

The Drafts(W0)men of Art Therapy

Looking at problems of definition through I (Saumya Sharma), *Her* (Judith A. Rubin) and *Them* (Elinor Ulman, Margaret Naumburg, Edith Kramer)

A brief Introduction

Calling this an introduction may sound too structured. This is a collaged, interwoven tale—obscure yet vivid, partly narrated by Judith ‘Judy’ Rubin, swerving toward the edge of the precipice, a deep dive into interpreting the draftsman’s ‘Need’ for redefining Art Therapy. I am reading ‘Problems of Definition’ by Elinor Ulman, and as I drift into psychoanalytical contexts I am grasping at straws to keep up with, Judy’s ongoing mental narration helps me access this historically poignant journal with a sense of the ‘personal’.

Away from the mimeographed 8.5’11 sized paper that the contents of this journal originally sat in, I imagine Judy experiencing ‘*the best paper ever written*’. The pages of my digitised print-outs begin to blow as though caught in a high wind, stopping halfway through the year 1963. Mouth hanging open, I see that the little square containing the year seems to have turned into a minuscule television screen. Hands trembling slightly, I raise the book to press my eye against the little window, and slowly I am tilting forward; the window is widening, I feel my body leave my desk, as I am pitched headfirst through the opening in the page, into a whirl of colour and shadow. I feel my feet hit solid ground, the blurred shapes around me gradually coming into focus.

I am in New York City.

From the Outset

Judy walks me through the chain of events that lead to understanding the need for defining Art Therapy and why Elinor Ulman started the ‘Bulletin’. She calls Naumburg and Kramer the two primary pioneers, and with resolution in her voice, claims that it’s their work and contribution to

the field that really brings the contents of the Bulletin together. Judy meets Naumberg in '63, where the mentor suggests subscribing to her former student- Ulman's journal. *"I immediately ordered all the back issues and was very excited. Oh, here are these people in different places using art, you know, so because of the journal and the mailing lists that she was compiling. That's how the group got together."* The journal and the subsequent meetings that led to the formation of the American Art Therapy Association. There is wonder behind the management of resources vis-a-vis accessibility of information and the collation of what is being looked at as a universal definition in an age and occupation that pre-dates globalisation. According to Judy, word of mouth is very powerful and people are very committed and the people who began the field were all in a sense, pioneers in their own communities. In '63, Judy, a former Harvard School Graduate and an Elementary educator, is the only Art Therapist in Pittsburgh. *"When I heard about Eleanor's journal, and then I wrote to her and I said, Can you give me, I asked everybody for advice because there was no formal training."* Judy describes the New York Art Therapy scene at the time as scattered. Between traditional graduate professors, libraries with stacks of card catalogs, she recollects reading through all the material she finds on the psychology of children's art. *"That's when I first saw the term art therapy. I had never seen it before. It was one of Naumberg's early papers"*. In '63, Bulletin announces a series of meetings and Judy ends up going to one in Washington. She remembers feeling surprised by the number of people who turned up to this meeting. Strangely enough (and a hard reality to imagine in 2020) she ends up going to a party and meeting an interesting mix of psychiatrists, psychologists and art therapists. *"I mean, that's how that's how you met people, um, either formally or informally."* The group Washington for a week, with lots of sharing and feedback. The idea for an Art Therapy Association is born in one of such meetings in the future, with people eventually getting to know one another, and not just through pages of the board. Ulman's journal ultimately facilitates and synchronises works of people across the country, making Naumberg's coinage of 'Art Therapy' an internationally recognised field.

Naumberg's work pre-dates Kramer's in terms of experience, research and published papers. Ulman, being a former pupil of Naumburg and a close friend of Kramer, sets out to evaluate the two so-called definitions of Art Therapy. Judy believes that Elinor is one of the few professionals

including herself that see the value in both pioneer's methodologies in face of the larger public opinion demanding individuals to pick one or the other.

"She was not a pioneer in the same way that Margaret and Edith were". Having said this, Judy believes that of the three, Ulman had the greatest influence in defining art therapy. Her role as the principal player is also well documented. In a time where legitimising art therapy in psychiatric, health, and rehabilitation centres means responding to psychological trends in developing assessment and research, Ulman talks about the varying practices designated under Art Therapy which refer to certain professional and volunteer workers with no similar educational preparation. In Problems of Definition, Ulman calls 'Art Therapy' inadequate or inaccurate, but she also feels like she hasn't found a better one yet. She comments on the direct attempts made by art therapists to tighten the loose definition, and thinks there is something important implied about the "nature and potency of this medium."

"Whatever it's deficiencies, our two- word title at least indicates the two main trends in existing practice and theory: some art therapists put the emphasis on art and some on therapy."

Looking at Margaret Naumberg

A distant look on her face, Judy begins to tell me about the Architects of Art Therapy by Maxine Borowsky Junge and Harriet Wadeson. They have asked each of the people who are either an honorary life member of the *AATA* or a past president to write a chapter. Due to Naumberg's demise, Judy is asked to write her mentor's life story. *"I don't remember how much I put into that chapter."* She settles into her Florida home cloud couch and tells me how important a role past histories play in taking on the role of a pioneer.

Margaret was born into a wealthy New York family, having already come over to the United States from Germany. She came from money. *"She was brought up in some degree of luxury but,* (a hah moment that fades into a silent smirk) *she was a rebel."* Naumberg is not an artist. It is her sister Florence Cane, who is the artist. Judy talks about a beautiful book called 'The artist in

each of us', which she thinks is one of the "*best art education books ever written*", and is acknowledged an origin act in the therapeutic use of art as therapy. In contrast, Naumberg's work develops over time in the direction of what we we call Art Psychotherapy today. Naumberg has been analysed by both a Freudian and a Jungian, and is considered very eclectic and open minded...

Judy dives into the evolving relationship she has with Naumberg. She discusses her Art lady days with fellow mentee Fred Rogers (later to be universally known as Mr. Rogers) and talks about their regular consultations with Naumberg in the face of small and big life decisions. "*She wouldn't tell you what to do. She would help you think through what what you would need to think about.*" Upon a presentation in a seminar conducted with regard to child art therapy, Naumberg falls in love with the session and the feeling is mutual. Naumberg tells Judy about financial aid being provided by the government to work with school aged children in after school groups, as a study for normal child development. She asks Judy if practising Art Therapy with the children from the psychiatric hospital would be something she would be interested in. "*I said, Oh, I'm not a therapist, I have no training, I wouldn't be able to!*" Naumberg agrees to supervise Judy. Her tone holds an element of surprise all these years later, pondering over how accidental her introduction to Art Therapy was. She recalls being very excited as the work is extremely challenging. "*All of a sudden, I felt like the ugly duckling you found the swans, you know, I was with people who were had similar values.*"

Judy believes that this need to advocate and include stems from Naumberg's personal experiences. "Up to the present time, education has missed the real significance of the child's behaviour by treating surface actions as isolated conditions. Having failed to recognise the true sources of behaviour, it has been unable effectively to correct and guide the impulses of human growth.... The new advances in psychology, however, provide a key to the real understanding of what makes a child tick." According to her son, a psychiatrist/psychoanalyst Thomas Frank, Naumberg is said to have a 'constrained and miserable' childhood that is considered a feeling factor in her desire to liberate other children to express themselves more freely. Naumberg's first endeavour is to open a progressive school, where Florence also takes on the role of an Art

Teacher. Here, Florence develops methods to release creativity, including scribble drawing, which Naumberg later adapts to release unconscious imagery in Art Therapy. Large sheets of paper are taken and patients are allowed to move their chosen material, paint or chalk pastel, around the page until satisfied but asked that the material not be lifted from the page from start to finish. After the drawing is created the drawer is then allowed to look at the artwork and try to create another form from the scribble. The client is encouraged to move the page around until an image is found. Once an image is seen in the scribble drawing, or painting, they are asked to colour it in. At this point if the client wants to talk about the artwork while creating, they are encouraged to do so. This technique can also be done with the eyes closed. Closing the eyes encourages the creator to become less inhibited to force a form from the free flowing lines. Another way of using this technique is to use the non-dominant hand. This forces the creator to use another part of the brain, hopefully releasing the unconscious mind to form the symbolic imagery needed to gain access to more insight of the self. Her experience with progression school also leads her to writing her first book 'The child and the world'. This is important because Judy brings it up in Architects, writing about Naumberg's insistence and adamance on Judy reading this book as it holds the seeds of Art Therapy.

Naumberg believes children would not only learn knowledge, but learn how to use knowledge to their advantage, directing the "spontaneous, free art expression of the groups of children." In view of not making the completion of the art process the central goal, Naumberg explains that "preoccupation with artistic goals must be minimised in favour of a specialised form of psychotherapy." Through Naumberg's efforts, psychiatrists all over the world encourage their patients to communicate not only with words, but with paint and clay. She is unique in using it as a primary agent rather than an auxiliary tool, *"a claim made, as far as I know, for no other activity therapy."*

Naumberg cites the advantages of introducing painting and clay modelling into analytically oriented psychotherapy as follows–

"First, it permits direct expression of dreams, fantasies. and other inner experiences that occur as pictures rather than words." She calls her approach Dynamically Oriented Art Therapy based

primarily on Freudian Theory. This approach promotes " the release of spontaneous imagery" from the client through the symbols drawn and free association of the artworks.

“Second, pictured projections of unconscious material escape censorship more easily than do verbal expressions, so that the therapeutic process is speeded up.” Naumburg persists that the only legit interpretation of anyone's art comes from the creator. She is cynical about simple or rigid approaches to symbolic meaning consistent with Freud's teaching about dream analysis.

“Third, the productions are durable and unchanging; their content cannot be erased by forgetting, and their authorship is hard to deny.” It is important to Naumburg to not read into or comment on the client's artwork so the client cannot not change their mind about what has been created and to avoid being wrong. Naumburg uses creativity as the means for clients to visually showcase their conflicts, and when it is too difficult for the client to relax, she provides them with art lessons or specific directive projects instead.

“Fourth, the resolution of transference is made easier. "The autonomy of the patient is encouraged by his growing ability to contribute to the interpretation of his own creations. He gradually substitutes a narcissistic cathexis to his own art for his previous dependence on the therapist.”

In *Architects*, Judy remembers one of the analysts calling Naumberg an “*analytic nun*.” 1966 sees Naumberg publish *Dynamically Oriented Art therapy* with definitions of her approach as they have evolved finally. Judy mentions her case study competing with Freud's with gratuity of vivid illustrations. “Naumberg's theory has undergone considerable evolution since the early 1940's; only a recent formulation will be quoted. Naumberg designates art therapy as analytically oriented, saying that it "bases its methods on releasing the unconscious by means of spontaneous art expression; it has its roots in the transference relation between patient and therapist, and on the encouragement of free association. It is closely allied to psychoanalytic therapy Treatment depends on the development of the transference relation and on a continuous effort to obtain the patient's own interpretation of his symbolic designs The images produced are a form of communication between patient and therapist; they constitute symbolic speech.” Ulman calls

Naumburg the “often embattled pioneer” as she discusses Naumburg’s struggles to remove her personal sensibilities in order to distinguish and grow with her research and discarding impeding misuse of art materials in therapy and art education.

“More and more emphatically she warns that premature concern with artistic achievement is bound to interfere with maximum therapeutic exploitation of ‘spontaneous art expression’.”

Looking at Edith Kramer

It is important to note, that alongside Judy’s narration of Kramer’s life and her work, as a former member, there is a first hand recollection by Kramer in ‘Architects of Art Therapy.’

Judy begins by telling me that Kramer is primarily an artist. *“It’s crazy, art was her life.”* In Architects, Kramer lays heavy emphasis on being raised in a Bohemian family, moving in Viennese psychoanalyst circles. She is raised by an encouraging mother who at the age of 13 puts her under the able guidance of Friedl Dicker. Judy, being good friends with Kramer, sheds light on her early life. Kramer’s parents are not analysts, but they know analysts and so there is a small community. She talks about Kramer and Dicker being Jewish, and their move with other refugees from Austria to Czechoslovakia, early in Hitler’s reign, before he invaded. Kramer explains this period in her life with great care and detail, discussing Dicker’s work with the uprooted children in the refugee camps, many of whom are traumatised and face emotional disturbance. She talks about Dicker’s art methods that personify individualistic and collective structure that later can be interpreted through these children’s chaotic images, filled with distorted bodies and Hitler becoming the incarnation of evil. This is the first time Kramer witnesses art becoming a medium for gaining emotional equilibrium, *“The healing quality inherent in the creative process explains, in Kramer’s view, the usefulness of art in Therapy.”* In these tough times, children evoking their art to remember the good in their present and past lives, helping them sustain and endure the deprivation and dangers in concentration camps. Kramer

calls Dicker's work in the Terezin camps her greatest legacy and recognises her as the 'grandmother' of Art Therapy.

Judy thinks of Kramer's work, as a primary product of her life experiences. She talks about Kramer's move to New York, escaping the Nazis, as part of a Jewish refugee stream on the last boat to leave Europe that gets to the United States, coming to her aunt. Kramer initially sleeps in the school she first picks up a job at, and since there isn't a bedroom, they give her a classroom, where she sleeps on the floor and works as a shop teacher.

"She had a little inheritance from an aunt. Not that she was wealthy." She talks about Kramer's first apartment in an ancient attic space, in what *"I would call a lower class neighbourhood"*, Owing to the space being a loft, there is a lot of room. It is down in what is at the time called the Lower East Side, which becomes gentrified much later.

She is 33, when she realises she needs a stable livelihood and wants to go back to her psychoanalytic roots and her early work in Prague, which also requires money. Kramer's job at 'Wiltwyck Therapeutic Home for Disadvantaged and Delinquent Boys' is the turning point for Art Therapy. In Architects, Kramer mentions Dr. Bernard, for he first labels her as an 'Art Therapist' and advises her to write down all her practices. She heeds his advice and maintains a journal noting all her "misgivings, victories, mistakes and surprises." According to Kramer, these illegible scribbles, comprehensive only to her, became the foundation for her first book. "In 1958 she became the second member of our nascent profession in the United States to publish a book length and to attempt rigorous definition."

Kramer's first book, 'Art Therapy in a Children's Community', is provided with an overview of her psychodynamic approach based on the Freudian model. Ulman quotes Kramer in 'Problems of Definition' where "Art", she says, 'is a means of widening the range of human experiences by creating equivalents for such experiences. It is an area wherein experiences can be chosen, varied, repeated at will.' She talks about the therapist's basic aim to cater to the disturbed people, the "pleasure and satisfaction" which art can give and consequently how the therapist's insight and therapeutic skills can make the process meaningful and valuable. "In the creative act, conflict is re-experienced, resolved and integrated." Kramer talks about the therapist's function

in accepting the unbeautiful manifestations of raw impulses, alongside results of ‘confusion and incomplete sublimation.’ She emphasises on the therapist’s artistic integrity in maintaining a judgement free stance, so the therapist can differentiate between regression and progress, “superficial pretence and true sublimation.”

Kramer especially uses sublimation as the centrepiece of her work. Freudian theory describes sublimation as a process in which primitive urges coming from the id are transformed into socially productive activities that lead to gratification of the original urge. Kramer believes sublimation to be one of the most vital goals of art therapy. Through art, negative and destructive emotions and urges are transformed into useful products. She asserts that the success of the therapy can be measured by the visual product. “The art therapist makes creative experiences available to disturbed persons in the service of the total personality; he must use methods compatible with the inner laws of artistic creation His primary function is to assist the process of sublimation, an act of integration and synthesis which is performed by the ego, wherein the peculiar fusion between reality and fantasy, between the unconscious and the conscious, which we call art is reached.”

Having said this, through Kramer’s writing, Ulman interprets the lack of imposed solution. “In the artistic, product conflict is formed and contained but only partly neutralized.” Kramer, having worked with younger children who are often unable to explain their feelings through the use of words, understands that some are incapable of complete sublimation. In ‘Architects’, she remembers some boys saying “Stop preaching, Mrs. Kramer.” Judy mentions a fan letter sent by Ulman to Kramer (after which Ulman and Kramer become good friends) where Ulman says “you so beautifully clarify the peculiar value of the artistic process itself– neither as a mere lubricant for an essentially verbal process of communication, nor primary a supplement to other ways of getting at unconscious revelation of personality.”

Judy talks about the time where she meets Kramer at an Art Therapy conference, where Kramer is the only other person who has written about blind children at that point. She describes Kramer as a very critical person, which Kramer claims to have picked from Dicker in her early days. “*I was terrified, because she was, you know, this big cheese and I was just a young twerp.*” It is

important to note that Kramer believes that product is as important as the process in Art Therapy. She feels denying the client the gratification of the end product is robbing them. Art must “evoke emotion”; art must also display “inner consistency,” meaning the artist is being true to oneself, and art must possess an “economy of means.” She insists that when artistic efforts become fully formed, there is greater likelihood that sublimation too will be achieved.

“No art therapist who places the emphasis on art considers art therapy a possible substitute for psychotherapy in the more conventional sense. Most agree with Kramer about a few salient qualities that distinguish the art therapist from the art teacher.”

The Historic Rift

I ask Judy about the ‘Historic Rift’, coined by Kramer in Architects, where she tells me about how Naumburg’s early work is the ‘40s, so she predates Kramer by a little bit.

Judy remembers Naumburg as her mentor and confidant, and also acknowledges her friendly relationship with Kramer, calling her generous for letting her observe Kramer’s work at the ‘Guild for the blind’ at the Jewish hospital.’ She fondly mentions taking classes both Naumburg and Kramer teach, and meeting with both of them independently. She does mention the meetings not being as extensive but writing a lot of letters to them, and recalls their advice very vividly.

Judy gets this peculiarly amused expression on her face. *“Each one of them told me that the other one didn't know what she was doing. And that I shouldn't listen to the other. Naumburg said, Don't listen to Kramer; Kramer said don't listen to Naumburg, essentially they use harsher terms than that. Something like, she's just a half baked art teacher, she's just a half baked child therapist or something.”* Having read similar stories by other authors and therapists, in Architects, Kramer’s view on the rift seems to sit in deep contrast and on the fringes of mere dispersion. Kramer claims to follow Naumburg to NYU and says that the organisation of the field has lead to division, which has ‘perturbed’ Art Therapy till date.

Judy smilingly continues, *“What was really interesting was they gave identical advice. I mean, really identical, you know, like, get yourself into therapy, uh, you need to know yourself, if you're going to be a therapist. I had been there, read these books, and even there, they overlapped. And then the other piece of advice that was the same was get yourself supervision from a really experienced therapist, for you really need to have a deep understanding of self.”* Both Naumburg and Kramer base their formulations on psychoanalytic theory. Kramer mentions observing similarities in their thought processes reflected in Naumburg's early work. She also attributes the difference to the age gap and the kind of social environment their patients belong to. By Naumburg's definitions, Kramer is an art teacher rather than an art therapist. Into Kramer's ideological scheme, Naumburg fits as a psychotherapist, not an art therapist. “This is an extreme statement of the cleavage between those art therapists who operate near the peripheral area of psychotherapy at one side, and those who operate near the peripheral area of art education at the other.” Judy talks about the both of them living very long lives. *“Kramer retained her faculties, almost till the end, Naumburg began to lose them at the end, but they were very bright and self made in the sense that they sought out the learning opportunities, one more formal than the other, very independent and quite competitive.”*

“When representatives of the two trends meet they are apt to treat each other and each other's ideas with a rather gingerly politeness, so that it is hard to tell where catholic acceptance leaves off and veiled difference about important convictions begins. Yet for all their serious and overt disagreement, even between two such strong personalities as Naumburg and Kramer the conflict in practice is not absolute.”

Through Problems of Definition and Judy's narration, I see Ulman in an active leadership role, refereeing these two schools of criteria and finding their formulations adequate, “that is the basis of their psychoanalytic understanding.”

(Probable) Synthesis

Through the course of this conversation, there is an underlying sense of pride and warmth in Judy's voice which she speaks about towards the end of our conversation. *"In the beginning, the AATA was very small, there were only 100 people. At the first meeting, there were no training programs yet. So the field wasn't well known. And therapy was quite frightening to most people, the idea of therapy was scary. And you had to be crazy to need therapy. So we didn't use the term much. We call it by other names. This was a pilot art program, we didn't use the term therapy at the school."* While Judy still does not condone labelling it as therapy, she quotes Ulman saying *"Margaret Naumburg was Art Therapy."* She talks about therapy being Naumburg's central passion for life. She commends Naumburg's ability to draw ideas from a variety of sources and synthesise them into new creations. Most importantly, Judy asserts the quality of Naumburg's works being a prime facilitator for the eventual acceptance of art therapy in mental health establishments. *"Like all pioneers, she had to fight hard for her creation."*

Judy remembers Kramer as a passionate and voracious learner, with interesting circles in psychology and avant garde art ideas. *"She wore overalls. She never dressed like a peasant but I don't think I ever saw her dressed up. She was a part of both worlds."* Kramer depicts physical, tangible objects such as herself, other people, landscapes, and cityscapes, cityscapes. She prefers painting with expressive colours. Kramer argues that art therapists must make their own art in order to cope with "exhausting clinical work". *"She would stand up and punch your fist, then she would say, Don't ever work full time. You have to leave time for your art. You have to keep doing your art. And for her, that was a mantra, and she lived by it."*

Judy and I talk about the need for a 'redefinition' in the 21st century. One of the overlooked facts that is brought up is the presence of a number of presentations and brief articles addressing issues of cultural difference by art therapists of color. Judy talks about Mr. Rogers about being a lovely man, but not the not the world's most liberal person. She refers to him as quite conservative, moving in a mostly white upper class, political world. She remembers how at one of the showings in New York, a tribute's wife and a psychoanalyst from Pittsburgh King, critically comments on Mr. Rogers' Neighbourhood not representing the real world. It is a sanitized,

cleaned up world. I also mention an amusing yet disarming footnote I notice, through the paper which says “The sexist language of the day has been retain in original quotations.” She grins. *“So it's only retrospect, you know, it's interesting how history works. History is selective like memory. And people select that they want to and need to to make a point.”*

Savneet Talwar says that contributors to today’s field “argue for a definition that represents the wide range of art therapy practice, one that is trans-disciplinary, self-reflexive, and de-stigmatising, and that honours the voices of those who use our services.”

Through the course of this paper, I constantly think about the role of the Unreliable Narrator. It is I with an expectation of her (Judith Rubin) and them (Ulman, Kramer, Naumburg) having a kind of authority and clarity of vision with what they think, interpret and analyse. I am leaning towards a team in parts, feeling included in parts, fleetingly forming strong opinions, trying to give everyone the benefit of the doubt yet also being sceptical. Most of all, I think the attempt at objectivity by all three parties is valiant, if not successful.

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