

Theoretical Sources of Art Therapy Beside the Psychodynamic Approach

A thorough analyses of the theoretical foundations of art therapy also requires a consideration of other theoretical approaches beside the general psychodynamic paradigm. These theories include: the family systems approach, the theory of game psychotherapy, the client-centred approach, the clinical approach, the holistic approach, and the synergistic approach.

Family Systems Approach

The theory of systemic family psychotherapy rests on the understanding that the family is a *living*, open system. The theory attempts to take into account not only the structural and functional features of the family, but also the diverse external influences that it *admits and enables*. The systemic family approach implies the recognition that an individual's problems are related to disorders in the social and, in some cases, the family system. Therefore, providing help to the specific person requires an impact on all members of the family system¹.

Thus observed, the therapist's efforts should be directed at rendering the kind of assistance that would contribute to a new understanding of the family's problems by all its members. An adequate assessment of the situation is required when problems arise, as well as reformatting of the behavioural reactions of each family member. In addition, it is the task of the therapist to reveal the inner potential of the community as a whole, thanks to which its members can amend their attitudes.

An example of the use of family therapy concepts, as applied to art therapy practice, could be the works of Helen Landgarten and Lois Carey. In describing her method of working with families, Landgarten noted that it is based on a combination of two approaches - dynamically oriented art therapy (following M. Naumberg's concept) and her own analytical researches. She noted that the model includes a diagnostic and a psychotherapeutic aspect.

¹ Фримен, Д. *Техники семейной терапии*. Санкт Петербург, Питер, 2001, с. 27.

The directive approach is applied during the first working stage, enabling the activation of the interaction between family members and determining the communication patterns characteristic of this family. This is done by analysing two aspects of the artistic work: dynamics and content. Even in the course of a single session, the therapist can establish the responsiveness of the participants in the therapeutic process which characterizes the family system as a whole. The psychotherapeutic aspect of the method enables family members to become aware of their characteristic patterns of interaction and their subsequent change.

Landgarten thoroughly analysed the various types of dysfunctional patterns of intrafamily communication that can be revealed on the basis of the analysis of the drawings - pseudo dependence, parentification, family stratification, family aberrations, triangulation, formation of an undifferentiated ego-mass and fusion, as well as processes of alienation.

When listing the various tasks of family art therapy, Landgarten noted that these are related to the goal of treatment and, in addition to the dysfunctional behavioural patterns mentioned above, may include disclosure of the family members' unconscious experiences and overcoming their characteristic defence mechanisms².

Carey's publications are devoted to the use of the sandplay therapy when working with families. As a theoretical basis for his approach, Carey, just like Landgarten, used the techniques of family psychotherapy, as in this case Carey combined them with ideas typical of the Jungian sandplay therapy. It should be noted that Carey applied the interactive version of sandplay therapy, which is not characteristic of the classic version of the sandplay therapy developed by D. Calf³.

² Лангартен, Х. „Семейная арт-терапия”. *Игровая семейная психотерапия*, Санкт-Петербург, Питер, 2001.

³ Кэри, Л. „Семейная песочная психотерапия”. *Игровая семейная психотерапия*, Санкт-Петербург, Питер, 2001.

Theory of Play Psychotherapy

In the practice of art therapy, it is necessary, under certain conditions, to apply elements borrowed from play group psychotherapy. The foundations of the theory of play therapy were laid down by M. Klein, M. Lowenfeld, J. Piaget, A. Freud and a number of other classics of the psychodynamic paradigm. Klein, for example, perceived play as a process that involves the symbolic reflection of unconscious processes through free association occurring at a certain level of the child's mental growth. In line with this understanding of the nature of the play activity, the main emphasis in the psychotherapeutic work is placed on the interpretation of the symbolic content of the play and the clarification of the process of transference.

Unlike the representatives of the psycho-dynamic paradigm, the humanistic strand in play psychotherapy pays attention not so much to the child's reflection in play practice of previous traumas, but rather to the acquisition of experience in the context of *right here and right now*. The therapist's task, according to these researchers, is to create a favourable environment for the expression of the child's feelings. Play psychotherapy incorporates the mechanism of play as the child's natural form of self-expression.

The contemporary stage of development of the theory of play psychotherapy is characterized by attempts to integrate some of the positions of the behaviourist theory and the theory of object relations. The notions of play psychotherapy have recently also begun to embark on some forms of art therapy (with adults). In particular, the question of the interaction of play and art therapy is being addressed. When using the play approach, the creation of visual images by clients is considerably freer, avoiding to a certain extent the fear of *improper* drawing.

The application of play in children's art therapy remains a priority.

Client-Centred Approach

Despite the widespread use by contemporary art therapists of the general principles of the humanistic approach and the borrowing of some of its characteristic techniques when working with groups, there are no serious attempts to theoretically justify art therapy based of this approach.

An exception is Liesl Silverstone's book *Art Therapy: The Person-Centered Way*⁴. The main idea is the application of the 10 principles by C. Rogers to the conditions in art therapy groups. According to Silverstone, the principles that can find application in art therapy are as follows:

- 1) Every individual exists in the ever-changing world of experience where he himself is the centre. Therefore, the main focus in the images created by the members of the art therapy group, should be a reflection of one's own place in the plot being visualized.
- 2) The personality reacts to the environment according to its experience and perception. It accepts the situation as true reality. It is because of this that the works created can serve as a source of adequate psychotherapeutic information.
- 3) The psyche reacts as an organized whole to a given *phenomenal field*. Accepting this principle, it can be expected that through the pictorial production a group member will react both to his personal problems and to the atmosphere that is created in the art therapy group.
- 4) The personality has a tendency and an aspiration to update (unlock), preserve and strengthen within itself reflexively accumulated experience. Following this principle, it can be expected that by expressing their feelings and modelling the relationships within the group, its members will reproduce these patterns of behaviour with the maximum degree of social effectiveness.
- 5) Behaviour is the purposeful attempt by the organism to satisfy its needs within the *field* of its own perception. When expressing their attitudes (including negative ones) through visual techniques, the person is enabled to use effective techniques to overcome the psychological problems that arise.
- 6) Emotion is the background expression of behaviour. The chromaticity of emotions is determined either by the initial or the final aspects of behaviour. The intensity of emotions is

⁴ Silverstone, L. *Art Therapy: The Person-Centered Way*. London, Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 1997.

changed by the conspicuousness, within the individual perception, of the behaviour to preserve the individual's psyche.

7) The best reference point in understanding an individual's behaviour is the individual's own level of competence.

8) The part of the general field of perception is gradually detached as a form of independence. The creation of the images in art therapy provides an opportunity to distinguish such a field of perception, and working under group conditions is an additional incentive for the development of independence.

9) As a result of interaction with the environment, and in particular as a result of evolutionary interaction with others, a structure of self-determination is formed. This self-determination manifests itself as an organized, fluid, and coherent pattern of perception of the characteristics of the I-self, as well as the system of values that can be applied to this concept.

10) The values applied to experiences and the values that are part of the structure of independence are in some cases directly perceived by the individual and in others are introjected or borrowed from others.

Since the main task of using the above model of work, according to Silverstone, is the development of facilitation habits and the formation of self-directiveness, the main focus is on the intrapersonal dynamics of the group participants.

Clinical Approach

The clinical approach is one of the earliest approaches in art therapy. I have elaborated on the use of visual art forms in clinical treatments in the first section of this paper. It should be noted here that the inclusion of art therapy is not the sole domain of the history of psychotherapy. Under contemporary conditions, the clinical approach has acquired a new meaning: as neuropsychological research advances, new alternatives for art therapy are being discovered.

The works of Burno inspired serious interest in connection with the clinical method⁵. He developed the method of therapy by creative self-expression on a practical basis. The therapy of

⁵ Бурно, М. Е. *Терапия творческим самовыражением*. Москва, Академический проект, 2001.

creative self-expression is a clinical approach, different from the psychoanalytic trend, oriented towards helping people suffering from depressive disorders of various types.

It is based on the following two ideas:

- the first is that the person suffering from psychopathological behaviour *can* understand the peculiarities of his character, his disorder, as well as his moods;

- the second idea is derived from the first and is expressed in the fact that the patient, understanding his condition, can improve it by practising a creative activity. According to this idea of therapy, any kind of creativity can hold healing properties.

The therapy founded on the Burno's method is adapted on the basis of the analysis of each character rather than on the existential unity of the human personality. Thus, a person suffering from chronic depression can understand the peculiarities of his condition, the basis for this understanding being the characterological analysis and the *metamorphoses* of various famous people: writers, poets, artists and musicians. The characterological features of artists are most often exemplified in Burno's therapy since they are relatively easy to illustrate with their pictorial heritage. During the second stage of the therapy, the patient performs a certain creative activity, which is most often related to the creation of a visual work.

It is obvious that Burno's therapy is very close to the thematic art therapy sessions. The main difference lies in the ways of interpreting the products of creative activity. If in art therapy practice the product is a form of the therapeutic activity, then in Burno's therapy it is the principal goal of the therapy. In the practice of art therapy, the works of the participants in the group are a source of additional information for the therapist, whereas in Burno's therapy the visual product itself is of no particular importance – what is important is that it exists⁶.

It can be reasonably argued that creative self-expression therapy is one of the main methods in clinical groups. Some of the variants have many features in common with short-term group art therapy.

⁶ Стюарт, В. *Работа с образами и символами в психологическом консультировании*. Москва, Класс, 1998.

Holistic Theories

Holistic theories lay the foundation for the following methods in contemporary group art therapy:

- group art therapy methods using elements of spiritual practices and ancient healing systems;

- forms of art therapy that involve elements of dance-motor therapy, drama-role and musical expression;

- the use of feminist, narrative and other related postmodernist notions, as well as the use of new sociological and cultural and logical theories.

Even though these approaches are referred to various categories, in practice it is very common to combine them. Regardless of the great diversity, all of them are characterized by an integrative orientation, i.e. an effort to accomplish a closer interaction between thinking, emotions, intuition and spiritual experience. At group level, this manifests itself in a more active and comprehensive interaction between the participants in the microenvironment, which takes place when using different communication channels and ways of creative self-expression.

As vivid example of a holistic approach to art therapy can serve the works of Shaun McNiff. His method is characterised, on the one hand, by the use of elements from spiritual practices and, on the other hand, by an effort to combine different forms of creative self-expression while preserving the leading role of visual expression. McNiff's approach clearly incorporates fundamentals of Jung's analytical psychology despite its rare application to group psychotherapy. To a certain extent, McNiff can be counted as a postjungian, as his views resemble those of J. Hillman. Like Hillman, McNiff places a major emphasis on the inner abilities of the psyche, which both of them associate with the concepts of *soul*, *inspiration*, etc.

McNiff views the *healing creativity* as a process involving various stages of image gathering and personal reflection. In his view, despite the contribution of psychotherapists and

other people involved in the process, acting in the capacity of *conductors* and *witnesses*, the healing effect is primarily related to visual creativity itself⁷.

Unlike traditional techniques for interpreting visual images, McNiff explores new techniques representing models of direct interaction - through bodily and musical expression, artistic descriptions, composing dialogues, installations, etc. In his view, interpretation is a way of embarking upon the world of images and responding to their inner nature.

Another example of holistic theory and innovation practice could be Pamela Whitaker's theory⁸. Her approach to art therapy combines, on the one hand, with postmodernist ideas and, on the other, with the theory of dance-motor and bodily-oriented therapy. Whitaker attributes the need to apply the latest ideas in art and the theories of dance-motor and bodily-oriented therapy when working with art therapy groups to the apparently insufficient attention paid by modern art therapists to the bodily and motor aspects of visual creativity and intragroup communication, as well as to the inconsistency of traditional theories of the personality with the postmodernist understanding of the subjectivity. She also points to the blurring of boundaries between different sciences and disciplines as the reason for the using these methods, thus creating conditions for the assimilation of those theories that have never before been applied to art therapy.

One of the features of the model used by Whitaker for working with art therapy groups is the application of the strategy of establishing partner relationships between the participants. This is one of the postmodernist, pluralistic models, free from the formation of a *normative* system of relations, corresponding to the contemporary concept of subjectivity.

The application of the dance-motor therapy to the practice of group art therapy motivated Whitaker to pay attention to group participants' use of spontaneous or group discussion-related definitions which reflect their bodily and motor experiences. According to her, the theory of dance-motor therapy and postmodernist ideas open up a new perspective for the study of the art

⁷ МакНифф, Ш. „Творчество в рамках привычного: расширение возможностей психологических исследований с помощью искусства”. *Исцеляющее искусство: журнал арт-терапии*. 2002, Т. 5, № 2, с. 8–25.

⁸ Уайтекер, П. „Движение, импровизация и телесные ощущения в арт-терапии”. *Исцеляющее искусство: журнал арт-терапии*. 2002, Т. 5, № 1, с. 37–56.

therapy process and the significance of artistic images. This perspective involves the use of multiple systems of psychological and physical reference (both of the client and of the psychotherapist). By *smearing* the boundaries between different disciplines, postmodernism does not attempt to *define* subjectivity, but rather reveals multiple perspectives on it. This manifests itself in the interdisciplinary nature of artistic creation, in the artists' aspiration to assemble different forms and materials for a new vision of personal and social themes.

Incorporating the diversity of forms of creative work and materials employed in art therapy practice enriches its potentials. The ideas of dance-motor therapy challenge the usual interpretive *languages* and theoretical notions in art therapy. Considering the body as a *reservoir* in which the needs, emotions and expressive utterances are gathered allows it to be used as a tool for locating and relocating identities and for exploring different kinds of representations. This is done not so much as to define the I-self or to achieve specific psychotherapeutic goals, but rather to experience the complex sequence of different events *imprinted* in dynamic visual and bodily images. The *heterogeneity* of expression, freed from the necessity to create any specific and unique image, enhances the receptiveness to the hidden aspects of symbolic language, i.e. to the aspects related to the body and its gestures.

To conclude this analysis, I will give a brief definition of narrative theories, which are also based on postmodernist ideas in group art therapy. These were developed by Shirley Riley⁹ and Michael Barbee¹⁰. The said theories have been filtered by scepticism towards *objective knowledge*, by the dominant predetermination of the sociocultural environment and its highly reflective impact on people's lives and on how they, by the use of language, understand their experiences and interpret various events. As Riley points out, the theory of social constructionism is an *open system* of opinions. Unless the influences of the external, social environment on the *construction* of reality are not taken into account, those applied issues related to the racial, cultural, gender, and socioeconomic background of clients cannot be adequately

⁹ Riley, S. *Contemporary Art Therapy with Adolescents*. London, Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 1999.

¹⁰ Barbee, M. A. „Visual-Narrative Approach to Understanding Transsexual Identity”. *Art Therapy Journal of the American Art Therapy Association*, 2002, Vol.19, #2, p. 53–62.

addressed. There are specific differences between the narrative theory approach to art therapy and the classical theories. Some of these are:

- the dialogicity and equality of the positions of the participants in the group and the psychotherapist, implying belief in those ways of solving problems which the client uses, as well as in his subjective experience;
- dismissal of the pathologising attitude towards group participants and their pictorial works, as well as ensuring opportunities for the participants to conduct group processes themselves;
- an exploratory stance of the psychotherapist and the group participants on their pictorial works;
- the flexibility of the psychotherapist and the mobile strategies used by him in the process of the dialogue with the group participants for the interpretation of the images depending on the context of the discussions.

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