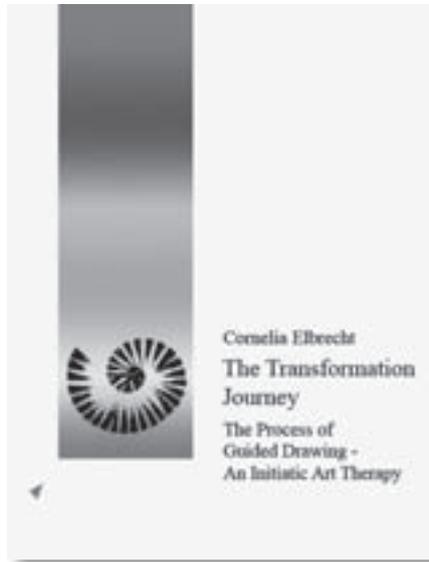


Book Reviews



The Transformation Journey: the Process of Guided Drawing – an Initiatic Art Therapy

by Cornelia Elbrecht

Johanna Nordlander Verlag Rutte 2006

Reviewed by Meena Blesing Art Psychotherapist

Close both eyes

To see with the Other Eye

Open your hands

If you want to be held.

Rumi

This is a compelling book that will be of great interest to those involved in expressive arts, counselling, psychology, Jungian and art psychotherapy. The title challenges the reader to ask: what is the Transformation Journey?; what is Guided Drawing?; and what is Initiatic Art therapy? Cornelia Elbrecht introduces this work as the culmination of decades of personal exploration and clinical work as an art psychotherapist using her uniquely developed process of Guided Drawing, which is the focus of her work and based on Initiatic Therapy.

Elbrecht describes a seminal experience of art therapy in her student days, following her request at a hospital to explore art as a medium of expression with children who had experienced the trauma of illness and accident. A four year old Turkish boy had

been run over by a truck and immobilized in hospital for six months. He had no language in common with his carers, he was isolated, withdrawn and could not communicate.

Elbrecht managed to encourage him to draw and he diligently produced 64 drawings in two days. As she looked at the scribbles he had done in sequence she realized he progressively produced in drawings the elements of the terrible accident he experienced. His strokes revealed the wheels of the truck and finally himself under it. As he recognized his experience, catharsis had taken place and he visibly changed, something was resolved and released. He then began to make model airplanes. He had intuitively used the process of Guided Drawing to resolve an emotional trauma he could not express and then he

began to heal. This small boy illustrated the cornerstone of her practice, "...healing happens through the act of symbolic expression."

Dr Maria Hippius, a Jungian depth psychologist developed a technique she called Guided Drawing through exploration of the graphic expression of feelings. In the final form of this therapy, clients drew basic shapes such as the bowl, the arch, verticals and horizontals in rhythmic repetition. With the therapist as guide she discovered the client could reach layers of emotional depth, uncover archetypal processes, restructure their experience and gain insights and healing from past traumas. Hippius worked for 40 years at the center at Rutte in Germany, with Karlfried von Durkheim, known for his works on philosophy, Zen meditation, bodywork and spirituality. Durkheim taught meditation and transpersonal bodywork at the center. In time the Guided Drawing became the basis of transpersonal Initiatic Therapy using multimedia as well.

Cornelia Elbrecht lived and worked with these pioneering therapists for eight years. This rare and intensive training connected Cornelia with her own spiritual search and after leaving the centre she worked for 10 years with a group of creative therapists at Neuenzell, using Guided Drawing, finger painting, mandala drawing and clay work with clients, whilst further developing her training in Initiatic Therapy. This laid the groundwork for her new practice in Australia where she developed a therapeutic healing center to offer Initiatic Art therapy including Bodywork, Guided Drawing, meditation and spiritual practices.

In Part One of this book *The Art of Guided Drawing* outlines the philosophical and esoteric foundations of this art therapy approach: Jungian analytical psychology, zen

meditation and mysticism. There is discussion of the spiritual path, initiation, inner guidance and its role in our life journey. Elbrecht discusses the significance and archetypal meaning of duality: our splitting from the original source of our energy and connection with the transformation journey; and as the soul urge to reveal and heal our inner wounds.

Elbrecht refers to Jungian analytic psychology, myth, and fairy tales to describe the 12 phases of the Transformation Journey. The phases are not meant to be an assessment tool but rather a guide to the spiritual process within, and to illustrate the power and possibilities of using Guided Drawing with conscious catharsis to access this journey. There is full discussion of each phase: there are Ascending and Descending phases; Conscious and Unconscious; the Power of Myths in forming our life stories and traumas; Reintegration; Rebirth and Return. This cyclic journey of transformation can be represented as a spiral or a wave, as it has no beginning or end, and is one on which we all travel. Each phase of the Transformation Journey in this book is illustrated with the shapes and forms of archetypal symbols the client will instinctively draw upon, which will also relate to areas of the body where there may be pain or blockage. Listening to our body and guidance in art expression will unerringly lead us to indicate which stage of the journey we are on, and the archetypes that inform us. The process on the path may be difficult and paradoxical but with guidance we reach healing and transformation.

Case studies with series of drawings show the clients' use of symbols in art, the mythology and stories that arise and the movement towards healing and understanding that is revealed as the therapy progresses. These studies support the theory with art images to

address issues such as sexual abuse, identity, fragmentation and integration, abandonment, weight and body image problems, conditions such as chronic fatigue, anxiety and depression. Transformations are revealed through the words and images of her clients.

“The art therapy class transformed all the rubbish... into compost... using negative past experiences to create a new positive future” (p.32).

Part Two describes the method of Guided Drawing. Here the reader is introduced to the specific setting up of guided drawing, in terms of space and body awareness. Elbrecht describes materials to use, the significance of colour, the importance of silence and reflection, and body and energetic connection to art work and healing. The language of Guided Drawing is introduced. There are two main categories of shapes that Dr Maria Hippus discovered in her work: round flowing motions that are described as ‘female’ shapes, and more angular linear shapes which are given a ‘male’ connotation. The ‘Female’ Primary basic shapes are: the Bowl; the Arch; the Circle; the Spiral; the Figure of Eight; and the Wave. The ‘Male’ Primary shapes are: the Vertical; the Horizontal; the Cross; the Triangle; the Rectangle; the Jagged Peak and the Dot. Elbrecht offers explanation of the shapes and how they correspond to our bodily experience, emotions and sensations. There is also a connection to archetypal shapes, myths, dreams and stories. We are encouraged to try this ourselves with eyes shut, breathing deeply, feeling into the body, then drawing with both hands in repetition to see what shapes emerge and how this feels to us. What are the symbols and shapes that draw us? What are we compelled to repeat in images? What are we repeating in our shapes and our lives? What does our own art work and practice reflect at

this stage of our life journey? This book offers many opportunities for self-reflection on art, dreams and practice for the artist, student and therapist.

The final section offers insight into the mind of the therapist and discusses the method of therapeutic dialogue used to support the process of Guided Drawing. The reader may be inclined to view the process at times as structured. Yet Elbrecht shows how her method can support and accompany a client without disturbing the flow of creative energy. The therapist assists the client to focus within and breathe deeply into the body to notice what is present. What disturbance, what pain what feeling is there? Where is it located? The client is encouraged to use this awareness as a movement and in time to direct the motion of drawing. The client is guided to notice and follow feelings that arise and to continue to connect inner awareness to the outer art process that continues. The therapist is the container of the experience and the spiritual guide in this sacred unfolding process.

Reading this book is to undertake a rich and symbolic journey. It is impossible to give a full picture of the detail and profound symbolic meaning of the Guided Drawing process as offered by this book in this review. The book is dense with information, history, mythical reference and allusion on each of these concepts of the complex title: the Transformation Journey, the process of Guided Drawing and Initiatic art therapy. Each aspect engages, challenges and absorbs the reader. I felt at times the need for an index or glossary to assist with clarifying for myself definitions, classical and mythic allusions.

This volume can be enjoyed at many levels. The case studies in Part Two are also revealing,

with images which refer to the stages of the client's transformation journey as well as the process of Guided Drawing. Again the therapist is seen at work. The therapist/client relationship, interventions and outcomes are discussed and are highly informative for the art psychotherapist. "The Transformation Journey" is well researched, mindful and thought provoking, and a much needed addition to works in the field of art psychotherapy.

Review by Meena Blesing.
Art Psychotherapist.

Cornelia Elbrecht BA, MA, AATR is a founder and Director of "Claerwon Retreat", a Centre for Contemplation and Creativity in Victoria.

"The Transformation Journey: the Process of Guided Drawing – An Initiatic Art Therapy" can be purchased directly from the publisher at: www.arttherapy.net.au