

ARTS/HUMANISTIC PSYCHOLOGY NEWSLETTER

April 2010

Dear Arts/Humanistic Psychology Mailing list Members!

Here is our first newsletter for 2010 and I hope you enjoy what we've gathered for you. Ilene has been doing all the exciting stuff recently, so I'll hand over to her to report on it! Best wishes, Heather.....

In April, I had the honor of presenting a keynote address at a historic summit between leading existential scholars from the East and from the West at Nanjing Xiaozhuang University. Below are notes from the program and some of my reflections:



The First International Conference on Existential Psychology

Nanjing, China, April 2, 2010

An intellectual dialogue between East and West: How to face suffering and create a life of value.

Ilene Serlin, Ph.D, BC-DMT

—Thus starts—the Journey of Existential Psychology of China! Let us come together and inaugurate the 2010 International Existential Psychology Conference! Distinguished scholars from both the East and West will convene to present and dialogue on relevant topics within Existential Psychology.

The first international conference on existential psychology will be held between April 2 - 5, 2010, in Nanjing, China. More than 40 experts of existential psychology from 10 countries will assemble in Nanjing to engage in the mutual exploration and dialogues on the basic themes of existential psychology, the essence of existential

psychotherapy, the latest research findings and the examination of the role of culture from an existential perspective. Sponsored by the American Psychological Association, Society for Humanistic Psychology; University of the Rockies; Alliant International University (California School of Professional Psychology), Existential Humanistic Institute; Depth Psychotherapy Institute, Psychological Institute of Nanjing Xiaozhuang University, China Institute of Clinical Psychology, Nanjing Association of Psychology, and Zhimian Academy of Psychology. (Conference Invitation)

The program opened with cultural visits to the Memorial Hall of the Victims of the Nanjing Massacre and the Kun Opera Theatre, followed by keynote addresses marking the journey of 30 years of Existential Psychology in China. Break-out sessions included:

1. Perspectives on Death & Suicide
2. Awakening to an Awe-Based Psychology
3. Growing through Suffering & Loss
4. Competency & Self-Care
5. Existential Perspectives on Trauma
6. Self-Deception
7. Social harmony, Individualism and collectivism
8. Existential Psychology & the Arts
9. Marriage and Family Issues & Existential Psychology
10. Supervision Issues in Existential Therapy
11. Spiritual Issues In Existential Psychology
12. Nietzsche and LuXun
13. Genuineness, Hierarchy, & Conformity
14. Western Movie with Discussion
15. Existential Ego Experience and the Art of mental patients
16. The Art of dance therapy
17. Existential-Integrative Psychology
18. Psychologist as Artist

19. Existential Challenges at Midlife

20. Emotion & Existential Psychology

21. Core Themes of Chinese Existential Psychology

The fact that this visit coincided with Timothy Geithner's trip to Beijing to discuss the reevaluation of the yuan marked a new step toward the friendship between China and the US. The friendship among participating psychologists was shown in the extraordinary hospitality of hosts at Nanjing Xiaozhuang University, and the eagerness of Chinese psychologists to embrace new ideas from the West. On the other hand, Western existential psychologists found deep commonalities with ancient and indigenous Chinese wisdom as both began to forge a common language.

Below are three areas in which I saw this common language take place:

- 1) **Roots in philosophy and religion:** Both Eastern and Western existential psychologists recognized that psychology had roots in ancient wisdom traditions long before psychology became a formal scientific discipline. For example, in the East, Confucius, Zhuangzi, Laozi, Mencius and more recently, Lu Xun, taught about living the good life and the connectedness of all things; in the West, William James, Nietzsche, Binswanger, Rollo May and others taught about authenticity and leading a life of meaning and commitment in the face of death.

Human beings from both East and West are searching for authentic identities that recognize the power of their own traditions, while confronting the challenges of post-modern globalism.

- 2) **The Role of the Arts and Culture:** Ways of talking about the role of myth and culture in the conference included a recognition of how the therapeutic process parallels the creative process, "demented" or "outsider art" and reality, nonverbal language and embodied experience, and the use of symbol to express the ineffable.
- 3) **Friendships and the human dimension:** The caring and interpersonal warmth during the conference illustrated a value held by existential psychologists of both East and West that the person matters. Existential psychology is a way to live. This means that: existential psychology is not manualized or focused on either solutions or symptom reductions, but is a fluid art of improvisation and dialogue; the therapist's use of self and relationship is the most important aspect of therapy; and that the way the therapist lives his or her life matters. Ancient teachers such as Zen masters, Socrates, Chassidic teachers all taught that students should observe the way their teachers "tie their shoes" in order to understand how to live. The cultivation of wisdom and compassion are both ancient and universal virtues that are much needed in today's world.

We emerged from this conference strengthened by our immediate recognition of commonalities, forged in the sincerity of human friendships, and the commitment to building bridges and developing ongoing dialogues.



Other highlights of the trip included:

- 1) A 2-day Dance/Movement Therapy workshop at Nanjing University was powerful. People seemed eager to come out from under conventionalities and discover/recover their more authentic sides. I saw much emotion, much open-heartedness and expressed desire to connect with each other.
- 2) a 2-day workshop in Beijing at the China Institute of Psychology. Also powerful, emotional and transformative.
- 3) A meeting and collaboration with a Chinese dance/movement therapist named Chunhong Wong, with whom I have exchanged emails since 2003.



ONLINE RESOURCES:

MATZKIN STUDIO - THE ART OF AGEING

Attitudes to ageing seem to range from Shakespeare's old age of being "sans everything" to a totally – one might say over the top – positive attitude which wants to focus purely on the achievements of those bungee jumping 100 year old elders. So what a delight to find the Matzkins' website which documents the work of Richard and Alice Matzkin, who as they approached their 60s and became more aware of their own ageing, decided to explore ageing through their art. And this has resulted in an amazing collection of paintings and sculptures, which can be seen on their website.

What emerged strongly for me was a more rounded, more human depiction of what it is to age – one which is able to look squarely at the less positive aspects, the losses, and at the same time celebrate life. And I'm left to wonder if this is in part a reflection of the arts process, a process which can give form to and can contain the diverse and the contradictory aspects of human experience. Certainly, as a viewer of their art, I felt moved, saddened, joyous, triumphant, fearful, sensuous, repelled, attracted, warmed.....all of which was held within my engagement with their art.

For a rich and moving, multi-dimensional view of age, I recommend their website:

<http://www.matzkinstudio.com/aboutFrame.html>

Do watch the short video clip of Richard and Alice talking about ageing. It is very moving. Ilene and I in our separate corners of the world were so enthused with what we saw, that we both bought their book –The Art of Aging”!

MEMORY BRIDGE : <http://memorybridge.org/about.php>

View here a wonderful piece showing Naomi Feil working with an older person with dementia.

THEATER OF WAR: http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/entertainment/jan-june10/ptsd_02-03.htm

At military bases around the nation, performances of Greek drama are linking ancient and modern warriors in an understanding of war's pain and mental agony. Jeffrey Brown reports. So begins the transcript of a report on the Jim Lehrer Newshour, on Feb 3, describing a program where actors read excerpts from ancient Greek drama to war veterans and their families. After the readings, the audience are invited to share their experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan...and this they have done without holding back. Even the initiator of the project was surprised at the responses and how these ancient stories are helping veterans make sense of their own traumatic experiences of war.

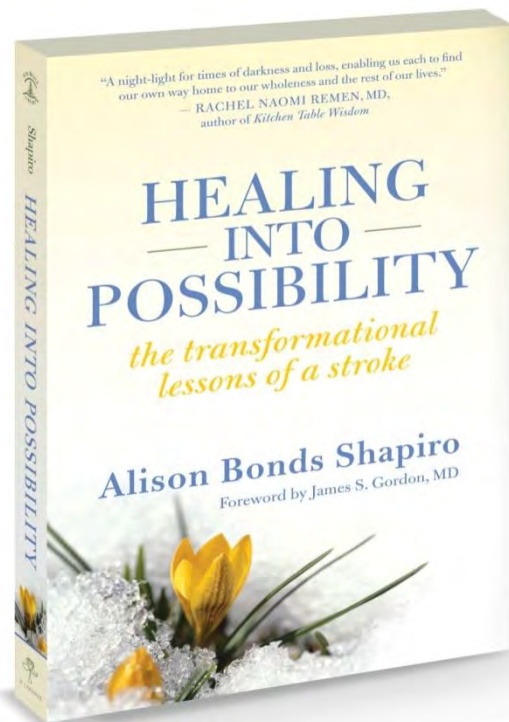
NEW BOOKS:

HEALING INTO POSSIBILITY: THE TRANSFORMATIONAL LESSONS OF A STROKE. HJ Kramer/New World Library (June 2, 2009)

Available at local and online bookstores.

*We are pleased to introduce a new member of the mailing list, **Alison Shapiro** who has sent us some information about her new book.*

Everyday we tell ourselves the stories of our lives and these stories orient us and give us meaning. A major illness can suddenly stop our stories, leaving us bewildered. Introducing the framework to develop a new story and grounding it in awareness, attention and openness to possibility can determine our subsequent quality of life and directly impact our healing. In her compelling book, *Healing into Possibility: The Transformational Lessons of a Stroke*, Alison Bonds Shapiro, MBA, through telling her own remarkable story and those of others, teaches specific skills that can help us face any major health challenge.





About the author

Surviving and thriving after having experienced two devastating brain stem strokes herself, Alison has come to understand the power of attitude and approach as we work with life's challenges. She regularly speaks and teaches at a leading HMO in Northern California, is the advisor to a non-profit dedicated to stroke survivors, writes an ongoing blog for *Psychology Today* and co-produced the DVD *What Now? Sharing Brain Recovery Lessons*. Alison is also a highly regarded business consultant, a published illustrator, a transformational coach, and the chair of the board of trustees of Saybrook University in San Francisco. Her website is www.healingintopossibility.com

CREATIVE ARTS IN INTERDISCIPLINARY PRACTICE

(From Cheryl McLean): The CAIP, *Creative Arts in Interdisciplinary Practice* research text series was launched with the inaugural text "Creative Arts in Interdisciplinary Practice, Inquiries for Hope and Change" published by Detselig Temeron Books, Editor Cheryl McLean, Publisher of [The International Journal of The Creative Arts in Interdisciplinary Practice](http://www.theinternationaljournalofcreativearts.com), IJCAIP, and Associate Editor Dr. Robert Kelly, Faculty of Fine Arts, University of Calgary, The inaugural text is scheduled for release in April 2010. (<http://www.creativeartpractice.blogspot.com>) The book "Creative Arts in Interdisciplinary Practice, Inquiries for Hope and Change" features illustrative examples, demonstrating the breadth and depth of the applications of the creative arts in research action and interdisciplinary practice <http://www.creativeartpractice.blogspot.com>

NEW SOCIAL WORK BOOKS ALERTS FROM JESSICA KINGSLEY

There have been several arts therapies books published here, so it may be worth being on their list. <http://www.jkp.com/newsletter/socialwork/200907>

BOOK REVIEWS

1) Attached are two book reviews on a two volume series on healing stories:

Healing Tales: The Narrative Arts in Spiritual Traditions

Edited by Stanley Krippner, Michael Bova, Leslie Gray, Adam Kay

Charlottesville, VA: Puente Publications, 2007. 512 pp. ISBN: 978-0963450159. \$38.00 (Paperback)

Healing Stories: The Use of Narrative in Counseling and Psychotherapy

Edited by Stanley Krippner, Michael Bova, Leslie Gray

Charlottesville, VA: Puente Publications, 2007. 384 pp. ISBN: 978-0963450142. \$27.36 (Paperback)

Also attached is Ilene's chapter (18) in the Healing Stories volume.

2) *We recently re-discovered a review Ilene wrote some time ago and thought it was worth sharing.*

A REVIEW OF:

Art Therapy and Social Action

by Frances F. Kaplan (Ed.)

London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2007. 272 pp. ISBN 978-1-8431-0798-9. \$29.95, paperback

Reviewed by:

Ilene Serlin, Ph.D. (Psychology)

PsycCRITIQUES

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Why is it important to document the use of art therapy as social action? Surprisingly, the myth still exists that art therapy consists of a Freudian interpretation of a picture painted in an exclusive private practice setting. Perhaps this was true in the early days of art therapy (as in the work of Margaret Naumburg, 1966, and Edith Kramer, 1979, the "mothers" of art therapy), which grew up during the primacy of Freudian orthodoxy. But, like other psychotherapeutic modalities, art therapy has grown and developed new branches. It has reached out into the community, been used to work with disadvantaged children and families, become multiculturally sensitive, and dealt with pressing social issues. The main thesis of Frances Kaplan's new book is that "we cannot separate the people we treat from the cultural settings in which they live and by which they have been influenced" (p. 13).

In *Art Therapy and Social Action*, Frances Kaplan shows us an impressive number of models from the United Kingdom and the United States in which art therapy and social action come together. Some example chapters from this book include "Art

Therapy as a Tool for Social Change: A Conceptual Model,” “Facing Homelessness: A Community Mask Making Project,” “Art and Conflict Resolution,” “The Paper People Project on Gun Violence,” and “Art Making as a Response to Terrorism.”

Beginning with a conceptual model, the art therapist is positioned as a social activist with “an awareness of the interconnectivity between individual and collective, between a person's suffering and social imbalance, as well as an active commitment to personal and social transformation through advocacy for those aspects of individuals and society that are disenfranchised” (p. 31). The art therapist as social activist addresses his or her “own complicity and taking a conscious and ethical stand in redressing social disparities” (p. 31).

Mary Watkins, an archetypal psychologist, goes further in delineating this social mandate:

The job of the activist is to connect with what needs activating, with what has been pushed outside the margins and silenced while listening carefully to the silence that is charged with unspoken truth and giving it form through the image. (p. 74)

The role of the socially conscious art therapist is intimately grounded in its prime modality: the image. The image, according to Cassirer (1955), mediates between conscious and unconscious, between the individual and the collective, and between the individual and the world. Working with images, the art therapist sees through the manifest reality to a reality that is closer to the human unconscious. Carl Jung described two main ways in which working directly with images can be transformative: It brings consciousness to what was previously denied, and it evokes the healing power of the psyche or the self. Kaplan summarizes, “Clearly, then, the image can serve as a call for individual and collective action to address marginalized aspects of human potential” (p. 23). In this way, art therapists have been, as Rollo May (1975) once said, closer to the role of prophet and seer than to that of social worker.

In summary, art therapy is a powerful modality that can access imagery directly, thus mediating between conscious and unconscious, and between individual and community. In *Art Therapy and Social Action*, Frances Kaplan ably documents the new development of art therapy to include social and spiritual awareness by providing clear conceptual frameworks and examples of actual applications in the United Kingdom and the United States. For all those interested in psychotherapy, creativity, and social consciousness, this book will be very valuable.

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ATTACHMENTS:

1 Two reviews of Krippner et al books

2. Ilene's chapter 18 from Krippner et al, *Healing Stories*

TO OUR READERS:

We do invite you to send in any items you come across which might be of interest to members of this mailing list. We also welcome short pieces about you and your work!



—Sometimes art achieves what therapy, medicine, or the best care of health professionals cannot. Sometimes art even achieves something that's beyond the best intentions of the artist. These moments can feel like little miracles when they happen, but they are usually instances of art functioning as it normally does: inspiring motivation, engaging parts of people's bodies or brains that they haven't been using, or allowing them to transcend their environments for a little while."— Liz Lerman, Founding Artistic Director, Liz Lerman Dance Exchange and Author of *Teaching Dance to Senior Adults*