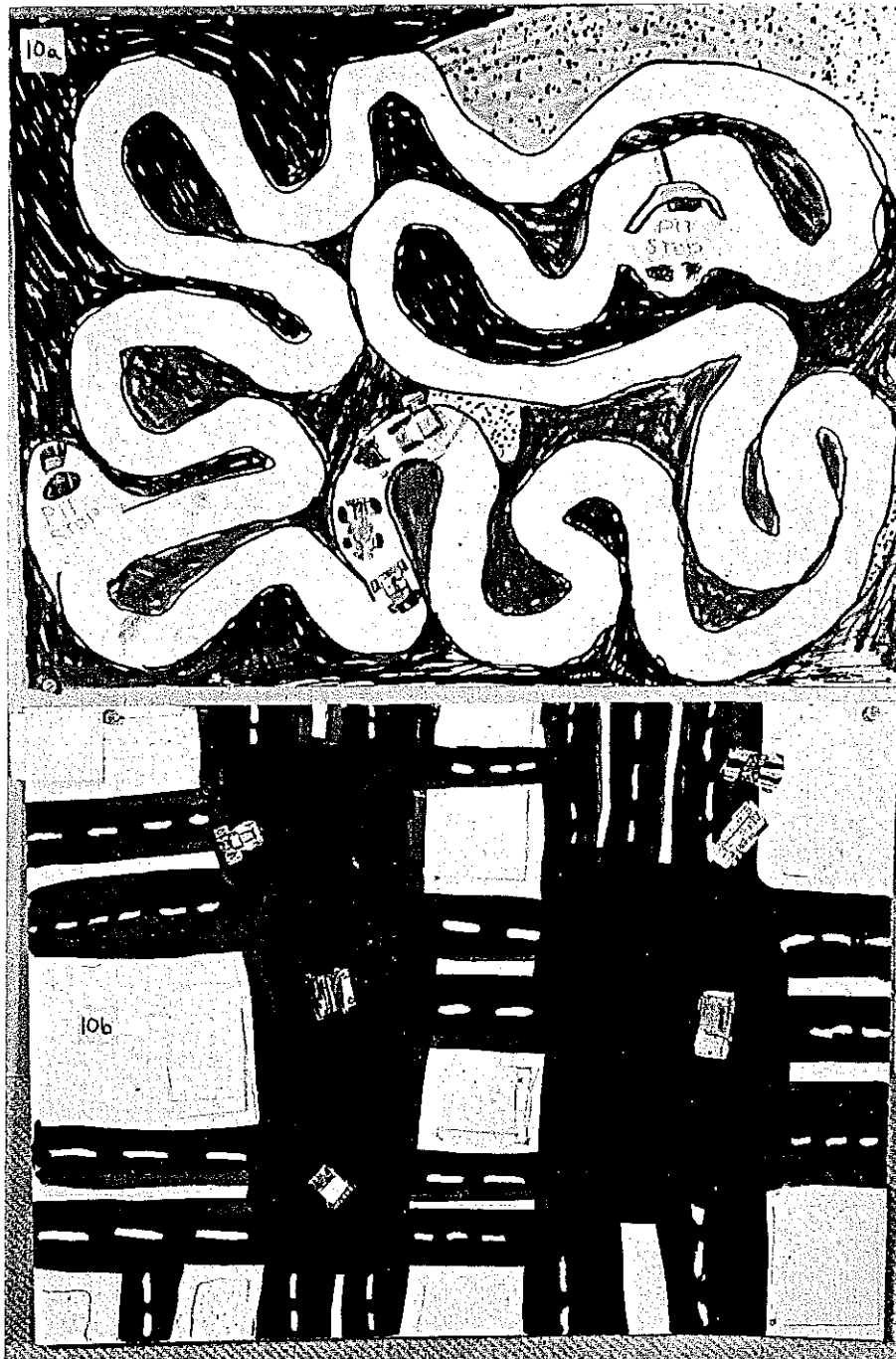


Fig. 10.