ATOL: Art Therapy OnLine

Taking a long look at Art.
Reflections on the context of production and consumption of art in Art Therapy

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Abstract

This paper draws on experiences of looking at art to consider the influence of social context on the production and consumption of art in art therapy. I draw on art historical discourses to explore the experience and relate this to looking at art in art therapy. I suggest that professional socialisation profoundly influences how art therapists look and think about what they see. I propose that attention to our tacit knowledge about art, extending art therapy's practices of looking to include contemporary discourse about audiencing, curating and display, and that taking time for a long look at art and at the art made in art therapy, can enliven and sustain art therapy's unique ways of seeing.

Keywords

Looking; social context; art therapy; art history; professional socialisation.

Introduction

This paper has been driven by intense experiences of looking at Early Renaissance art. These have stayed with me, haunted me almost, and propelled me into new and

unexpected research. I describe this experience and what it led me to think in relation to patronage and the professional socialisation of art therapists, our language, discourse and how we audience what we see, and how our practices of looking and display might be enhanced through taking a long look at art, and through looking longer at the art made in art therapy.

The method I have employed is heuristic. Heuristic research draws on in-depth description and analysis of personal material such as transferential responses, cultural associations and written and visual explorations through which the researcher interrogates their topic and searches for meaning. It is an introspective process that leads not only to self-knowledge but also, hopefully, contributes to knowledge about the topic (Douglass and Moustakas, 1985: Moustakas, 1990). My process involved thick description of my looking and critical subjectivity about my reflections and internal frames of reference, setting these alongside exploration of the external world of the topic, which, in this instance, involved reading, thinking and more looking. I begin with description of what happened and then unpack and contextualise my thoughts within the literature.

Looking 1, Italy: 'The Resurrection', the 'Madonna del Parto' and 'St. Francis preaching to the birds'.
A few summers ago I went to Italy, planning to do some of the Piero della Francesca trail. We began with 'The Flagellation' (figure 1). It took a bit of finding: a lot of wandering round the streets of Urbino and through many rooms of the large, municipal gallery before suddenly coming upon it by a door, in the thick of lots of other Early Renaissance paintings. It seemed small and insignificant, being on a rather moth-eaten, woodwormy piece of old wood. It was so disappointing.
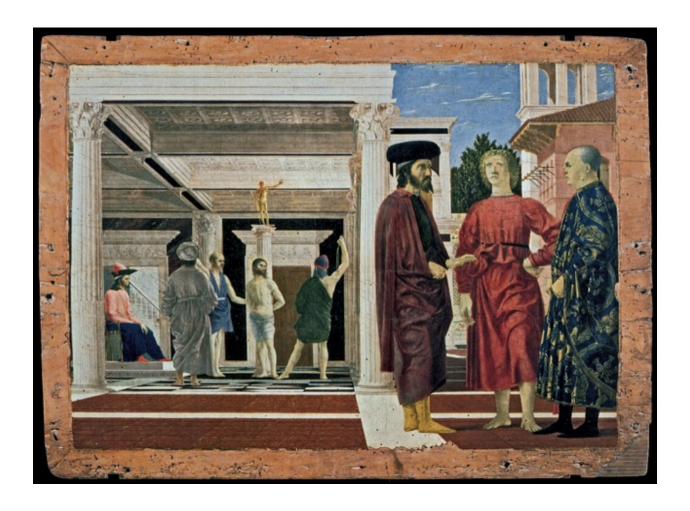
Figure 1: Piero della Francesca, 'The flagellation of Christ', 1445-1450.

Then, on a not-too-hot-yet morning, we went to the Museo Civico in Sansepolcro to see 'The Resurrection' (figure 2). I was captivated. I gasped on entering the room, held my breath. The fresco dominated the civic chamber. It was about twelve foot square and placed mostly above eye level and was much bigger than I'd anticipated. I remembered to keep breathing and looked and looked and looked and looked and looked, wondering how and when I was going to be able to stop.
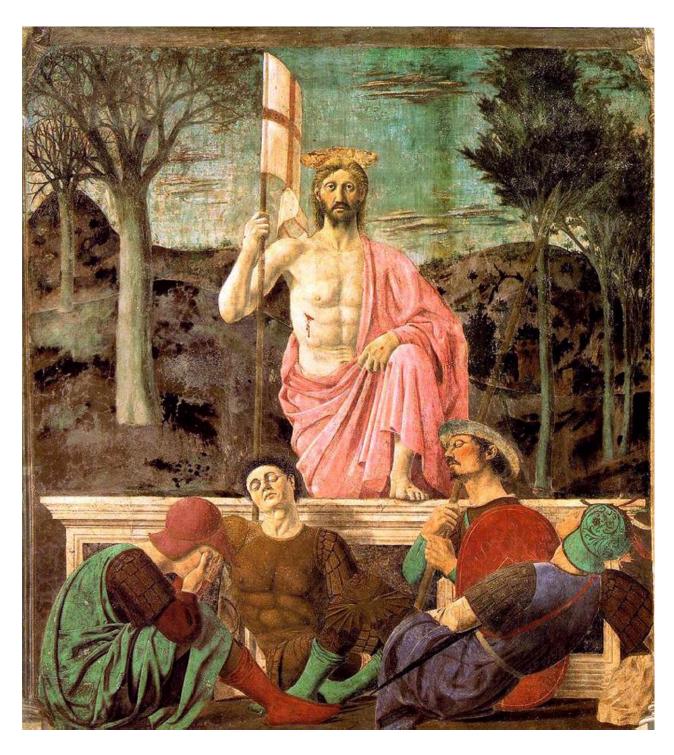
Figure 2: Piero della Francesca, 'The Resurrection', 1460.

It was quiet, silent, and only my friend and I were there, apart from the civic official watching us looking. I remember the physical experience of my eyes darting around the painting, not knowing what to look at first, or next, to move back or forward, look at the whole, look at the detail, like I wanted to take it in all at once. I was so *excited*, seeing this painting only ever seen on slides or in books. There it *was*. And here we were too.

I was struck by the scale, by the physicality of the piece; it was so much a part of the wall. In fact there was a trompe l'oeil architectural surround that I'd never seen in reproductions that worked extraordinarily well with the actual architecture of the place, giving a whole new dimension to the piece. Piero had actually been here and done that. His "shaping hand" (Hughes, 1990: 12) had made those very marks. I moved in to look at them more closely.

I settled down to look at it, walking backwards to see the whole. The central figure of Christ was so *demanding*. Commanding. This was a muscular Jesus, a real man. He'd been down the gym and worked on those muscles and now he was a warrior. He meant business. You'd better not mess with him, in fact you'd better just pay attention, now. He was an ordinary man who had been through an extraordinary experience and *he was back*, this was serious, he was looking at *you* and he wasn't taking any prisoners. He was haggard, bleeding, unsmiling, his mouth turned down. This was not an entirely benign presence.

The soldiers were sleeping, unaware of the warrior Christ standing over them, on his way out of his tomb. They formed an extraordinary triangular group of tangled limbs, some of which didn't quite match up. The soldier centre left was slumped with his head thrown back, resting on the tomb; he was straightforward. The soldier on the far left was readable too, with his head in his hands, but what was happening there? Move in: his nose was poking through his fingers. Endearingly human, and I did it too.   But the figures on the right troubled me: move back. The man centre right didn't appear to have any legs; they could not possibly have been behind the figures either side of him. And

the soldier on the far right could not have been resting in that position: he'd fall over. And what was his right arm doing? Move in: still doesn't make sense. Move back: look more, work it out, can't. Had anyone noticed this or written about it? What did it mean?

But that stare. That *man* looking at you, watching you looking at him. That steady, unremitting, unflinching look that could see right through you. Scary. Mesmerising. (Figure 3)
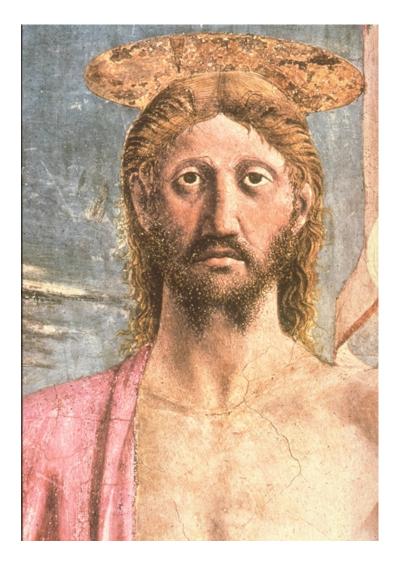

Figure 3: Piero della Francesca, head of Christ, detail from 'The Resurrection'.

The room was simple, painted white. The fresco was at the far end of a chamber about sixty foot long, windows on the left hand side and other paintings on the right. Hang on, there was another face I knew well from posters and Christmas cards. I'd glanced at him on the way in but been sucked into the main event in the middle of the room. Quick, look at him. There *he* was too! 'St. Julian' (figure 4). What a cool, tranquil face; what a complexion. And the 'Madonna della Misericordia': look at that, try and look properly, remember it's an important painting too. Look, *make* myself take notice.

Figure 4: Piero della Francesca, 'St. Julian', c1470.

But 'The Resurrection' insisted on being looked at more. Actually there was something rather clever happening. Those soldiers were physically on the same level as me, the viewer. My eye met them; I was at the same level as them. Yet he was above eye level so you had to look up at him, up *to* him, but he was looking straight at me, level with me, still with that steady, not amused, authoritative stare. How had Piero *done* that?

Jesus was casual, resting his arm on his raised leg and holding his robe. Was it an imperial Roman toga or a simple pink sheet, a shroud for an ordinary man? And that foot: *look* at the perspective of that foot so skilfully rendered. (Move in. Could I do that? Probably. Actually maybe not quite so well). And the painting of the tomb was so interesting, the compositional fearlessness of dividing the entire picture plane in half with the tomb edge and linking this with the trompe l'oeil of the painted surround (move back again). It really looked as if the entire fresco was recessed with columns either side and a ledge at the bottom, and that Jesus had just paused on his way out of the tomb and could quite easily step out of the wall. The tomb too was so cleverly painted (move in again) to look as if it was old, that is to look 'old' in AD 32 with cracked and crumbling stucco and Roman numerals that were half gone when the body was placed inside. This was painted in the 1460s to look old then; a 500 years old fresco referring to 1500 years before, existing in the present, then, yet still here, now, referring back through layers of history. What a time warp.

We stayed for about an hour. It was like having a long, cool drink having been very, very thirsty and I wanted it to go on and on, yet I was saturated and happy to leave all at the same time. The morning was going on and it was time for a cappuccino. We went to a café in the square of Sansepolcro and I sat, pretty quietly for me, stunned, recovering, my eyes still darting, thinking about the intensity of the experience, wanting to go and write it all down, and wanting to go back again, immediately. But other Pieros called and there wasn't time, yet I really, *really* wanted to go back later on, through the rest of the holiday, and still do, now.

There was more in Assisi and Monterchi. Assisi first. The sight of the Basilica was astounding, rising palely from the plain of the surrounding landscape like a ghostly monastery, dominating everything. Again I gasped as I entered the Basilica at Giotto's ten, twelve foot square frescoes depicting the St. Francis cycle, all painted in the most extraordinary perspective and with such curious things going on. A wild, bright pink, fluttering creature zapping St. Frances with the stigmata: what on earth was that? (A seraphim, so I later discovered, figure 5).
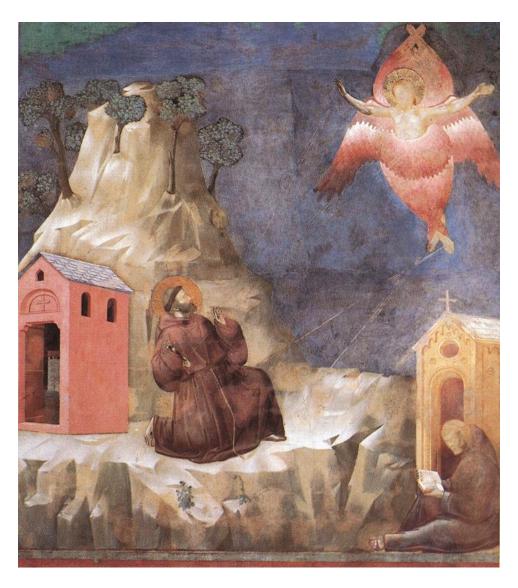

Figure 5: Giotto di Bondone, 'Stigmatisation of St. Francis', 1297-1300.

And the flying chariot, the flying Christ, the distorted perspective of the buildings – what did they all *mean*? Then the familiar, marvellously calming image of St. Frances preaching to the birds (figure 6) that brought tears to my eyes.

Figure 6: Giotto di Bondone, 'St. Francis preaching to the birds', 1297-1300.

What *was* this response of mine? I spent an hour or so looking at these wonderful paintings in an incredibly crowded place that somehow I didn't really notice, so captivated was I with the majestic original Giottos, there on the wall. Occasionally a monk would irritably ask for quiet over a microphone, trying vainly to remind us tourists that this was a place of worship. Indeed it was, but for me not of the kind he meant.

A few days later to Monterchi. We looked for the museum, slowly wandering up and down hilly, cobbled streets with red geranium-filled window boxes, getting hotter and hotter, then coming across the most unprepossessing municipal building with a man in a glass box taking the lire. And there it was, in a cool and darkened room - another fabulous painting: Piero's 'Madonna del Parto' (the pregnant Madonna, figure 7).

Figure 7: Piero della Francesca, 'Madonna del Parto', 1460.

No longer in its original location in a chapel but still in Piero's mother's home village, here, and behind a perspex screen, right there, with that same 'shaping hand' using small white flicks of the paintbrush to describe the featheriness of the angels' wings. I'm captivated by Piero's use of colour exchange between the angels: red wings, green dress, red stockings; green wings, red dress, green stockings. So simple, but it takes a moment for the eye to register it. And I remember reading about how Piero used to trace figures and faces, repeating and sometimes reversing them. Look closely and you can see the tracing dots on the gesso surface. Yes! There they are. The artist from 500 years ago suddenly very visible, doing his simple technical thing, playing with colour and form. And those angels really look at you too, inviting you to look at their pride and joy, the young woman who looked so like, and so unlike, a pregnant teenager today, wondering what on earth had happened to get her in this state, and there she is, on display, with these two equally young men holding back the curtains to show her to the world, almost like a prize exhibit in a country show. Such a theatrical painting in a theatrical setting that somehow seemed appropriate, reverential even in the darkness and welcome coolness. But where had it come from? Why was it there and not on it's wall?

Thinking about looking, 1

Two of the paintings I've described, Piero's 'Resurrection' and 'Madonna del Parto', are images of tomb and womb, of death and resurrection, of returning from a dead state into life. Thinking about my response brings to mind notions of change and transformation, of moving from one state to another, all of which are pertinent issues for me nowadays. And I was struck not only by the erotic charge between me and the painting, me and *that man* in 'The Resurrection', but also by the resonance I experienced with the authority of that stare and finding my own authority. All of this makes sense in terms of a transferential response but somehow this familiar, psychoanalytic frame of thinking about art was not enough. There was more to this and to think about it solely in these terms somehow diminished the experience. I had experienced a real identification with

Piero the painter in thinking about the space and location, about perspective, the flatness of the picture plane, the paint and the colour, all through existing in the same physical spaces, in those towns and villages, under the same hot Italian skies.

This led me to think of the experience as a series of meetings: first, between the central figure and me; second, between the artist, the subject and the viewer - between Piero, That Man and me - and third, between me as an artist and *the* artist. This made me want to know more about the man who had painted That Man. Who *was* he? Why had he made those paintings? I wanted to know about the context of their production and consumption then, in order to understand more of what they might mean to me, now.

At that point I read Hughes' (1990) discussion of the importance of seeing original paintings and how nothing can compensate for or replace the visceral experience of actually seeing the object with one's own eyes. I also noted his remarks that "Art requires the long look" (15), about the power of actually seeing "the recorded movement of the shaping hand" (12) and that present day culture is like living in "a Niagara of visual gabble" (14).

Looking 2, London: 'St. Michael', 'The Baptism' and 'The Nativity'.

On the second day of the following New Year I went to look at the Piero's in the National Gallery in London. They were in a little room down the end of a long gallery full of Early Renaissance Italian paintings, after a number of other galleries equally full of stuff, just *stuff*. I skimmed them and sat in the attendant's seat where I could see all three Piero's and began to look. Just look.

My gaze was drawn first to St. Michael (figure 8).

Figure 8: Piero della Francesca, 'St. Michael', 1470.

I was struck by his monumental stillness and by the familiar, cool complexion of this young man who had the merest hint of a shaving shadow. His legs really went up under the battledress tunic and down into the red boots and there was a fine gauze undergarment over his forearms that was visible at his neck as well. I let my eyes rove around the painting, noticing the sharpness of the sword, the pointy teeth of the serpent, and then the roughness of the painting of the serpent's body. These were real blobs of paint, so unlike the translucent smoothness of St, Michael's cheeks.   Was this deliberate, or painted by an assistant? Surely this painting was not entirely the work of that particular 'shaping hand'?

Then I noticed the way St. Michael's wing is cut off in the bottom left hand side. I looked at the blurb on the wall: the painting was originally part of an altarpiece for the Augustinian church in Sansepolcro, the cut off cloak presumably linking this panel to what used to be next to it. I start feeling a bit edgy, like this is wrong, I'm only getting part of the story, the painting's out of context, not at home.

Then the Baptism of Christ (figure 9).   Immediately I read the blurb: this too was painted as an altarpiece for a chapel in Sansepolcro and originally had other pictures around it. And those feet again, painted in marvellous perspective. Then I notice an unevenness in the paint quality similar to that of St. Michael with a crudely painted background landscape and foreground plants (the assistant again?), that is in comparison with the faces and the torso of Christ. But look at the marvellous perspective of the dove and the delicacy of the embroidered edge of Christ's garment, although those angels' wings aren't quite right either. You can see how they've been squeezed into the painting, a bit like the tumbling group of figures and limbs in 'The Resurrection'. The angel's wings on the far left just don't work, and the wing nearest to Christ is clearly an ultramarine glaze over the landscape (a restorer perhaps?).
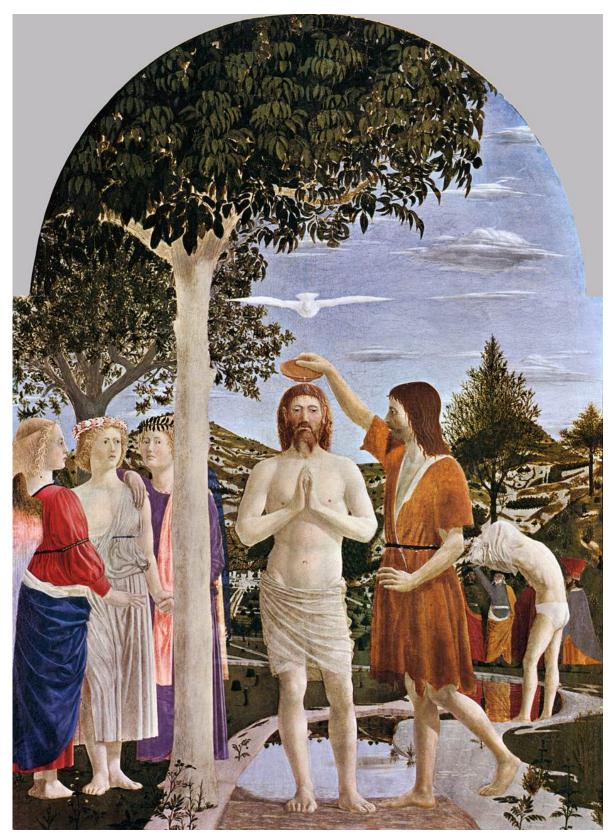
Figure 9: Piero della Francesca, 'The Baptism of Christ', 1448-1450.

And then the half-painted Nativity. Either it was never finished or it's damaged (a 19th Century restorer I later discover). All good stuff, extraordinary images really, but I realise I'm bored and can't look anymore, so I walk out into cold, grey Trafalgar Square in busy central London. It doesn't feel right at all. Those paintings have been ripped out of their context to be looked at an entirely different way to that intended either by Piero or by those who commissioned the work. There they are, those precious, splendid paintings surrounded by so much else that they go barely noticed by the few who drift in, glance around and wander off. The few who did whilst I was there were mostly from overseas: Japanese, American and Spanish, and I wondered how Italians felt looking at the frescos here in London, under English skies, surrounded by the colours and culture of Northern Europe. Perhaps my and others' looking at these Piero's was limited, constrained because the paintings are out of their context and blurred by everything else that surrounds them so they cannot be properly seen.

Thinking about looking, 2.

Three key points arise from these narratives:

- The emotional and aesthetic response to the paintings
- The significance of context and location
- The physical and sensory nature of the visual experience

As the research progressed I noticed that I was returning to key texts from art history and related, contemporary literature in order to explore these issues.

The emotional and aesthetic response to the paintings

I was relieved when, in the art history literature, I discovered that 'The Resurrection' had an equally powerful impact on others. There were heady descriptions of the figure of Christ: Aronberg Lavin (1992), for example, speaks of a "stationary, ghostly ruffian fixing

us with burning eyes, repugnant yet horribly compelling" and of "the virile nudity of his hard, metal-like body (37). Christ's face is, she says, "awe inspiring" with "a devouring and absorbing gaze … what the Italians call 'brutto-bello, a superb visualisation of 'beautiful ugliness'" (110). And I was thrilled to read that one of the kneeling figures underneath the cloak of the 'Madonna della Misericordia' and one of the soldiers in the tumbling group in 'The Resurrection' (centre left, figure 10) – the man with the dark, curly hair - were generally agreed to be self portraits by Piero. I really liked being able to put a face to the man who painted That Man.
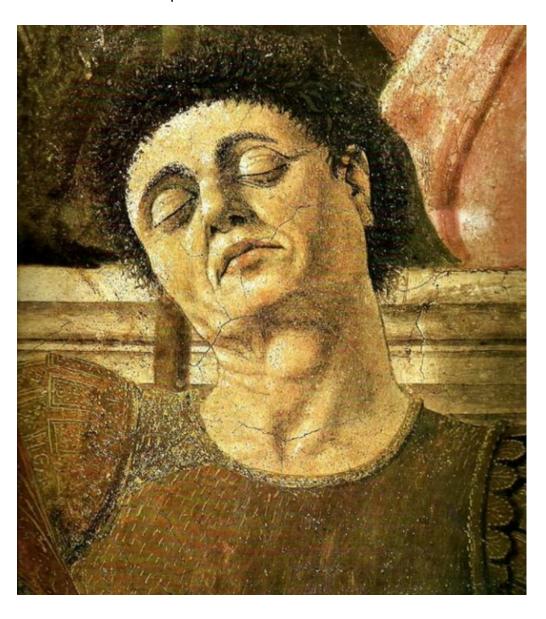

Figure 10: Piero della Francesca, head of soldier, detail from 'The Resurrection'.

I was also interested to read that images of the pregnant Madonna were not unusual in the 15th Century (Bertelli, 1992), neither was the memorial, sculptural tradition of angels drawing aside curtains to show an effigy of the deceased (Hendy, 1968: 112). What is unusual in the 'Madonna del Parto' however is Piero's adaptation of the tradition to show life instead of death, the underlying theme being one of rebirth of the spirit.

I continued to be intrigued by the power of my looking in Italy, how outside my usual experience it was, how I was thinking about it, relating it to my art practice and the essentialness of place, of landscape and being in the world that my work is about. I wondered if other art therapists had similarly intense visual experiences and devised a workshop to find out. I was fascinated to discover that almost everyone who attended these workshops (over several years now, both in the UK and overseas) had. A few, interestingly, were with Piero's 'Resurrection' and 'Madonna del Parto'; others with Cimabue's 'Adam and Eve', Michelangelo's 'Pieta', Anish Kapoor's installation in Tate Modern and many other paintings and sculptures small and large, famous and unknown.

One participant refered me to Ryde's paper (2003) where she describes gasping on entering the Tate's Rothko room, choking and catching her breath on seeing the paintings. Ryde thinks about this in terms of Rothko's communication about death, sensuality and a sense of timelessness and the ephemeral which, she suggests, is achieved through a particular form of projective identification where the viewer becomes immersed. The result is what Bollas (1987) describes as an 'aesthetic moment', that is "…a state of being that is wordless; a fusion between subject and object" that has a transformational effect (Ryde, 2003: 60). This made sense; my experiences in Italy had indeed been transformational but but…

Elkins (2001) has investigated the powerful impact art can have, in particular why people cry in front of works of art. He suggests that intense responses arise for a number of reasons: from seeing beauty; because people feel the same winds and storms in themselves as they see in the artworks; they may feel transported to another time or place; there may be realisations to do with time or their own death; or there is a profound sense of either absence or presence that links to a spiritual component in the encounter. This last Elkins explains as a response to a "sudden, unexpected, out-of-control *presence*" (174, his emphasis), a feeling of "grace" and of being at home. This he links to the etymological meaning of the word 'religion' – connection – so, if a painting makes the viewer feel at home or somehow a part of the picture, then the experience is religious in the original sense of the word (180).

This helped me to understand the exhilaration I felt when standing in those chapels in Italy and why I cried in front of Giotto's 'St Francis preaching to the birds'. At the time I had thought of going to Sansepolcro and Assisi almost as a pilgrimage, not in the conventional religious sense but to see paintings I had long admired. 'The Resurrection' undoubtedly had the 'presentness' that Elkins describes and, like the "Madonna del Parto' and 'St Francis', induced a curious sense of 'home' in me. This makes me think my tears were tears of relief: relief at a sense of connection, of coming home to art. This is not to say that I had disconnected from art, rather that there was a sense of *profound* connection to my primary discipline.

Then a colleague referred me to Berger (1960) on Piero's 'Resurrection'. Here at last was an exploration of the visual awkwardness of the soldiers. Berger suggests that it is as if the figure on the far right is in an invisible hammock that is part of a net, held by Christ's hand as he holds his shroud, and that the soldiers "..are the catch the resurrecting Christ has brought with him from the underworld, from Death" (160). He explores how Piero's paintings are about creating order, using a visual language to connect a foreshortened foot or sleep with death to emphasise that everything is subject to the same physical laws. In this way Piero "explains the world" (161). Berger then (and

this really helped) describes the quality of Piero's faces, especially the "unwavering, speculative" eyes:

> "What in fact he is painting is a state of mind. He paints what the world would be like if we could fully explain it, if we could be entirely at one with it. He is the supreme painter of *knowledge.* As acquired through the methods of science, or – and this makes more sense than seems likely – as acquired through happiness. During the centuries when science was considered the antithesis of art, and art the antithesis of well-being, Piero was ignored. Today we need him again"
>
> (Berger, 1960: 162, his emphasis)

This links to Elkins' (ibid) point about how art can incite feelings of happiness when the viewer is "disarmed, but content" (21), to those moments of looking in Italy when I was indeed very happy but also needed those paintings. They were about death but they were also about life. I knew some of this at the time, and thinking further about my responses within art therapy's habitual territory was helpful but turning to art history deepened and enriched my understanding in terms of social context, location and audiencing as I discovered the resonances between my responses to these paintings, those of others and the intentionality of the artist. This leads me to agree with Elkins (2001: 51) when he says that assigning strong reactions to art entirely to the individual viewer's history and experiences "..strips the artwork of its power just when its power is strongest". In a sense I came full circle, as often seems to happen in research: you know what you knew or suspected in the first place but come to know it in an entirely different way. Those frescos in Italy that affected me so strongly were, after all, about death and life together, but I came to understand that my responses were also about happiness, achieved through a timeless connection to the world through art.

The significance of context and location

My experience of looking was qualitatively very different when I saw the frescos in situ and in London's National Gallery. In Italy, unlike London, the physical location of the frescos' production was the same as my looking, but the social context of their production had little to do with my consumption (or audiencing) centuries later. The social context of Piero's and Giotto's production was that of patronage by churches, monasteries and artists' guilds (Hendy 1968; Bertelli 1992). Artists were commissioned to make those frescoes, approval of the composition and the colours having to be obtained before painting began. The paintings were a means of exchange between the artist and his patron: it was a commercial transaction, their audience being the patrons and the local congregation who came to learn the lessons of the Bible.

Wolff's (1993) challenge to traditional notions of artists as sole creators of art who work in isolation was helpful at this point. She argues that "… the production of art is a collaborative affair" (32) and draws attention to everything that has to happen in order for art to be 'produced' and seen, involving - directly and indirectly - many people: teachers, patrons, curators and critics who effect who becomes an artist and how, influences practice itself and how artists' work is accessed and perceived. Woolf proposes that everyone who makes art is a 'producer', each and every person being conditioned by the tools and equipment available in their environment. This relates to exploration of the physical spaces of art therapy practice (e.g. Wood, 2000) that show, implicitly if not explicitly, how they reflect the person of the therapist and the influence of the ideologies and economics of the organisations they are situated within. Research has also shown how the art materials that practitioners do and do not offer are influenced not only by personal preferences, skills and budgets but also by institutional norms and attitudes towards art (Dudley et al, 2000).

Woolf, like Mirzoeff (1998), Rose (2001) Sturken and Cartwright (2001) and many others, has also paid close attention to how audiences 'read' art and construct meaning, showing how this differs from one social context to another. She suggests that there is an interactive, hermeneutic circle of projection and modification between the object and

its audience that allows a mediated meaning to be produced. There is no 'correct' interpretation because nothing is value-free or a-historical; everything is conditioned. Artworks are therefore "dynamic entities" (108) received by audiences whose looking is active; meaning is constructed and understood in ways that are both "provisional and situationally specific" (120). Thus there are multiple understandings of artwork, 'consumed' by different viewers in different times and places that are not only about the viewer and their history but also about the social contexts in which they look and the discourses that inform their looking. Meaning, Wolff says, is always provisional and supported by the different discourses and social contexts in which art is 'consumed'. This describes what happened when I looked in Italy and London, and how my understandings developed as I traversed different discourses.

The physical and sensory nature of the visual experience
Location had a significant influence on my looking, the experience being qualitatively very different when I saw the frescos in situ and in London's National Gallery. Thinking about this in terms of separation and loss helped me understand my anger at the fragmentation and dislocation of the London frescos but again there was more to this.

One of the striking things about my looking in Italy was its physicality. I experienced an empathic, corporal response to Piero's 'shaping hand'; my hand knew how to make those white marks with a flick of the wrist, although it did not know how to paint feet quite so well. My experience was bodily as I walked backward and forward, mimicked movement and became aware of my breathing. The latter relates to Gombrich's (1999) exploration of the particularity of place in fresco painting and how frescos are usually shown and discussed one at a time, and rarely within the context of their architectural setting. He suggests that this disregards their unity and obscures the relationship between the people in the paintings, the viewer and the physical space they are all in. Gombrich describes what happens when we enter a room: how we look around, note the walls and see the details, all of which require a roving eye movement and different perceptual skills. This requires a controlled and focussed look at the paintings and at

the architecture to enable "a situational consistency" (19) to be seen and understood. He calls this "the effort after meaning" (22).

My understanding of this was significantly informed by the 'Telling Time' exhibition at the National Gallery (Sturgis, 2001) that showed how we physically cannot take in an image in just one look. Ocular, interactive research within the show involved the audience in looking at the same painting and having their eyes tracked as they looked and were asked a series of questions. This showed how, when we look at a painting (or at anything come to that), we scan it in a series of jumps as our eyes move across the surface and build a mental picture of the whole in a way that is far from random. Our eyes fixate on one point and then move to another in an uneven process as we seek out and focus on certain areas, making conscious and unconscious choices about our interests and as we get the information we need. We do not see things whole and in an instant, only what is at the centre of our vision, equivalent to a thumbnail at arm's length; everything else falls away. Thus we begin with brief scans in a period of 'diversive exploration' then look for longer periods and in a more concentrated way; we glance and then we scrutinize, and what we look at depends on what we are looking for, on our 'effort after meaning'.

Taking these reflections and constructs into art therapy led me to think about the social context of production and consumption of art in art therapy, particularly in relation to professional socialisation, physical context and to the discourses that inform our thinking.

Professional socialisation

The influence of the paradigms and practices of psychiatry, psychotherapy and psychoanalysis on the theory, practice and language of art therapy has been a topic of conversation in art therapy for a while (e.g. Dudley 2004; Maclagan1995, 2005; Mahony 2001; Mann 2006; Skaife 2001). Henzell (1994), for example, explored how "… art therapy accommodates itself to clinical and psychodynamic models" (74). He proposed that this creates a language that is clinical and explanatory which allies itself with the

"hermeneutic discipline" of psychoanalysis (ibid) rather than with psychiatry and psychology, i.e. with a discipline based in linguistics. He adds: "How extraordinary that such an originally *a*-clinical activity as art therapy should ape all this" (75, his emphasis). However I now wonder, given art therapists' professional socialisation, how can art therapists *not* 'ape all this'?

Professional socialisation is a process through which a person learns the particular requirements, values and attitudes of an occupational group or a place of work and "turns himself into the kind of person the situation demands" (Becker, 1964: 44). Previous research (Gilroy, 1989/2004, 1992) showed that the socialisation process art therapy students undergo has, like psychotherapy training, a "total life relevance" (Henry, 1977: 58) that leads them to reflect on every aspect of their work, lives and relationships, and on their art. The process continues as neophyte therapists enter the profession and are socialised into the norms and practices of their workplace. The role models and 'significant others' who communicate the ongoing 'technical orientations of the insider' (Henry, Sims and Spray, 1971: 114) are supervisors, therapists and colleagues, some of whom are art therapists but many of whom are not. Who the 'significant others' are will, of course, vary from one context to another but they are generally those who mentor the new practitioner into their job. Some art therapists work in art therapy departments alongside other members of the profession; others may be the sole art therapist in a multi-disciplinary team or in a large organisation such as an NHS Trust; yet others may be the only visual artist or the only person from a humanities background. A shared valuing and knowledge of art cannot be assumed when other discourses and treatment models dominate theory, practice, policy and governance. One of our primary tasks may then be to explain: we explain the profession and what we do; we become the translators of our work and of our clients' visual practices, the interpreters, the conveyors of their art. During the process of professional socialisation we make the necessary situational adjustments, becoming the mediators between different discourses and, I suggest, in the time-honoured phrase, we moderate our language.

In the social context of public sector work, and especially in our EBP-driven times, it is important to keep up-to-date with the latest literature. Which literature though, which set of discourses? It seems to me that art therapists ensure familiarity with the latest art therapy and psychotherapy literature but are we similarly aware of contemporary theorising within and about art, art history and the "Niagara of visual gabble" (Hughes, 1990: 14) in which we and our clients live, look and see? Visual culture encompasses all forms of media from fine art to film, TV and advertising, from 'high' to popular or mass culture (Sturken & Cartwright, 2001). "It is", as Mirzoeff (1998) says, "not just a part of your everyday life, it *is* your everyday life" (3, his emphasis). Such discourse could significantly inform and enrich the looking and thinking about the art in art therapy where the art can be, in both conscious and, I suggest, unconscious ways, determined by an organisation's requirements and the socially legitimising discourses that exist with it. Indeed without it our thinking could become somewhat monochromatic, ascetic and essentially modernist, existing, as Henzell (ibid) and Tipple (2003) argue, within the socially legitimising discourses of psychotherapy and psychoanalysis. This leads to the need for a postmodern look at art therapy, as others have suggested (e.g. Byrne 1995; Alter-Muri 1998), one that acknowledges the social construction of art, challenges dominant meta-narrratives and welcomes multiple perspectives.

My experiences in Italy led me to think too about how our professional socialisation can create the potential for art therapists, like Elkins (2001), to become disconnected from what art used to make us feel. He describes how, paradoxically, his knowledge of art history undermined his passion for art, leaving him "perilously close to forgetting why I was drawn to … painting in the first place" (89). I am not suggesting that art therapists lack feeling about what we see, or the theories and practices of art therapy lead to a disengagement with art, nor am I suggesting that art therapists turn away from important knowledge and understanding. My point is that the paradigms, language and tacit knowledge of art that art therapists have in their repertoire are eroded by the cumulative effect of our professional socialisation in medical, psychological, psychoanalytic and science-based cultures.

Heightening our awareness of the influence of social context on the practitioner leads to thinking about its influence on practice. The nature of the physical spaces that art therapy inhabits and the attendant practices have, for example, been explored in our literature (e.g. Wood, 2000; Case and Dalley 2006; Hyland Moon 2002), but Woolf (1993) indicates how implicitly, if not explicitly, they reflect not only the person of the therapist but also the ideologies and economics of institutions. The art materials offered, and those that are not, reflect the social contexts of organisations: the budgets, institutional norms and attitudes, as well as art therapists' personal preferences and skills, as research has shown (Dudley, Gilroy and Skaife, 2000).

Case (1998) drew our attention to how the social context, culture and language of different countries influence the art that is made in art therapy, and Wolff (ibid) discusses how existing codes and conventions of visual expression limit and mediate how ideas, thoughts and feelings are expressed. This emphasises how the artworks made in art therapy do not exist in a vacuum but are shaped, at the macro level, by the aesthetic and representational norms of Britain's visual culture. They are also shaped, at micro level, by the immediate social context that 'produces' clinical work. First, the patient 'produces' and we, the art therapists, 'consume' their production with them; second we, the art therapists, 'produce' and our teams 'consume' what has been made by client and art therapist together. It could therefore be argued that the patient plus their art are the art therapist's 'means of exchange', our 'product' that is 'consumed' by the team, the art therapist's 'patron'. Artworks are 'produced' according to the explicit and inferred expectations of organisations and multidisciplinary teams, as Tipple's research (2003) has shown. He unpacked how this occurs in clinical practice with children who might have an autistic spectrum disorder. He showed how art is not 'produced' by the child alone but is co-constructed, first by the expectations of families and professionals who work with the child and second through the interactions of the child and the art therapist. He describes an intersubjective, socially-based understanding of the art made in art therapy, drawing on the work of Baxandall (1985) to show how art is profoundly influenced by the circumstances of its production and the exchange that takes place between an artist and the viewer.

My looking in Italy led me to think too about how our professional socialisation can create the potential for art therapists, like Elkins (2001), to become disconnected from what art used to make us think and feel. He describes how, paradoxically, his knowledge of art history undermined his passion for art, leaving him "perilously close to forgetting why I was drawn to … painting in the first place" (89). I am not suggesting that art therapists lack feeling about what they see, or that the theories and practices of psychotherapy, psychoanalysis etc. should be ignored, or that they will lead to a disengagement with art. My point is that the paradigms, language and tacit knowledge of art that art therapists have in their repertoire are eroded by the cumulative effect of our professional socialisation of their non-art-based workplace and that we would benefit from reviving them.

The 'long look' at art

My experiences in Italy and London led me to think that we have to write ourselves into our looking more than we already do. I refer not only to the aesthetic countertransference that Schaverien (1995) has usefully described, but also to the limiting influence of a particular kind of look, of our 'effort after meaning' that is I suggest, a consequence of our professional socialisation: of our colleagues' 'look' at us.

It is well established that where and how artworks are displayed influences how they are seen and understood (e.g. Rose 2001; Sturken and Cartwright 2001; Woolf 1993). How does this relate to the 'display' of art in art therapy? The busyness of art therapists' working lives can mean that most artworks are only viewed when they are made, each week, and in time-limited supervision. These are often static, seated activities, occurring on a horizontal plane with pictures and objects on the floor or a table, although sometimes images come off the floor and get on to a wall and we move in order to look. Finding time for a long look is problematic, plus art therapists see so much everyday that our capacity to look may be inhibited by visual saturation and by the horror and pain that we see. I am not suggesting that art therapists become insensitive to what they witness, rather that (re-)turning to allied discourses, practices and paradigms, alongside

those that habitually inform our looking, could be a rejuvenating process. How would it be if, for example, we curated private, retrospective displays, chronologically and in other ways, and, when appropriate, involved clients in the process too?

Think how exhibitions are curated in order to tell a story, or explore a theme and how juxtapositions of form, colour, content and composition tell other, different stories. Friis-Hansen (2001) speaks of the curator as an "interpretive bridge" (67) between an artist and their audience and, when organising exhibitions from one culture in another, the importance of him or her having an understanding of both cultures or worlds so that s/he can work "across boundaries" (ibid). I think this informs art therapists' role as interdisciplinary mediators, as 'translators', and suggests a visual method that could enable colleagues to have a different kind of engagement with – and a different kind of look at - what we do. What if, for example, we invited our colleagues to look at a private, carefully staged visual display or installation in an art therapy or other appropriate space. Recent experiences in research supervision certainly indicate that this is a useful research method that, in the processes of both curating and subsequent viewing, can open our eyes to new links, ideas and conversation. It can also heighten our awareness of how organisations' look at us influences what we see. Manners, (2005) showed how his look at a visual display of the art his learning disabled clients made was profoundly influenced by his colleagues' drive towards diagnosis and evidence. Given that he was an art therapist in a forensic setting perhaps this is not surprising but what was surprising was the way in which his team's expectations initially clouded his ability to see important material in the art works about his clients', and his, disempowerment in the organisation. Elaborating practice through carefully staged visual displays and installations, rather than showing work in ways which invite little more than a glance, could enrich our looking and what, as a consequence, is seen, both by ourselves and others.

Then comes the storage and disposal of clients' artworks. What if this rather pejorative language changed to one which construes this aspect of our work as archiving? Physical processes aside, digital and computer technology enable new kinds of

archiving that can facilitate and enliven this aspect of our work, as well as offering potential for rich and exciting representations of art therapy. For example, a case study usually takes the form of a developmental chronology told over time, almost in the manner of a storyboard with particularly fruitful or difficult moments captured in a few images, but linear text cannot always capture the shifts, phases and plateaus of art therapy. Lippard (2001) has equated choosing illustrations for a book with curating, an activity that allows a visual story to be told and explored, for example through digital technology. Construing the illustrations in a case study as a curated visual display (see Herrmann, 1997; 2012), especially when enabled by digital technology, perhaps coupled with attention to the ekphrasis (or artwriting, see Carrier, 1991) and other kinds of 'voice' (Gergen, 1997), may allow the representation of our work to expand and something of the nuanced, three dimensional quality of art therapy to be captured. Indeed Elkins (2001) has argued that writing about art has become "a bloodless pursuit" (208) and that genuine encounters with art are sometimes disabled by curatorial practices that give the viewer little more than "a dried-up collection of stray facts" (207), making contemporary looking anaemic and passionless. I am not suggesting that this is so in the art therapy literature, rather that thinking about texts and images in this way could guard against our literatures being shaped by the legitimising discourses and the social and political mores of the public sector and being dominated by the requirements of evidence-based practice orthodoxy (Gilroy, 2006).

Finding time for a long look is problematic, plus art therapists see so much every day that our capacity to look may be inhibited by visual saturation and by the horror and pain in the images we see. I am not suggesting insensitivity, rather that (re-)turning to art historical/visual discourses and practices, alongside those that habitually inform our usual practices of looking, could be a rejuvenating process, both personally and professionally.

Endnote

The way I looked at and responded to the frescos in Italy and London were to do with me, with my particular history. Your experience would, of course, be different. My

looking made me profoundly aware of the influence of the places in which the paintings were made and in which I saw them, centuries later. At the time I could not entirely make sense of my experience and was propelled into unexpected research that re-acquainted me with ways of looking at and thinking about art that I had subconsciously pushed into the background because they had, I suspect, been impoverished by the powerful professional socialisation of being an art therapist, albeit one that works in higher education.

I think that the art made in art therapy is profoundly influenced by its social context, by the environment of its production. Further, that the consumption of art in art therapy is neither a passive nor an innocent activity, being made partial by our histories, our interests and the information that we seek. I also think it is conditioned by the social and professional contexts in which we look and are looked at. We can widen our visual lens, enhance our scopic regime, and take time for a long look - at art, and at the art made in art therapy. As Elkins (2001: 54) says: "A picture will leave me unmoved if I don't take time with it, but if I stop, and let myself get a little lost, there's no telling what might happen." Finding the time to get lost and take a long look at art is, as Ryde (2003: 61) suggests, profoundly nourishing and indeed necessary to keep "interest and engagement alive" in clinical work. I entirely agree - it is part of art therapists' continuing professional development - but would add that doing so within the once familiar discourses of art, art history and visual culture and, in so doing, renewing our acquaintance with them, and extending this to taking long looks at the art in art therapy, will enhance our practices of looking, keep our looking alive and ensure that we maintain the different ways of seeing that we have at our disposal.

Acknowledgements

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