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The Psychoaesthetic Experience

An Approach to Depth-Oriented Treatment

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Introduction

In the next three sections, a dancer, a musician, and a dramatist, each trained as a depth-oriented therapist, will offer their particular metaphor applied to the aesthetics of a verbal psychotherapeutic dialogue. Each emphasizes a particular aspect of the psychotherapeutic matrix. All of them, however, have in common a belief in the psychoaesthetic importance of the therapist-patient interchange.

In the preface of my book, *Expressive Therapy: A Creative Arts Approach to Depth-Oriented Treatment* (1981), I stated the following:

In any one session, we can detect in patient-therapist communications both verbal and nonverbal cues that

can be examined within the artistic parameters of sight, sound, and motion; that is, in rhythm, pitch, and timbre, in color, texture, and form, and in muscular tension, energy, and special relations. These elements of therapeutic composition have their own principles and require the utmost skill in therapeutic management.

This nonverbal composition of a given patient's communication takes place on a number of psychic levels and presents a unique aesthetic character. First, however, let me define what I mean by aesthetic. In *The Artist as Therapist* (Robbins, 1987), I stated the following:

When I speak of aesthetics, I'm referring to making the inanimate animate, giving form to diffuse energy or ideas, breathing life into sterile communications. *Communication* is a key word here, for a complete work of any medium becomes art only when it touches us as a living truth. This happens when it is an authentic expression of the artist, and more often it involves an integration of polarities.

In another section, I further elaborate on this point:

When symbolic form includes multiple levels of communication and transcends its individual parts to communicate a larger meaning, it approaches the level of aesthetic communication.

Historically, the language of the artist has always addressed itself to the self that cannot easily be reduced to words. In the following sections, each artist will offer his/her special view of the language of art applied to the therapist's grappling with an understanding of man's wish to give freedom and space to the very essence of where the self lives.

Movement Composition and the Choreography of a Verbal Psychotherapy Session

Eileen Serlin

P moved against the far wall. She stayed in the corner, keeping 4 or 5 feet between herself and the other group members, not acknowledging them in her movements. She was hunched up, eyes closed, energy pulling inward, hands gesticulating. These hands seemed to flail out into empty space, hands curled like claws, clawing the air. Her head was tilted toward one side, eyes beseeching and flaring, mouth twitching.

She says she wants to be touched, but is terrified and furious. She grew up in an orphanage and was sexually abused as a child. She is afraid of being violated and abandoned.

P's back was to the wall, braced by the wall. This was the only solid point of contact, of support. Everything else was flailing, desperately, helplessly, uselessly. Her body was limp and lacked a strong central inner support.

I momentarily saw my cat, a frightened creature. My cat loves to be held, but if approached tentatively, head-on, with hesitancy, she'll lash out and claw. If approached from the side, however, with swift sureness, decisiveness, and a firm touch, she will melt and cuddle.

I swiftly approached P. Without pause, I moved in from the side and placed my two palms against her thrashing hands. She pushed my hands away. As she pushed, her body resisted, strengthened, and focused. Her flaccid weight mobilized, her diffuse efforts organized. She pushed, and I pushed back. As we pressed