

# Review of: "Psychotherapy as a Subversive Art"

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Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

## Psychotherapy as Subversive Art

Author: Manu Bazzanu

This is an exploratory paper attempting to capture what is distinctively potent and unique about psychotherapy as 'praxis'. Like the author I am a practicing psychotherapist familiar with mainstream psychoanalytic theories in the British and American contexts coupled with a less confident but sympathetic grasp of phenomenology.

The paper isn't an easy read. For me, the paper started, well stimulating my interest in the analogies between engagement with the visual and musical arts and what kinds of experience psychotherapists grapple with. I found it helpful to be reminded of the ambiguities and disruptiveness of the truths that are sometimes transformative; the notions that understanding both wounds and heals, that receptivity to learning something new creates experiential ruptures.

The author's clustering together the visual and musical arts fails to acknowledge the different experiences they can generate and these differences speak to a problem which I thought ran through the paper. When I see a painting in Chichester's Pallant Gallery I can be disturbed in the way that the author claims but the painting doesn't change; I am in a relationship with the painting but it is only I who is changed as a consequence. When, however, I go to a concert or watch, as I did last night on television the closing hours of Glastonbury Festival, it is obvious that performers and audience are powerfully influencing one another and the experience is part of a shared relationship. Both parties to the musical event are changed and, I think that, in this sense, psychotherapy is similar.

In this paper the author is at points dismissive of a relational perspective while at others he seems to value it. So the following two quotes convey his diminishing the contribution of a relational perspective "When I am close to the emergent phenomenon, I am less likely to be side-tracked by suggestive interpersonal evocations, be they 'I-Thou', deep relating, intersubjectivity, or the evocation of stale mummy-daddy scenarios just behind the stage curtain." Or again "Excessive focus on the subject meant disregarding the work of art, forgetting psyché, neglecting and/or pathologizing the unconscious, and effectively ignoring the phenomenal field of experience." In this author's view the phenomena under review are independent of the artist and the viewer, the therapist and the patient.

I struggle with that notion and I find it even harder to embrace as the paper proceeds to locate the praxis of psychotherapy as a psycho-social endeavour. As I read the argument, the author proposes that, to use a Hegellian phrase, psychotherapy is part of the 'Geist' and what has to be understood, acted upon and unpacked in the consulting room are truths about the patient's life which have meaning only within that social context. If I have understood that correctly, it

seems to me that a relational perspective whereby experience is understood in context becomes essential.

Behind my critique may lie a more fundamental difference between my Humean empiricism and the author's idealism- there is a talking across paradigms which is tricky but interesting and I have enjoyed the aesthetic challenges of grappling with this paper.