

1-1-2015

Book Review: The Heart and Soul of Psychotherapy: A Transpersonal Approach Through Theater Arts by Saphira Barbara Linden (Editor)

Jessica Bockler
Alef Trust

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.ciis.edu/ijts-transpersonalstudies>

Recommended Citation

Bockler, J. (2015). Bockler, J. (2015). [Review of the book The heart and soul of psychotherapy: A transpersonal approach through theater arts, by S. B. Linden (Editor)]. *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, 34(1-2), 219–224.. *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, 34 (1). <http://dx.doi.org/10.24972/ijts.2015.34.1-2.219>



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/). This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by International Journal of Transpersonal Studies. It has been accepted for inclusion in International Journal of Transpersonal Studies by an authorized administrator. For more information, please contact the editors.

BOOK REVIEW

The Heart and Soul of Psychotherapy: A Transpersonal Approach Through Theater Arts

by Saphira Barbara Linden (Editor)

(2013; Bloomington, IN: Trafford)

Reviewed by

Jessica Bockler

Alef Trust

Wirral, UK

*I myself do nothing. The Holy Spirit
accomplishes all through me.*

—William Blake

Humans are creative beings. Drama, dance, song and art have long provided a vehicle for us to communicate our ideas and visions, and to grow and evolve—as individuals and as a collective. Throughout the ages, we have used art in cultural and religious rituals and ceremonies to affirm and to transform our identity and to express our relationship with the world beyond the human sphere. From paleolithic cave paintings to Buddhist and Hindu mandalas to the works of William Blake, from the Afro-Brazilian candomblé to the Indian Kathakali dance-drama to modern dance and movement therapies—art has served as a healing tool, a way to engage more profoundly with each other, and as a pathway to a deeper relationship with that which one might call the Numinous or Divine. In *The Heart and Soul of Psychotherapy*, Saphira Linden and 39 of her creative colleagues offer in-depth accounts of the contribution transpersonal theatre arts have made to this journey of personal and collective spiritual development.

Linden's passionate account begins with a recollection of a Sufi retreat in the mid-1970s, during which she immersed herself in meditative practices—mantras, breath work, and prayers—for three weeks, practicing 14 hours every day. She describes the gift of the retreat as one in which all “all awareness of individuality was replaced by a feeling of oneness with all that exists” (Linden, 2013, p. xxiii). In the following

30 years of personal and professional practice Linden developed a transpersonal approach to drama therapy, which at its core aims to attenuate the grip of the “limited, historical, conditioned self” and to deepen a person's connection with what she calls the “soul Self, or essential Self” (p. xxiv). Linden has come to refer to this journey toward one's own highest nature as the Omega Process, referencing the work of French mystic Teilhard de Chardin who drew on the first and last letter of the Greek alphabet as a metaphor, describing the evolution of consciousness towards the Omega Point, a transcendent and yet attainable and indeed imperative endpoint of human consciousness.

Linden opens Part 1, Chapter 1 of the book with a depiction of her own eclectic and experimental journey towards a Transpersonal Drama Therapy, which spans environmental, educational, therapeutic and ritual theatre. Linden describes Jungian and Transpersonal Psychology as significant sources of inspiration for her work. She spent time studying with Jacob and Zerka Moreno, the founders of Psychodrama, and she also immersed herself in Mystical Judaism and Sufism and integrated meditative practices into her drama work with actors and audiences. Early on in her career, Linden felt drawn to create performances, which would challenge the conventional actor-spectator relationship and engage audiences as participants. She became interested in working with archetypal energies for community healing—the exploration of which culminated in an 11-year interfaith project titled *The Cosmic Celebration*. *The Cosmic Celebration* was devoted to enabling casts of up to 350 people to explore and express their deepest authentic Self through the medium of theatre. These

theatre events with a spiritual and transformational purpose, propelled Linden to develop her own Omega Transpersonal Drama Therapy practice.

In Chapter 2, Linden proceeds to describe what she calls the twelve principles of Omega Transpersonal Drama Therapy and illustrate them through a case study. Many of the ideas she describes here are congruent with other approaches to drama therapy and psychodrama, such as the principles of "embodying/roleplaying the therapeutic issues," "making the unconscious conscious through symbolic/metaphorical approaches," and "working with archetypes." What stands out is Linden's and her colleagues' openness to the transpersonal perspective. For example, "assuming health rather than pathology," a notion which is rooted in the assumption that, no matter what the client's problem or challenge, within a larger, transpersonal context there is innate health and wholeness. A transpersonal drama therapist thus has to navigate a journey with a client simultaneously closer to the wound and beyond it toward healing. The aim is to enable clients to shift identification from a conditioned and restricted self, marked by stories of personal trauma and suffering, to a higher, or soul Self, marked by qualities that will serve as sources of strength and inspiration—to transform a limited sense of self into an essential Self. Several other principles support the notion of self-expansion, specifically through creativity, and a deepening relationship with the numinous. Lastly, one can see that esoteric practices have informed the evolution of Linden's approach, for example the practice of mastery through self-discipline, which is rooted in the martial and meditative arts.

Part 1 concludes with Chapter 3—a short reflection by psychiatrist Adam Blatner (2013), who highlights the paradigm shift which has underpinned transpersonal approaches to psychotherapy, acknowledging that "The subconscious mind is not only a repository of the repressed, but also a source of creativity and individuation" (p. 31). The bottomline: Whether or not they believe in a supreme reality, transpersonal therapists guide their clients to seek wisdom and inspiration from the soul, the deeper Source which flows through us and guides the unfoldment of the psyche's potential. Moreover, creative approaches particularly lend themselves to an engagement with and an articulation of that which cannot be easily put into words—the irrational, the intuitive, the felt sense, the bodily impulse—which are often not understood and/or valued in traditional clinical approaches.

The remaining parts of *The Heart and Soul of Psychotherapy*, from 2 to 5, explore and elaborate on the application of the twelve principles of transpersonal theatre arts in private practice with individuals and groups. Part 2 focuses on the therapeutic relationship with individuals, couples and groups. Part 3 sheds light on the value and potential of transpersonal theatre work in diverse communities (such as prisons, hospitals and inner cities) within the USA. Part 4 focuses on the application of the work around the world. Lastly, Part 5 reflects on the deeper psychological and spiritual processes and dynamics, which underpin transformational theatre work. Thirty-nine authors from a broad range of professional backgrounds—among them social workers, nutritionists, psychotherapists, counsellors, and psychologists who are all also creative artists in a variety of media—reflect on their practice with diverse client populations and with fellow colleagues in training.

Among them is psychotherapist James Mathews Grant (2013) who in Chapter 6 advocates that actor training, as well as meditative practice, ought to be essential ingredients of a transpersonal approach to psychotherapy training. Grant elucidates that actors learn to operate with what he calls an *open identity system* (p. 62), enabling them to "become another," to merge with a fictional character's identity and perspective and to see the world through their eyes. Referencing Greek drama, Grant proposes that "actors have learned how to do the 'soul work' of descending into the personal and collective realms of the creative unconscious through their own emotional bodies and harnessing its archetypal healing wisdom" (p. 62). I share Grant's enthusiasm for the transformative potential of the actor's craft, as well as his emphasis of what he calls the *transperceptual principle*: "To be ourselves, we first have to see ourselves" (p. 68). Indeed, I think it is vital to acknowledge that creative play and heightened vulnerability to new possibilities of being need to go hand in hand with a process of deepening self-witnessing, or else one might get lost at sea. The deep dive into alternative personalities and archetypal material may offer release from past patterns, but it may also lead to disorientation, overwhelm and re-wounding. Grant asserts that the therapist needs to "be able to model vulnerability in order to safely enter the wounded place with clients, and make it possible for them to re-experience the original trauma consciously and creatively" (p. 64). Highlighting the transpersonal nature of his perspective, Grant further elucidates that:

To practice psychotherapy in this way means learning to consciously surrender in the therapist client relationship to the action of the shared transformative process upon our whole being, thereby accepting at an ontological level of responsibility the role of co-transformer. (p. 64)

I wholeheartedly share Grant's vision of a transpersonal approach to psychotherapy. I would add that the transpersonal way not only necessitates holistic and soulful training of psychotherapists but ongoing work on the self, which is rooted in deep commitment to a spiritual practice, nurturing the kind of openness and refinement of self-insight, which will allow for the safe transcendence of boundaries in a co-transformative encounter. As Grant himself asserts, drawing on Hindu and Sufi philosophy, the task of a spiritual master is to see the sacred depths beyond the surface of the ordinary and to teach and transmit this vision to others (p. 69). Moreover, "This vision requires intensive meditation training [...] to achieve the necessary 'refinement of sight'" (p. 68). Similarly, transpersonal therapists need to commit to ongoing spiritual practice, so to ensure their own psycho-spiritual growth and refinement.

There are many other chapters in *The Heart and Soul of Psychotherapy*, written with heart-rending passion and insight by established practitioners in the field. Yet mentioning them all in this review is, sadly, impossible, considering the book exceeds 500 pages in length. I found that each chapter provided a rich perspective on the transformational potential of a transpersonal approach to theatre arts, may that be working with children in a bereavement camp as did Christopher Kavi Carbone (2013) working with survivors of a natural disaster, such as hurricane Katrina, as did Edward Williams (2013) or working with marginalized, prostituted women in Kolkata, India, as did Bobbi Ausubel (2013). To give a flavor of Parts 2 to 5 of the book, I shall reflect on a chapter from each.

In Chapter 8 in Part 2 of the book, which focuses on the use of theatre arts in working with individuals, couples and groups, Kristi Davis (2013) writes about Imagine Health, a seven-week course which utilises a transpersonal drama therapy approach to enable people with chronic illness to unlock the meaning of their "disease" and to reconnect with the healthy and whole Self. Davis who created Imagine Health following a personal health crisis and subsequent healing journey elucidates

that her course consists of three phases: Phase one, the Reveal Phase (p. 86) encourages participants to become more aware of their bodies, to feel into physical symptoms and to let them speak. Phase two, the Release Phase (p. 87) introduces a range of cathartic exercises to enable participants to acknowledge their feelings in regard to their disease, allowing for a release of unproductive and restrictive emotions. Finally, Phase three, the Recreate phase (p. 90) aims to enable participants to re-imagine themselves as healthy and "rehearse the life they desire to have" (p. 90). Fundamental to Davis' work is the idea that physical symptoms are "messengers" (p. 86) which contain valuable information for the person's healing and growth—a notion that finds widespread resonance in other transpersonal approaches to therapy, such as Process Oriented Psychology (e.g., Mindell, 1998) and Body-Mind Centering (e.g., Hartley, 1995). Referencing emerging research in neuroscience (e.g., around the phenomenon of neuroplasticity), Davis (2013) further elucidates that her work is underpinned "by the principle that whatever we think about and focus our attention on we will attract into our lives [for] focused attention creates new neural networks in the brain that actually serve to manifest changes in real life" (p. 90). Whilst I share Davis' enthusiasm for these ideas, a major question concerns the evidence base supporting the application of emerging neuroscientific research in such areas as the treatment of chronic illness. Within the arena of arts in health care we are equally challenged to address the question concerning the impact of our work; a lot still has to be done to prove its efficacy and value to the more conservative health professionals, organisations and political bodies. With regard to Davis, I appreciate that her research into the impact of her work is most likely ongoing and more extensive than indicated in the chapter. However, I feel compelled to point out that the sample of five participants who report on the effects of Imagine Health in this chapter is hardly sufficient to substantiate the health benefits of the course. Not to single Davis out, overall within the book Linden and her colleagues could have made a more structured and rigorous attempt to address the question as to how a stronger evidence base for transpersonal theatre work can be built. I can see that beyond providing personal reflections and case studies evaluations were not on the authors' minds when they were writing their chapters. However, I feel that the question of research and evaluation is one that the field cannot afford to side-step, if applied arts practices are to

be integrated into the mainstream of health and social care. To be fair, the question of arts in health evaluation probably warrants another book!

In Part 3 of *The Heart and Soul of Psychotherapy*, which introduces the reader to the use of theatre arts in community healing, Jonathan Stein (2013), in Chapter 23, reflects on his drama therapy work in a maximum security psychiatric forensics hospital. Working with highly challenged and volatile individuals, Stein describes his struggle to see beyond his clients' limitations and to recognize and bring forth their essential nature and higher qualities, a central principle of Transpersonal Drama Therapy. He emphasizes the importance of skilled supervision in this context, as well as the value of inner work, in which the therapist engages mindfully with his/her own shadow material. Stein vividly highlights the value of a transpersonal approach to his work, creating a sacred space and using embodied ritual and play to gain his participants' trust and to increase their expressiveness, self-discipline and ability to take responsibility. Stein sums up my one and only concern: "I don't know what happened to the patients I came to know and care for during my brief time in that strange, sad, and surreal world" (p. 269)—it is an unfortunate state of affairs indeed when practitioners are commissioned only for short interventions without follow-up and longer term commitment. Throughout Stein's chapter the meaning and value of the work is palpable, and the depiction of the final performances in which the clients successfully manage several crisis points is awe-inspiring.

Part 4 of *The Heart and Soul of Psychotherapy* is dedicated to transpersonal theatre arts in projects outside of the United States. I felt particularly drawn to Chapter 33, which depicts the approach of Molly Scott (2013) who writes about her work as a Creative Resonance practitioner in Europe. Creative Resonance works with the language of sound and embodied vocalization, "aligning the frequencies of the voice with the frequencies of body feeling, jump-starting realignment and pattern change throughout the mind/body system" (p. 374). Scott elaborates that Creative Resonance requires the skilled use of entrainment and aperiodicity. The former involves attuning to the rhythm and sound of another, providing sympathetic resonance to facilitate the release of ingrained somatic patterns. Directly related to entrainment is the principle of aperiodicity which involves both the ability to "hold the dissonant experience of another without contraction and withdrawal" (p. 375)

and the use of contrasting, dynamic, and disordered sound to provide new stimuli, to catalyse the creation new of patterns and stories which support intentions for growth and healing. Scott proceeds to describe what she calls Deep Story (p. 373), a component of Creative Resonance work, which combines reflective processing with spontaneous movement and pre-verbal sounding to access and liberate stories that are deeply buried within the soma of clients, well beyond the reach of the cognitive mind. Her vivid depictions of the Deep Story process beautifully illustrate the transpersonal underpinnings of her approach, which are closely aligned to the principles outlined by Linden. The case studies she presents bring into focus one question for me, which concerns the safety of clients and practitioners. Reading Scott's depictions, I have no doubt as to the potency of her work and I would have liked her to elaborate on the dynamics and processes which facilitate her clients' transition from the initial cathartic release to the transformative frequency realignment for which the Creative Resonance model aims. I would have also liked Scott to go into greater detail as to how she manages her own inner process along the way and is able to remain grounded and centred in the face of her clients' emotional storms. Perhaps I am asking too much, considering the word limit that a book chapter imposes!

In Part 5 of the book, which focuses on the dynamics and processes that underpin transpersonal theatre arts, in Chapter 37 Suzanne Frazier Wilkins (2013) reflects on a theatrical project which aimed to investigate, if the act of performance-making could facilitate a personal growth process within her. Over four months Frazier Wilkins worked with Linden to create a solo show titled *Finding My Way*, to confront and transcend the challenges that she was encountering at midlife. Frazier Wilkins explains that her theatrical journey particularly engaged with three of the 12 principles of Transpersonal Drama Therapy. Principle one, "shifting the identity from a limited sense of self to the essential Self," (p. 426) she embeds in Jacob Moreno's role theory which proposes that "the personality can be conceived of as an interactive system of roles" (Landy, as cited in Frazier Wilkins, 2013, p. 427) and that roles can be used to expand and liberate a person's sense of self. Frazier Wilkins highlights how the development of her performance piece required her to create roles, expressing uncomfortable, as well as concealed aspects of herself, thus enabling her to access hidden pain and needs—

embodied by a teenage character—and to explore hidden wisdom and strengths which brought her closer to her essential nature. This essential nature is exemplified by the character Miss Essie who is “the Buddha in the body of a tiny 80-plus year-old Southern Black woman: big enough to embrace and guide to safety all of my smaller, separate selves” (p. 433). “Working with archetypes” (p. 427) was another principle central to Frazier Wilkins’ process. She goes to some lengths to introduce the theoretical context, referencing the works of Campbell and Jung; and she likens the process, through which she was able to reclaim her child self and connect to her wiser self, Miss Essie, to the hero’s journey. She further situates her journey within Emunah’s Five Phase Model for Drama Therapy (p. 429), which takes a person through a sequence, “beginning with interactive dramatic play, progressing to scene work, role-playing and enactment, and ending with a closing ritual” (Emunah, cited in Frazier Wilkins, 2013, p. 429). She also relates this journey to shamanic ritual, explaining that Linden enabled her to invoke the archetypes that brought to life the teenage character and Miss Essie. Working within the liminal space of a creative ritual, Frazier Wilkins was able to let go of her need “to control everything,” and this gave her “greater command of my content, my instrument, and my experience” (p. 430)—a sense of mastery which has lasted well beyond the four months she worked with Linden. Lastly, Frazier Wilkins touches upon the third principle of Transpersonal Drama Therapy, which was central to her process: “embracing love while holding all emotions as sacred.” It was this principle, which enabled her to face difficult emotions and to reclaim aspects of herself that had been “discarded in my earlier years” (p. 433). There can be little doubt that Frazier Wilkins’ theatrical journey which she depicts with great passion and humour had a profound transformative impact upon her. Adopting once more the role of the evaluator I feel drawn to highlight that Frazier Wilkins’ project bears some resemblance to heuristic research (Moustakas, 1990), as well as to autoethnography, both of which derive data from self-observation and reflexive narratives—here in dramatic form. I believe that more such research is needed, to identify and map the dynamics of transpersonal theatre in the various contexts in which it is applied and to consolidate what we know of the transformative impact of performances upon actors and also audiences. Frazier Wilkins briefly touches on this towards the end of her chapter, submitting that her deeply personal exploration served not only the entertainment

but the education and healing of her spectators—a notion which most certainly deserves further exploration.

Concluding the review, in *The Heart and Soul of Psychotherapy* Linden (2013) and her colleagues weave a rich tapestry of their transpersonal approach to drama therapy, psychodrama and transformational theatre, serving a broad spectrum of populations with varying ages, backgrounds and health challenges. The book provides a wealth of insight into the transformative potential of the theatrical craft, and it is further supported by an associated website, omegatheater.org/book, which offers supplementary information for 14 of the 42 chapters. Any arts, social care or health practitioner who feels drawn to explore a transpersonal approach to creative practice will find this book a valuable and inspiring resource.

References

- Ausubel, B. (2013). Work with prostituted and vulnerable Women in India. In S. B. Linden (Ed.), *The heart and soul of psychotherapy: A transpersonal approach through theater arts* (pp. 323-334). Bloomington, IN: Trafford.
- Blatner, A. (2013). Beyond the medical model: Finding one’s soul. In S. B. Linden (Ed.), *The heart and soul of psychotherapy: A transpersonal approach through theater arts* (pp. 28-35). Bloomington, IN: Trafford.
- Carbone, C. K. (2013). The positive power inside: Integrating sound, music, rhythm and story with children in bereavement camp. In S. B. Linden (Ed.), *The heart and soul of psychotherapy: A transpersonal approach through theater arts* (pp. 198-209). Bloomington, IN: Trafford.
- Davis, K. (2013). Imagine health: A transpersonal Drama therapy approach to chronic illness. In S. B. Linden (Ed.), *The heart and soul of psychotherapy: A transpersonal approach through theater arts* (pp. 84-92). Bloomington, IN: Trafford.
- Frazier Wilkins, S. (2013). Finding my way: A transformational theatre process and performance on facing mid life. In S. B. Linden (Ed.), *The heart and soul of psychotherapy: A transpersonal approach through theater arts* (pp. 424-436). Bloomington, IN: Trafford.
- Grant, J. M. (2013). Vision and enactment: The role of self-creativity in the therapeutic relationship. In S. B. Linden (Ed.), *The heart and soul of psychotherapy: A transpersonal approach through theater arts* (pp. 61-72). Bloomington, IN: Trafford.

About the Journal

The *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies* is a peer-reviewed academic journal in print since 1981. It is sponsored by the California Institute of Integral Studies, published by Floragrades Foundation, and serves as the official publication of the International Transpersonal Association. The journal is available online at: www.transpersonalstudies.org, and in print through www.lulu.com (search for IJTS).

- Hartley, L. (1995). *Wisdom of the body moving: An introduction to body-mind centering*. Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books.
- Linden, S. B. (Ed.). (2013). *The heart and soul of psychotherapy: A transpersonal approach through theater arts*. Bloomington, IN: Trafford.
- Mindell, A. (1998). *Dreambody: The body's role in revealing the self*. 2nd Edition. Portland, OR: Lao Tse Press.
- Moustakas, C. (1990). *Heuristic research: Design, methodology, and applications*. London, UK: SAGE.
- Scott, M. (2013). Deep story: Creative resonance and the play of embodied voice. In S. B. Linden (Ed.), *The heart and soul of psychotherapy: A transpersonal approach through theater arts* (pp. 372-388). Bloomington, IN: Trafford.
- Stein, J. (2013). Heartless killer or suffering soul? A personal journey of transformation inside the walls of a maximum security psychiatric forensics hospital. In S. B. Linden (Ed.), *The heart and soul of psychotherapy: A transpersonal approach through theater arts* (pp. 258-270). Bloomington, IN: Trafford.
- Williams, E. (2013) Staying afloat: Using drama therapy with Katrina survivors. In S. B. Linden (Ed.), *The heart and soul of psychotherapy: A transpersonal approach through theater arts* (pp. 279-288). Bloomington, IN: Trafford.

About the Author

Jessica Bockler, PhD is an Applied Theatre practitioner and Transpersonal Psychologist with extensive experience of creative programme management and multi-modal arts facilitation in community, education and health contexts. Jessica specialises in transpersonal and somatic approaches to creative practice, combining expressive arts work with practices enhancing mindfulness and body awareness. She is the Director of Creative Alternatives (www.creativealternatives.org.uk), an arts and mental health service in Merseyside, UK. Jessica is also one of the Directors of the Alef Trust (www.aleftrust.org), UK, which provides online education and community programmes in the areas of Consciousness, Spirituality and Transpersonal Psychology. Email: jessica.bockler@aleftrust.org