

# ATOL: Art Therapy OnLine

**What is the theoretical ground on which art therapy stands?**

**Professor Joy Schaverien**



This illustration from Splendor Solis the ancient alchemical text, kept in the British Library, sets the scene. It is a reminder of the delight and endless fascination of imagery. It also contextualises my thinking, it acknowledges the influence of Jung and

his respect for the ways in which the psyche displays itself in visual form, (Jung CW12, Henderson & Sherwood 2003).

I am an Art Psychotherapist and a Jungian Psychoanalyst and, whilst my theoretical influences have developed from traditional Jungian views, his call to us to 'follow the image' is still central in my thinking about art within analysis. I do not have time to discuss the details of this picture so I hope it will give you a feast for your eyes and for speculation (in every sense of the word) as I speak. (Speculate = conjecture Imagine]. This is what Jung did with alchemy; he speculated about these images, about their meaning and he imagined. He knew alchemy had been a physical art with spiritual resonance. The chemical reactions were thought to transform matter into gold - and Jung turned this into a metaphor for the analytic journey and for psychological transformation.

**So please feast your eyes whilst I speak.**

Today I have been asked to talk a little about my practice as well as thinking about its wider implications - all in 15 minutes – so here goes I will try.

Art Psychotherapy, like other forms of analysis and psychotherapy is about the making of meaning. Like words in context, a series of pictures may form a narrative, a story, which may gradually become meaningful for the client. We are social beings and language is how we communicate with each other and in doing so, become part of society. As a child grows language develops, but if some experiences are not mediated successfully there are gaps in that language. Very often our clients have gaps in this meaning-making function and, as a result, some of their emotional experiences are unmanageable. It is the task in psychotherapy to detoxify, and

normalise sometimes, traumatic memories or lived experiences. In this art psychotherapy has a unique role to play. It may help to transform apparently chaotic, or previously only part-remembered, thoughts and inner world experiences into a story. Once there is a narrative it is possible to feel less alienated.

Art Psychotherapy practice, based in the National Health Service in Britain, has been central to my development as a practitioner and to the development of our profession. I no longer work in the NHS but I supervise others who do, so I know what a difficult time practitioners, who still have their jobs, are going through. In supervision the context always hovers, dominating our thoughts. This may make it difficult to concentrate on the power of the image. So, whilst acknowledging this today I want to think with you about interesting questions with regard to practice. These lead to theory and research.

### **Research and Theoretical Questions**

Theory develops from clinical practice and so first of all it is our clients who teach us. It is our clients and their use of art works that lead us to research. It is this that has led me to ask questions about how and why this process is so engaging and why it works. Such questions lead to inquiry and thence to development of a clinical approach and to conceptualisation. I will give a sense of key influences in my professional thinking. These are writers to whom I have turned in the quest to understand the work we do. This is not an exhaustive list but rather a general sense of where my thinking comes from.

### **Where I work now - Personal History**

I now have a private practice and offer art psychotherapy alongside analysis and psychotherapy. However I trained as an artist at the Slade and became an art therapist somewhat by chance. I looked for the road map – the books written on the theory. In

the UK at that time there was one book by E M Lyddiatt (1971), and Irene Champernowne, who was a Jungian analyst, had written in the earliest issues of *Inscape* (Champernowne 1969 & 1971). *Inscape* was a new publication at this time. Clearly the climate has changed hugely since then, but this dearth of art therapy literature at that time, gives a sense of what led me to research. I began to think with colleagues and to write and think about what I observed was happening with my clients and their art works.

### **The Revealing Image and research**

Theoretically the ground on which I personally stand remains *The Revealing Image* published nearly 25 years ago (Schaverien 1992). Written to tell myself, as well as my students, about what happens in art therapy, it surprises me that it still informs my analytic practice. In this Richard Wollheim was an important influence both personally, and through his books, especially *Art and its Objects* (Wollheim 1968). I came to understand the importance of aesthetic appreciation in mediating images in Art Psychotherapy. Wollheim supervised my PhD and I am always grateful to him for his spare but helpful questions, which encouraged me to think more deeply.

Some of the formulations created in that book have remained helpful in elucidating what still happens in my practice today. This is especially so with the distinction I made between diagrammatic and embodied images. This was developed from Susanne Langer's distinction between embellishment, which is design, and the art symbol which is an embodiment of affect (Langer 1957). The Diagrammatic image is one that needs words to embellish its meaning whilst the Embodied image is one that embodies affect and presents it in a way which can have no other form or expression. To speak directly about such a work diminishes it. I still find this helpful, although not in a rigid or hierarchical way. This, as well as the role of the image in the transference and countertransference dynamic, I carry through into my analytic work.

### **Cassirer – levels of knowing mediated through objects and artefacts**

The work of the philosopher Ernst Cassirer (1955 & 57) underpinned much of that book and his work has remained one of the foundations of my understanding of art works in psychotherapy. This is because of his view of the progression through levels of consciousness, mediated by objects. It is through the making of artefacts, tools, religious objects, and ultimately, art that humans evolved into the sophisticated social beings we are today. In this sense art is formative and it is through this process that, as he puts it, 'the "I" comes to grips with the world' (Cassirer 1955b: 204). That art is *formative in itself*, gives us a strong case for believing in the healing potential of our work. I still love the phrases I borrowed from him because they are so expressive of art in art psychotherapy:

### **Baring the Phenomenon -**

'the simple baring of the phenomenon is at the same time its [the pictures] interpretation and the only one of which it is susceptible and needful' (Cassirer 1955:93-4) (Quoted in Schaverien 1992:107). This I developed in thinking about the artist's identification with their own image.

### **Immanent Articulation –**

He writes of myth: 'immanent articulation, yet does

not know the organisation of reality according to things and attributes...they are differentiated without being separate from each other' (Cassirer 1957: 61) (quoted in Schaverien 1992: 108). This is what happens in art works – something is seen – shown which is as yet without conceptualisation.

Both are such evocative phrases – such riches - and there are more. So Cassirer helped me to find words for what I already knew through making art!

## **Jung – Follow the Lead of the Image**

This sits well with Jung's respect for the integrity of the image. Combined these have informed my practice in art psychotherapy and continue to do so now in my current analytic practice (Jung CW 16). There is a great deal of theory by post Jungians that influences my thinking. This includes the critical debates from within the Jungian world, which challenge some of Jung's political leanings and the more questionable aspects of his theories with regard to feminism and race (Samuels 1993, Dalal 1988, Singer & Kimbles 2004). Such critical approaches do not idealise the man but rather take what is useful from the theory with a critical stance. Today there is much common ground with psychoanalytic ideas and the influence of findings from neuroscience that confirm the reparative potential of the work. The links with infant development play an important part in this and research into mirror neurones offers fascinating potential for thinking about the healing aspects of art works.

On Tuesday this week I returned from a conference in Boston, which was organised by the Journal of Analytical Psychology on this theme (JAP Conference 2013). The research presented there demonstrates just how far some of us have now developed into the relational and inter-subjective field of psychoanalysis.

**There are too many influences in my thinking to do justice to them all in such a brief space - but I do have to turn now to:**

**Lacan and his evocation of the Gaze, which I explored in *Desire and the Female Therapist* (Schaverien 1995)**

When continuing to think about the role of pictures in the transference and countertransference Lacan inspired me. I am not sure I understand him even today; he

is complex and elusive but I also find his ideas evocative and 'speculative' and that is very important. From his writings on the gaze I continued to think and develop ideas for understanding of the power of imagery in art psychotherapy.

I love his reflections on the pictures in the Doges palace and in particular his imagining of the battle of Lepanto.



The Battle of Lepanto *The Battle of Lepanto, painting by Andries van Eertvelt*

He writes and I quote:

'Let us go to the Doges' palace in which are painted all kinds of battles, such as the battle of Lepanto... 'Who comes here? Those who form... the audiences. And what do the audiences see in these vast compositions. They see the gaze of those persons who, when the audience are not there, deliberate in this hall. Behind the picture, it is their gaze that is there.' (Lacan 1977:113)



The Battle of Lepanto - Paulo Veronese 1528 -1588

What goes on there when the people have left?

What a vivid and imaginative speculation. Do these battles carry on in our absence? Is it the people in the pictures whose gaze continues in the absence left by the viewers? It reminds me of the childish idea that when the child is asleep the toys come to life in their absence.

Lacan's speculations about the gaze (1977) led me in turn to speculate about the various aspects of the gaze in art psychotherapy: There are a number of gazes which all relate to forms of transference and countertransference:

**The gaze of the artist** - the maker has some form of transference to the image

**The gaze of the picture** – the picture looks back at its maker and it looks too at the therapist and both are affected.

**The gaze of the viewer** - Both people are the audience of this particular picture and within it there is the gaze of the artist and the gaze of the therapist – both are viewers. Their gazes are channelled through the object.

### **In recent years**

In the current political climate where finance seems to rule everything and when art psychotherapists are losing their jobs, it is heart breaking. Having been involved in this profession for the last 40 years and watched it grow from its first green shoots to its establishment as a recognised profession it is hard to just blithely discuss theory without also attending to the context. But if we don't keep our eye on the image, so to speak, we lose the very ground on which we stand. Art offers a way of helping those who cannot articulate difficult or traumatic experiences. As art psychotherapists sometimes we help people without a voice to make meaning and thus to find hope that they can communicate with another being. We know this is life saving work. Political policies come and go but art is a constant, we have to try to keep alive the life force that is art psychotherapy because we know that it works and now we know why it works as well.

### **End with a picture:**

Let us never forget the power of the image to enlighten and so I would like to end with a particularly optimistic painting by Picasso from 1946: Joie de Vivre



Picasso: 'Joie de Vivre' 1946:

This picture was made at the end of the Second World War and after the horrors portrayed in his painting of Guernica (1937). This picture is delightful and full of hope and optimism and it seems to me like a renaissance.

It is my hope and indeed belief that art psychotherapy and art psychotherapists will continue our particular dance into the future.

## Biography

Professor Joy Schaverien PhD is a Jungian Analyst, Art Psychotherapist and Supervisor in private practice in the East Midlands UK. She is Visiting Professor in Art Psychotherapy at the University of Sheffield, a Professional Member of the Society of Analytical Psychology (London) and a member of the International Association of Analytical Psychology. Her publications include: *The Revealing Image* (1992), *The Dying Patient in Psychotherapy* (2002). She is series editor of *Supervision in the Arts Therapies* and editor (with Caroline Case) *Supervision in Art Psychotherapy* (Routledge 2007).

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### **Conference**

Schaverien, J. (2013) 'Mapping the Psyche: pictures in mediating memories of trauma',

Paper given at: *The Journal of Analytical Psychology XIth International Conference*

Theme: 'Attachment and Subjectivity in the Therapeutic Relationship'

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