

Art Therapy Online: ATOL

Book Review: Navigating Art Therapy - a therapist's companion.

Compiled by Chris Wood, London, Routledge 2011

Reviewed by Caroline Case

This welcome new book '*Navigating Art Therapy-a therapist's companion*' brings a historical, cultural, political and artistic context to British Art Therapy. This is a great reference book and students as well as practising art therapists will value the bibliography.

A short introduction sets the scene, delineating specific periods of art therapy historically in the UK, as well as touching on the contemporary. There is a list of entries at the beginning and a list of contributors and then, on to the entries themselves.

I am a contributor to the book and it seems sensible to let the reader know this and my perspective. In different entries that Wood discusses of periods of art therapy I can place myself as having trained in the early 1970's in the second period of art therapy at the time of the anti-psychiatry movement of Laing etc, with placements in studio-settings based in large hospitals but also part of the Diaspora of art therapists pioneering work in many different settings and as part of the third period of art therapy having contributed to the flourishing of writing about art therapy at that time.

This book could be used as a Dictionary of terms by those wishing to elucidate a concept or by a student art therapist exploring the breadth of the discipline for the first time. I suspect that its major enjoyment will be to dip into it and let one's mind journey from entry to entry. Each entry has references within it to further reading and is cross-referenced at the bottom to further entries.

For example I started at **Contemporary period of art therapy** curious to know how Wood would define the current period which includes 'efforts to produce research' and evidence of effectiveness' but also 'discussions in this period include the material qualities inherent in art-making and the 'participative practices by the therapist'. From the list of directions I could take (cross referenced entries below) I chose **Participative art practice**, refusing to be diverted by other entries on the same page. My chosen entry discusses the therapist's personal art practice alongside clients as part of art making in a studio-based group. I then chose **Mythologies and the participant observer** (noting the absence of participation mystique) which led me to a discussion about the ideas of the anthropologist James Dow and the philosopher Wittgenstein. I then chose **Art as Discourse** an entry concerned with the power inherent in the therapeutic relationship and whether this can be modified. From here I travelled to **Absorption in Art making** which led me to thinking about reverie and to choosing **Studios**. Lots of ideas are engendered by following such a trail. Thoughts about how I used to work with a purpose made studio that only I worked in to one current work situation where I am seeing a child in a staff room, hardly ideal, but it does enable me to see a child disadvantaged socially and economically who would not be able to access a service in any other way, however 'containment' is through materials and emotional containment by the therapist, the outer frame a supportive staff group who let us use the room. **Studios** led me both to **Edward Adamson**, slightly nostalgically, as he was part of my training as an art therapist and to **Reverie** where there is a critical discussion of psychoanalytic and art psychotherapy writers on that subject.

Navigating Art Therapy is set in current culture in a way that an art therapy dictionary could not have been. For instance an entry **Female Body** which is a discussion of the work of the artist Jenny Saville on the female body at first glance seems to be solely about this particular artist and about cultural perspectives of the female body and feminism. However it directly links to clinical work with an entry on **Eating Disorders** and an entry on **Male Gaze** to a

discussion of John Berger's classic investigation '*Ways of Seeing*'. From here one can go to '**Looking down in disability**' where Damarell discusses how a downward looking scopic (of the able down onto the physically disabled in wheelchairs) has become a controlling observational gaze.

In this way one can move from artist to artwork to clinical issues and discussion to political and cultural debate to a particular client group and the way that they are culturally, politically and socially defined. It is the potential interweaving of paradigms and issues, information and ideas which is the power of this book.

Are there any drawbacks? Although the book cover claims to have contributions from art therapists around the world it is very much a British art therapy that is discussed. Most international contributors have a UK affiliation of some kind, having either trained or worked in the UK; however there is a world of ideas within its covers from Derrida's '**Deconstruction**' to **Gericault and physiognomy** to **Kusama and the artist's experience of psychosis** to **Talisman transference** to **Randomised Controlled Trials** to **Crucible**.

Wood's criteria, for her selection of entries, are very much her own and to some extent naturally reflects her interests. Every reader is likely to wonder at a particular inclusion or apparent exclusion of a possible entry. Wood is to be congratulated in having masterminded the concept of the book and inspiring the contributors. There will be something of interest to all and every reader is likely to find an intriguing new idea in an unexpected entry.

Caroline Case is an Analytical Art Therapist working in private practice with children and adults. She is also a Child and Adolescent Psychotherapist working in a child and family mental health service in the NHS in Bristol.