



2022

A Grounded Approach to Integral Art Therapy: Initial Reflections on Art Materials

Natalia Gómez-Carlier

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.ciis.edu/cejournal>

 Part of the [Clinical Psychology Commons](#), [Cognition and Perception Commons](#), [Cognitive Psychology Commons](#), [Critical and Cultural Studies Commons](#), [Family, Life Course, and Society Commons](#), [Gender, Race, Sexuality, and Ethnicity in Communication Commons](#), [Liberal Studies Commons](#), [Social and Cultural Anthropology Commons](#), [Social and Philosophical Foundations of Education Commons](#), [Social Psychology Commons](#), [Sociology of Culture Commons](#), [Sociology of Religion Commons](#), and the [Transpersonal Psychology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Natalia Gómez-Carlier (2022) "A Grounded Approach to Integral Art Therapy: Initial Reflections on Art Materials," *Journal of Conscious Evolution*: Vol. 19, Article 3.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.ciis.edu/cejournal/vol19/iss19/3>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals and Newsletters at Digital Commons @ CIIS. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Conscious Evolution by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ CIIS. For more information, please contact cbgoldstein@ciis.edu, ksundin@ciis.edu.

A Grounded Approach to Integral Art Therapy: Initial Reflections on Art Materials

Natalia Gómez-Carlier

Recommended Citation

Gómez Carlier, N. (2021). A Grounded Approach to Integral Art Therapy. *Journal of Conscious Evolution*, (19, #). <http://XXX>

A Grounded Approach to Integral Art Therapy: Initial Reflections on Art Materials

Natalia Gómez-Carlier¹

Abstract

Art therapy has the power to bring healing and wholeness as it expands globally, an awareness of the integral structure of consciousness can benefit an adaptation of this profession that is both integrative and respectful of multiple perspectives and cultural views. The art-making process in art therapy can ground experience, and art materials can serve as vehicles through which different structures on consciousness are elicited, experienced, documented, and integrated. Integral art therapy can study the use of art materials to activate an integral structure of consciousness. Integrality is defined by its ability to play simultaneously from all structures of consciousness.

Keywords: art therapy, structure of consciousness, integral, Jean Gebser, modern art, postmodern art

Art provides a gateway to explore consciousness and its evolutionary development across time (Combs, 2014). Jean Gebser (1986) defined consciousness as a "wakeful presence" (Brown, 2018, p. 3). Gebser differentiated it from intelligence and posited that it has changed throughout our evolution into five primary mutations or structures of consciousness. Feuerstein (1987) described Gebser's consciousness as a directive and active force with a witnessing function. Thus, consciousness evolves in response to experience and is simultaneously initiating its own mutation. Gebser named the following five structures of consciousness: archaic, magical, mythical, mental, and integral (Combs, 2009).

Combs (2009) highlighted that we live in constant evolution and flux towards increasing complexity; likewise, our

consciousness is also evolving. In this everchanging terrain, consciousness seems to seek a state of wholeness and the end of conflict. We desire integrality as a structure that, according to Combs, is related to mental and spiritual maturity and values such as compassion, beauty, and trust. Combs described a mature ego capable of regulating the mythical archetypal forces and with mastery over magic in the quest towards transformation while still grounded and able to communicate its experiences through a mental structure. Integrality can be seen when all the consciousness structures are in service of our personal and collective evolution.

Furthermore, our everyday human experience depends on how we structure our consciousness (Combs & Krippner, 2007). The structures serve as lenses through which

¹ Correspondence: ngomezcarlier@mymail.ciis.edu

we organize our perceptions and experience. Each structure provides a different perspective, in an unfolding that has been executed through our history on this earth. Likewise, this development can be seen in the way a neonate develops into an adult. Evolutionary development is paralleled in individual development; we have been transitioning this sequence of mutations as a species and individual beings. Models of development, whether cognitive, socioemotional, moral, and others, parallel the evolution of consciousness (Combs, 2009; Combs & Krippner, 2007). For example, Piaget's cognitive model identified that children go through a period where magical thinking prevails, with growth magic is replaced with formal operations and logic. In general, Piaget's model demonstrates how we as individuals have experienced the evolution of consciousness, "ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny" (Combs & Krippner, 2007, p. 136).

How we understand and organize our experience of the world, internal and external, depends on the structure of consciousness we employ. The structures of consciousness that have been seen in developmental psychology also mirror the development of art throughout time. Gebser (1986) used art to exemplify his conceptualization of the different structures of consciousness and to model their development. He provided a map using the territory and language of art. In this way, these structures of consciousness can become important in the work of an art therapist.

The American Art Therapy Association (2021) defined art therapy as an integrative human services and mental health profession that, through the understanding of the creative process, active art-making, and applied psychological theory within the context of a therapeutic relationship, enriches

the lives of individuals, families, and communities. Western developed art therapy carries cultural values that emphasize autonomy, boundaries, and individualism (Kaimal & Arslanbek, 2020; Potash et al., 2017). It is possible to consider art therapy as a profession that, although integrating the universality of art and healing, is still being created at a specific time in history and is being developed from mostly a mental structure of consciousness. However, as art therapy expands, it has encountered communities and groups that might function from different structures of consciousness—societies where interconnection, collectivism, and interdependence are fundamental. Communities where the relationship with nature and the world is less differentiated and the distance between subject and object can differ.

Integration and eclecticism provide a link between an integral structure of consciousness and art therapy. Art therapy integrates the world of art and the field of psychology. Using the framework of psychotherapy, art was integrated into the therapeutic space to address trauma, widen communication, and provide a voice to the non-verbal (Hocoy, 2002; McNiff, 1984). Additionally, studies demonstrated that art therapists identify themselves as eclectic (Wadson, 2016). Art therapists are versed in many forms and styles of psychotherapy, and they bring to the table a wide array of art materials and techniques. Art therapy's natural diversity and eclecticism (Wadson, 2016) invites cultural adaptation, but it can also result in the profession's fragmentation (Karkou et al., 2011; Potash et al., 2017). It is possible that an integral view and an awareness of structures of consciousness can support the growth of this field and avoid the fragmentation characteristic of the postmodern mental structure.

More importantly, art therapists worldwide agree that the profession relies on humans' natural relationship with art and utilizes human drives towards creativity and imagination (Kaimal & Arslanbek, 2020). Art has been used for healing throughout times; shamans used rituals, symbols, and imagery to cure illness (Bella & Serlin, 2013, Feen-Calligan, 1995). Transpersonal and archetypal aspects of the universality of art have been acknowledged in the art therapy literature (McConeghey, 1986; McNiff, 1984). Dissanayake (1998, 2001) defined art as making something special. From Dissanayake's perspective, art has an evolutionary value and enables a direct connection to experience and transformation. McNiff (1984) proposed that the personal and the universal intertwine to access healing and transformation in art therapy. He emphasized the universal cross-pollination in art and healing practices. Similarly, imagination as a human drive was defined as an inbuilt organizing principle that can harken healing (Pearson & Wilson, 2009).

Access to art, imagination, and creativity are then considered universal aspects of the human experience. Making the premise of art therapy universal, all citizens of the world could access healing and expression through art-making. Additionally, art therapists have discussed how their experience evidenced more cross-cultural similarities than differences (McNiff, 1984; Potash et al., 2017). Unfortunately, this claim is not yet supported by empirical studies, and art therapy is yet to consider the evolution of consciousness as a factor that plays a role in cultural differences.

Beyond creativity and imagination, art materials have been considered the basis of art therapy intervention (Hyland Moon, 2002). Art therapists are trained to use different materials as they elicit different

responses and engagement. In the globalization of art therapy, indigenous materials have become as important as fine art materials. The goal is to transcend attunement and use the materials to deepen our understanding of the psyche of the people we work with and the impact of culture (Kaimal & Arslanbek, 2020). The authors highlighted the importance of having a holistic view of the person, including mental, emotional, social, physical, spiritual, and cultural aspects. For this paper, art materials are considered in their capacity to awaken and heighten specific structures of consciousness.

Kaimal and Arslanbek (2020) identified a worldwide need to address mental health issues; the universal relationship between health and art can bring art therapy to people in need of support. Art-based research has a unique opportunity to look beyond what people say and access what people do (Silverman, 2000). Art has the power to make personal and cultural issues evident, concrete, and visible (Huss & Cwikel, 2005) and, in that way, evidencing the different structures of consciousness.

In developing this paper, the biases and preferences generated by my practice in the US, Colombia, Oman, and the United Arab Emirates required self-reflexivity. As a Colombian art therapist educated in the US, adaptation, and integration have been constant and necessary, yet insufficiently trained or supported by research. Understanding of consciousness structures can help transcend ideas of culture and observe people in their development. It is essential to acknowledge that the current paper is being written from an academic and mental structure, even though it attempts to describe different structures and ways of understanding the world. Although it attempts to describe an integral approach, it

does so from the context of an academic requirement. I also want to acknowledge an early understanding of Gebser's complex theory.

This paper considers the development of an integral structure of consciousness as a step towards holistic health. As such, an integral structure demands that we are able to experience the different structures simultaneously. However, to experience them, we must be aware of them. This paper develops the idea that it is possible to awaken the various structures of consciousness by using specific art materials and processes. The proposed methods and qualities of the art materials described below are only one of their possible uses. Art materials hold immense possibilities and meanings, but for this paper, specific materials were selected to exemplify the hypothesis proposed. As follows, I will summarize the different structures, identify an art material that can awaken such structure, provide a case example, and develop a short critical reflection.

Structures & Art Materials

The Archaic Structure

As the structure closest to origin, the archaic has encountered problems being defined and conceptualized from a mental perspective. Even Gebser identified not knowing much about this structure (Combs, 2009). In the archaic, there is no sense of otherness, the self is not differentiated from nature or the universe, there is no separation between the object and the subject, and there is no perspective (Brown, 2018). It is a structure connected with the oneness of origin, "a time of complete non-differentiation" (Gebser, 1986, p.43).

The archaic represents the transition towards consciousness (Combs 2009) or the process of *complexification* (Feuerstein, 1987).

According to Feuerstein, it is an intensification of consciousness that allows for a union with the spiritual. Archaic as a primary structure cannot be fully understood mentally; Feuerstein claimed we need to experience it to understand it, which can be achieved through the experience of oneness that comes from spiritual training, or altered states. Another way to understand this structure is by considering the consciousness of the neonate, undifferentiated and one with the sensations of the body, with no subjective organizing principle. It is a time of instinct and drives, where survival of the body is the primary goal. With no awareness of the passing of time, we lived in the moment with no plans or goals. Feuerstein described this stage as devoid of memory, mental anguish, and emotional ties, a world without shadows nor symbols.

Experiencing Art Materials

Art documents our experience (Seiden, 2001). As we interact with the world, we can create marks and forms, some ephemeral, and some can transcend time. Before we can make marks, we experience art materials through our senses. Before communicating anything through art, we must first experience its qualities and acknowledge their difference. We notice their softness, hardness, malleability. As the archaic structure is related to this first consciousness of sensing the world, the closest we can create a parallel with in terms of art materials is with the sensory experience of them—the experience of texture, size, smell, touch. According to Seiden, the tactile experience is intimately related to our earliest memories of touching and being held. Likewise, smell guides us back to our mother's breast and to the materials we enjoy, as in the scent of pine in oil paintings.

In this sense, the archaic in art materials might be heightened when we get lost in the

art materials, in the use of an object without any plan or intention, and without the desire for a product, expression, symbolization, or communication. An art piece that cannot be defined, named, or analyzed, but that triggers the senses and the experience of unity with the act of creation.

Case Example - Yusuf's Sensory Journey

Yusuf is an 11-year-old boy originally from Lebanon. He was referred to art therapy due to experiences of rage and difficulties in expressing his emotions. A psychoeducational evaluation determined he was neurodiverse, with a significantly high IQ (Intelligence quotient) and an unbalanced profile. His mathematical skills resembled that of an adult, while his socioemotional skills were on the six-year-old norm. During the pandemic and because of reading news regarding COVID, he became touch resistant; he refused to touch any surface and would go around resolving his life from his elbows. Causing significant disturbances in the family as he would refuse to attend school, had difficulty eating and relating. At this stage in his art therapy sessions, we focused on touch. The space was filled with art and non-art materials. Making dough with cornstarch, playing with coffee beans to activate smell, creating with spaghetti cooked and uncooked, and using plasticine, clay, and charcoal; the main goal was to reconnect Yusuf to his sense of touch. Slowly, as he became more adventurous in his touch, he reengaged with the world. His family helped him explore without judgment and with awareness of his uniqueness. This focus on sensory integration and the feeling of safety in our body is reminiscent of the archaic consciousness.

In this drawing (Figure 1), Yusuf completely lost himself in the act of creation with charcoal. When asked about his experience, he didn't want to name, analyze, or interpret

it; but he was incredibly proud of his work, which is not often seen in his case. As a witness of his experience, his work had a different quality, a complete absorption not previously witnessed. When he finished his artwork, there was also a shift in his relatedness and presence.

Figure 1

Charcoal on A4 paper



Presence and Engagement as a Gateway to the Archaic

Grounding the archaic structure presented significant challenges. As this structure is difficult to understand from the mental perspective, it was necessary to access other realms to identify experiences with materials that could ground this origin-like structure. However, once there was sensory and somatic awareness, the image of the charcoal drawing came immediately to my mind. The memory of witnessing this creation conveyed a different quality. It was reminiscent of experiences in meditation and in nature. The pride and shift in Yusuf were also clues of this moment being an experience from a different consciousness.

However, access to this structure does not seem to be something that can be produced only through the use of specific materials or processes. It appears that the archaic structure must join the process of art-making at all times, but to be immersed in this structure of consciousness requires an openness to experience that is difficult to plan or control.

It is possible that it is sufficient to name it when it happens, and to value it as an essential experience to integrate.

The Magical Structure

According to Feuerstein (1987), Gebser described the magic structure of consciousness as egoless, spaceless, timeless, one-point unitary, a world interweaved with nature, and where there was a magical reaction to the world. As our magical consciousness was developing, people lived in small tribal groups (Brown, 2018). Life was filled with magic, and communities followed Shamans and healers who entered altered states and received help from power animals (Combs, 2009). Although awareness of the self was starting to develop, it was still strongly associated with nature (Brown, 2018). Identity was defined in terms of the collective, the tribe. Time and space were present in each moment (Combs, 2014) and were based on cycles of nature (Combs, 2009). In this structure, the world is one-dimensional; the sense of space and identity was experienced at one point.

There was no interior experience in the magical structure; consciousness was part of the environment (Brown, 2018). In other words, human beings experienced their consciousness and nature as part of themselves; as language started to evolve, human beings moved from being a part of nature and into being in nature with the development of conscious will (Gebser, 1986).

The magic structure can be witnessed when individuals dissolve their identity into mindless groups, such as during the Nazi regime (Combs, 2009). Combs posited that when a person believes that they can control their lives through the repetition of ritualistic behaviors, it corresponds to the magic structure. Likewise, repression and

projection are examples of the magic structure in our everyday life. Combs and Krippner (2007) identified that adults could also access their magic structure when they wanted to connect with their creativity: "indeed, any experience that merges human experience into a unified event that transcends the isolation of the individual qualifies as a potential production of the magical structure" (p. 138). Experiences such as love, participating in Symphony halls, midnight raves, and using plant medicine can also create access to the magic structure (Combs & Krippner, 2007).

Clay Magic: Using Clay in Psychotherapy

Clay is an essential medium in art therapy. Henley (2002) identified a deep archetypal attraction to clay that transcends culture and the need for novelty. Henley found that clay has the capacity to induce experiences that are rich in sensory information and can help develop impulse regulation. Henley proposed that clay awakens the sensory and the creative experience and can even be experienced with a sort of magic.

Seiden (2001) explored clay and named it as a material that "says yes" (p. 44), a material that records and accepts transformation. "Clay has power in its history, mythology and earth origins which are reflected in its structure. It can be modeled, carved, poured in liquid state, baked and make rigid." (Seiden, 2001, p.44). Mythology and religious texts give clay magical powers; the earth was seen as the source of all beings. Our need for containment was first expressed through ancient clay vessels.

Another association with clay is its relationship to feces and an invitation towards regression (Henley, 2002; Seiden, 2001). Clay can be very pleasant and unpleasant, stimulating, and permissive or bring confusion and anxiety because of its

lack of boundaries. Clay invites an exploration of limits and can be accessed directly or using instruments. Clay responds immediately and has the capacity to be created and destroyed multiple times.

Case Example – Lucas and the Power Within

Lucas is a 5-year-old boy originally from New Zealand; he has lived most of his life in Dubai with his parents and sister. In 2019 his parents separated, changing the dynamics of the family and Lucas's life. Lucas came to see me as he was having difficulties managing his sphincters; he presented with Enuresis and Encopresis. He would have pee and poop accidents in school and on play dates, causing significant disturbance to Lucas and his family. I met Lucas in the waiting room where he was waiting behind a plant pretending to be an animal; he possibly didn't feel safe coming to meet a new person. In attunement to his request, I became an animal as well, and this ritual became the beginning of our sessions for the following months.

With Lucas, I often find myself diving into the magic consciousness. He narrates stories of witches, superheroes, and animal shamans; most of his stories relate to power issues. In his stories, he gains powers by befriending dangerous animals. Lucas uses clay to create some of these animals that are part of the territory. As he uses the clay, he infuses the material with the powers that he believes the animal has. So, if it is a bat or a spider, the attention is not to create an accurate being but to mold the power into the clay. He doesn't concern himself with the product or how the clay looks at the end, he infuses his magic into the material, and the clay transforms.

In our first session, Lucas created a mighty dinosaur eating his food from a tree (Figure 2). As the image shows, the clay is flat, with no dimensionality. However, for Lucas this is

an alive being that becomes part of this magical world, where the line between reality and fantasy is blurred. Lucas keeps playing and creating the same art repeatedly in a compelling and repetitive action used to attempt to gain control and power over his difficult circumstances. Lucas is currently doing much better; after months of regular sessions, he has zero accidents and can better manage transitions and challenges. Lucas continues to be comfortable in the magical world that I visit when he comes to see me.

Figure 2

Clay Dinosaur



Using Clay to Conjure Magic

Clay is a material that facilitates the expression of emotions, particularly rich and complex emotions (Henley, 2002). Clay can welcome emotions and stories that were previously inaccessible to the client's consciousness; it may be that the magical qualities of clay support access to experiences that happened during the preoperational period. It has been documented that clay facilitates both catharsis and regression (Henley, 2002). Hence clay is proposed as a medium that can enable access to the magical structure. Clay can help circumvent the conscious defenses and create direct access to different aspects of the mind. After the clay has been formed, it

can facilitate verbal communication and integrate the magical. Finally, clay helps us concretized and symbolize our inner visual images (Sholt & Gavron, 2006). Our fantasies, feelings, and thoughts become embodied in the clay and separated from ourselves, allowing us to mentalize and symbolize, helping us process our life and bringing the magic consciousness towards an integral mindset.

The Mythical Structure

Imagination is the distinctive aspect of this structure (Brown, 2018). According to Feuerstein (1987), language shifted the relationship with reality. As human beings used language and symbolized reality, they became creators of the world. Human beings could construct and communicate their reality for the first time. Spirituality moved from spirit animals and into great mythic stories. According to Combs (2009), these great gods were not dissimilar to modern-day religions. The first of these gods was Mother nature; feminine goddesses were then followed by great male gods who battled and conquered. Shlain (1993) posited that this shift corresponded to the move from an oral tradition to the discovery of writing. This move towards action and agency resulted in a masculine dominance still present nowadays.

As a species, we started to construct our world and reality through stories and myths. Myths allowed humans to experience their inner world with a newfound feeling of having power over reality (Gebser, 1986). Stories became the way humanity oriented and found meaning. Regardless of the accuracy of the myth, the stories provided a sense of spirituality and purpose to life (Combs, 2009). Along also came feeling, empathy, and the capacity for "private feelings, as well as the capacity to participate in the private emotional world of another"

(Feuerstein, 1987p.78). Marking the emergence of complex social relationships.

The mythical consciousness was described as mimetic, retrospective, and introspective, concerned with history, origin, and the imitation of archetypal stories; it also moved in polarities within sacred time and space (Feuerstein, 1987). Actions had a mythical intention behind them, even a simple action such as plowing. The mythic mind wants to understand the world and finds answers in epic stories and larger-than-life gods and goddesses (Combs & Krippner, 2007). However, it creates sides, polarities: good and evil, light and dark. When the myth remains unresolved, the polarities do not integrate. This mythic mind still exists today in the creation of personal and cultural myths that help us cope. It can also be seen in psychotherapy and using myths to support the resolution of trauma and processing experiences (Combs & Krippner, 2007).

Watercolors: Lessons from Jungian Therapy

Water, a powerful symbol of life, is a vital substance when working with watercolors (Seiden, 2001). The water receives and absorbs the pigment, creating colors as the artist resolves the appropriate combination between the pigment and the water. Watercolor paper is porous and receives; the transparency of watercolor paintings allows the paper to be seen (Seiden, 2001). In art therapy, they provide an easy and safe way to access a great variety of colors and shades due to being water-based.

Jung used painting and calligraphy in his exploration of the collective unconscious. He used both watercolors and gouache and preferred to mix the pigments on his own. He was often specific about the paint and the paper he used in his personal and professional work (Azevedo, 2019). One of the reasons

behind his selection of watercolors was the possibility for transparency and opaqueness (Mellick, 2001). His work has often been compared with medieval manuscripts from the time when the mythical consciousness was in reign. At that time, the medieval illustrator, like Jung, executed his inner vision with commitment, devotion, and attention, a work that required a contemplative state of absolute focus, patience, and slow deliberate fine movements (Azevedo, 2019). "Jung's art was more than art: it was his life's spiritual practice" (Azevedo, 2019, p.186). Jung explored the mythical archetypes contained in the collective unconscious, possibly a record of the mythical consciousness.

Case Example - Shatha in the Myth of the Good Mother

Shatha is an Emirati woman. Shatha is single, lives alone, and is disconnected from her family. She was the youngest of 11 siblings, and her parents passed away from illness. In both cases, she was their caregiver towards the end of their life. Her stories are full of myths, mostly from her Islamic faith.

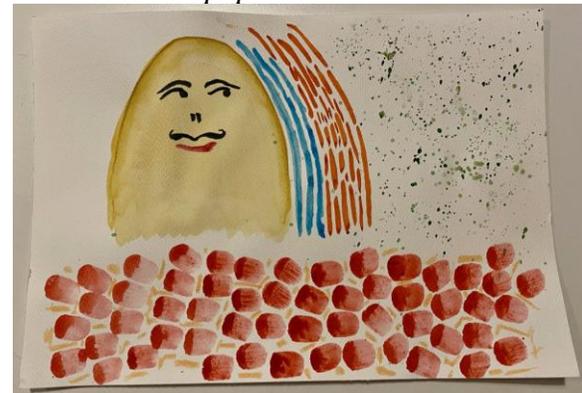
The myth of the good mother has often been processed in sessions. Shatha created a story around her mother as an ideal and almost perfect being. Strong, resilient, and powerful, the myth of her mother sustained her throughout her life. However, her recent memories of her biological mother portray a woman busy with housework and attending to many visitors. Shatha has started to break the myth and integrate that alongside the good mother she also experienced different degrees of neglect since early childhood. It is only recently that Shatha has been able to disconnect from the myth of having an ideal good mother.

Shatha often uses watercolors to portray her stories, some from her imagination and others

from her dreams. The image selected was created after the COVID lockdown when storytelling and art therapy supported her isolation. The painting (Figure 3) portrays a reinterpretation of Humpty Dumpty and explores feelings of fragility and protection. In this creation, she processed the idea of needing to reparent herself, to return almost to the egg, and take care of herself with kindness but in a realistic manner. To be able to mindfully break with the myth of the good mother.

Figure 3

Watercolor on paper



Colors of Life: Watercolors as a Medium for the Mythical

Changing belief patterns is the work of psychotherapy. Many of our belief patterns come from our childhood, from what we experienced and learned when we were young, and in a mythical consciousness. Our patterns come from a time when our parents were gods. Imagine yourself as a small child: clumsy, unable to communicate and express your thoughts and feelings, overwhelmed with sensory information and tasks; and here comes your mother, she is a giant -taller than you, more intelligent than you, with more dexterity, and vocabulary. The lessons we learn from our parents, teachers, and culture become our myths. However, it is difficult to see them as they have been integrated into the fabric of our being. In art therapy, the myth

can be portrayed, the story witnessed, instead of lived.

Watercolors have special powers; they are an ancient medium used since the cave paintings of the Paleolithic time, a medium that prevailed in the European Middle Age and traveled through the Renaissance and until today. Watercolors facilitate regression and provide access to unconscious material. Watercolors create the illusion of transparency and magic while they can also be precise and exact. Their capacity for transparency and opacity, as polarities, invite the mythical consciousness. It is a medium that can help portray inner myths in a non-precise or finished way, as we usually experience our myths. As the myths clarify, so can our painting, and we can move towards integration.

The Mental Structure

The shift towards the mental structure described the process when human beings replaced the gods and goddesses with their own thinking and science. In the art world, this was seen with the advent of three-dimensional perspective and depth (Combs, 2009). Spatiality and how objects exist in particular locations was a new aspect of consciousness that allowed the possibility to view the world with increasing objectivity (Brown, 2018). This became the time of the mind and reason. Of understanding the world through the mental constructs in our mind, individually and collectively. Understanding truth as resulting from logic and systematic theories (Combs, 2009).

The mental as a *perspectival* consciousness intended to find an inner world that would represent the external world more accurately. It also created the possibility of seeing the world from a specific place, from a perspective. Each person began to see the world from their own point of view (Combs,

2009). Creating feelings of separateness from the world and, in that way, isolation and detachment. As we settled in sedentary existence, we became more self-aware (Feuerstein, 1987).

The time for individuality started, which relied on the human ability to focus, direct thought (Feuerstein, 1987), and problem solve (Combs & Krippner, 2007). This ability to rationalize has resulted in taking things apart to analyze, measure, categorize, reduce, and in the specialization of science and fields of study (Brown, 2018, Combs, 2009, Feuerstein, 1987). This mental view also separates the subject from the object and prioritizes objectivity. However, this perception has increased the separation "of man from the whole" (Brown, 2018, p.4). Feuerstein (1987) described how free expression, doubt, and confusion could reign in a mental consciousness that tried to resolve questions of destiny and purpose. Without myths and magic, the body was detached from the mind and the spirit from scientific exploration (Feuerstein, 1987). We welcomed the time of dualism, formal operations, and linear time (Combs & Krippner, 2007). The mental structure is the primordial consciousness of today.

Pencils as Tools of Precision: Drawing as Mental

Drawing is a task common to our childhood. In adolescence, we decide whether we want to continue with artistic endeavors or we give up; this was named the age of reason by Lowenfeld and Brittain (1987). In terms of artistic development, this is a time when there is increased attention on the final product instead of the creative process, resulting in dissatisfaction with art as not everyone finds that they have the skill and patience to develop in this area. At this stage, attention is placed on proportion, three-dimensional depiction, and realistic use of color; drawing

from observation is preferred over drawing from imagination. Accuracy is the primary goal; regardless of talent mastery can only be achieved through practice. Drawing requires skill, the development of specific muscles, and fine motor coordination. For adults who distanced from art in their adolescence, drawing can be complex as they are often concerned with their difficulty in being able to portray the world as they see it.

The pencil is an instrument that leaves marks as it touches surfaces (Seiden, 2001); these marks are different according to their speed, pressure, width, force, and many other characteristics. Pencils are also all different in terms of the softness or hardness of the graphite; colored pencils add a layer of color that is less intense than paint. Pencils can record a variety of symbolic images and can also be used to plan and create maps. With pencils, we can make the illusion of depth following an exact formula developed in the Renaissance. Pencils can remind us of taking tests and being right or wrong.

In art, drawing is distinct from painting, even though sometimes underneath the painting, there is a drawing. It is a dry medium often used to study a subject or prepare for painting. There are different categories of drawings, such as figure painting, cartooning, doodling, and freehand. Drawing is also used in learning to heighten memory and in scientific studies to convey information. As art therapy continues its mission to acquire empirical evidence, neurobiological research has become essential. In a recent study, art therapists recorded EEGs of participants while drawing (Belkofer et al., 2014). The result of the study showed a difference pre and post drawing in the left posterior parietal, occipital, and temporal regions. Art therapists have discussed how drawing relates to the left brain, self-regulation, problem-solving, and planning (Belkofer et al., 2014). These are the

kind of explorations characteristic of the mental structure.

Case Example - Luis and the Fragmented World of Art

Luis is a 17-year-old Venezuelan teenager. He was well known as an artist due to his skill and constant practice. His parents had divorced early on, and after a couple of suicidal attempts, his mother felt she couldn't care for him anymore. Luis was living with his grandparents when he attended art therapy sessions. Luis was constantly exploring existential questions, but looking for answers from his intelligence and his interest in science. This mental exploration left him fragmented and confused. He often talked about the search for meaning and purpose. But, in his art, he looked to replicate reality as it was, and he was very hard on himself when their result was less than accurate. His preference for drawing with pencils retained him in a mental consciousness.

Although drawing did not lower his existential questions, it brought him the power of self-expression. Through drawing, Luis communicated with the people around him, his art therapist, and himself. He used drawing to problem solve and resolve some of the questions that felt endless in his mind; regardless of his coming up with a solution, drawing provided him with a sense of containment and holding. The paper could hold his questions and his fragmented self. Drawing provided Luis with great admiration as his peers were impressed by his skill. Developing the identity of an artist was supportive for Luis during this difficult time.

Luis drew the world, copying an image from a specific perspective (Figure 4). It was completed in a group setting where every person was instructed to depict the image from their particular location, exploring perspective both from an artistic and a

psychological point of view. Luis invested significant time in creating an image as accurately as possible; great attention was placed on detail. Once finalized, he felt great pride at having achieved what he considered a good result.

Figure 4

Colored pencils on paper



Pencil Drawing to Access the Mental Consciousness

Get a pencil, an eraser, and a sharpener and assess your response. Are you ready to explore and find answers? To follow formulas and get answers? Drawing, specifically with pencils, seems to awaken the mental consciousness where we feel we can be objective and separated from our subjective experience. Once we create the drawing, it becomes an object separated from our self. An object that, in its accuracy, conveys the values of reasoning and logic. Science uses drawing to step away from magic and myth and find formulas. Drawing invites us to be primarily rational. To create art as a statement of our ability to reason and depict the external world accurately. In the case of Luis, an excessive mental consciousness, conveyed through his love for pencils, supported his internal fragmentation.

The Integral Structure

Gebser posited that a shift in consciousness is emerging; he identified it since the end of the nineteenth century and was evidenced through changes in art, science, mathematics, music, among others (Combs, 2009). He named this new dimension the integral structure. After the mental structure, concepts of separation and matter shift into a different dimension that requires an expanded consciousness and an openness to new paradigms and ideas (Brown, 2018). However, this growth and intensification of consciousness are being perceived from our mental consciousness, and in that way, we still might not fully comprehend what this new structure requires from us. It is a structure that transcends many developmental models developed so far (Combs & Krippner, 2007).

It is a four-dimension reality where the goal is to integrate all the structures in their best forms and where all structures can be at play simultaneously (Combs & Krippner, 2007). According to Gebser, the integration results from "the concretion, or condensation of the early structures, where all the positive and negative attributes have been resolved, rather than a mental apprehension of them" (Brown, 2018, p. 4-5).

It is a structure that is *aperspectival*, where perspective has been transcended. Time and space are limitless, we are egoless, and we see reality as a whole. It is fluid and flexible and allows the presence of multiple simultaneous perspectives. Where one type of knowledge or perception is not valued over the other (Brown, 2018). A consciousness that emphasizes the quality of the experience (Combs, 2009) and steps away from dualism (Feuerstein, 1987). Integral consciousness has a diaphanous quality; it is translucent and invites us to experience reality with less clarity and conditioning (Combs & Krippner, 2007). Combs and Krippner (2007) related

integral consciousness with experiences such as flow, non-dual experiences, and samadhi; in the integral structure, creativity and spirituality flow together.

Collaging in Art Therapy

Collage is the action of fastening different materials into a new surface. It makes the ordinary extraordinary, mirrors relationships, and brings diversity into unity (Seiden, 2001). According to Seiden, scraps, old, useless, inexpensive, abundant commonplace objects, and printed images become art materials. Objects can be chosen for aesthetic reasons and then removed from the flow discarded in a process of construction and destruction. Objects are reshaped or changed to be combined with other objects. Transforming everyday objects into valuable art is the matter of collage (Seiden, 2001). It is an experience of taking the helpless, useless, worn, old, sick, and the leftovers and transforms them into beauty.

According to Seiden (2001), collage involves sorting, selecting, judging, and arranging. The objects can be altered or not, establishing connections to other objects on the surface. The results are often two-dimensional, but can become multidimensional according to the artist's decisions. It is a process in flux and constant change; one image can move around the space to find a different place.

Collage as a medium can provide people with a sense of safety and a capacity for expression, particularly for those who are apprehensive of painting and drawing (Malchiodi, 2006). Collage combines structured and self-expressive qualities. It often involves easy-to-access materials at low or no cost. The selection of the images can be conscious and intentional, and at the same time, can invite less conscious thoughts and feelings that may reveal to the artist when the collage is finished. Collage provides

many responses, representations, and layers of knowledge (Chilton & Scotti, 2014). It is important to remember that in art therapy, making the collage can be accompanied by verbalization and storytelling in a quest for meaning; this meaning can sometimes evolve and change with time. When the collage is created in a hands-on fashion, it has a physicality, but this is not a requirement as digital collage has emerged as a valid art form.

Case Example - Collaging the Self: Hanin's Integration

Hanin, a 17-year-old adolescent originally from Syria, was referred to art therapy due to school refusal and symptoms of depression. She had visited multiple doctors and had numerous diagnoses as she also presented with psychosomatic complaints. In the process of art therapy, she explored her avoidance, opposition, refusal, and unresolved grief. Due to living in a mobile society, she had experienced the loss of many friends, and recently some of her friends had moved to boarding school. Additionally, her maternal grandfather and paternal grandmother had passed away. The grief and loss had created a fragmentation that caused her significant pain and a need to distance herself from everyone. Hanin also attended to her parents' suffering, as the whole house was experiencing undiscussed grief.

During treatment, Hanin started to rediscover and restore herself. She resisted using artwork at the beginning as she did not consider herself an artist. As the symptoms of fatigue lowered and she reconnected with her anger, her artwork became alive, and then she was able to process her grief and return to her developmental tasks and school. Most of her work was integrating, trying to make sense of the different parts of herself. As she became better able to verbalize her feelings and disclose her internal experience, her peer

relationships improved, which was critical in her prognosis.

In this collage (Figure 5), she integrated conflicting parts of herself. The background represented her openness to different cultures and worldviews. The jewels represented her desire for wealth and power. The image of lights in a dark background conveyed her fantasy and desire for magic. The eyes were a commitment to continue to take care of herself from a mental perspective. In the middle, there is a “ugly” yet powerful character. Hanin discussed ideas of honoring her darkness and ugliness and integrating even this into a whole self. She created many iterations of this theme using collage.

Figure 5

Collage with magazine images



Collage as a Vehicle towards Integral Consciousness

In postmodern art, collage is an aesthetic device that juxtaposes textual and visual elements that creates an awareness of the experience of viewing (Aronson 1991). It allows for the multiple overlapping of papers

and images that can mirror the different structures of consciousness, becoming interconnected and integrated. Collage provides the ability to integrate the theoretical, artistic, subjective, intersubjective, and any knowledge from any field that the artist wants to bring into the work (Chilton & Scotti, 2014). As the artist selects and perfects the different images, this can be a metaphor for choosing the aspects of the different consciousness in their full expression, taking away what has been deficient or excessive.

Collage creates a space where multiple perspectives can be integrated simultaneously. Every image in the space has its own perspective, theme, and even origin. However, as they are placed together, they become something new as a totality. According to Feuerstein (1987), collage is attempting to deal with the "problem of time" (p. 148). Collage can create timeless aperspectival images that look for integration without hierarchy. It can also represent reclaiming all the consciousness structures that could have been seen as useless or invalid and into communion with newer forms and perspectives. In collage, presence is key to identifying intention and general outlook; this can summon an archaic aspect of consciousness. The process of selecting images can incite the magic of finding, or not finding, what you want. The processing of the collage can involve mythical storytelling, and the precision of arranging the images can invite the best characteristics of the mental perspective. As a totality, collage welcomes the integral perspective.

Conclusion

In the quest for developing an integral consciousness, art materials can help ground the experience of different consciousness structures and invite integrality. However, art materials are not specific; they represent an

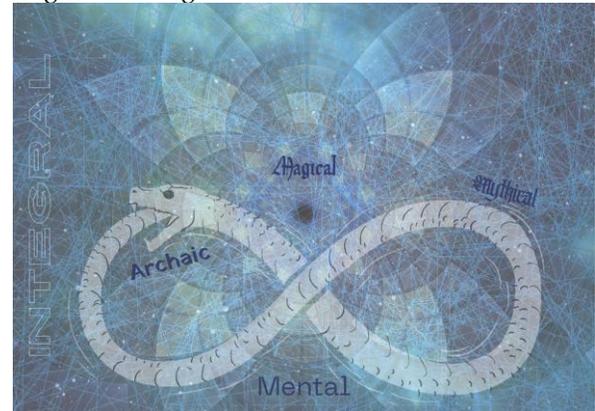
approximation and an invitation. With different intentions and processes, every art material can change its qualities. The transparency of watercolors can be used to portray essential attributes of the integral consciousness. Charcoal can be used with precision and in a goal-oriented manner to convey the mental structure. We separate and categorize to understand because we have been trained to do so and still have a predominant mental structure.

But what would happen if we used materials to bring balance when consciousnesses are excessive or deficient? For example, in helping a person experiencing psychosis, and caught in the mythical, to connect to the real world using the mental consciousness and the precision of drawing from observation with pencils. Or addressing existential questions with mythical watercolor painting instead of trying to find meaning from a mental perspective. And, what if we use magic to potentialize transformation and to connect with ritual? Through intense presence and experience with the qualities of the materials, we can also bring forth the connection with origin characteristic of the archaic consciousness. This paper is an initial exploration of these possibilities, which need to be further supported through empirical research. Art-Based Research and Descriptive Phenomenology might be promising avenues for this exploration.

Integral consciousness has been related to an "open and translucent quality through which reality is experienced in a clear and less conditioned way" (Combs & Krippner, 2007, page 143). This evolution of our consciousness might take us to a non-dual and unconditioned space. There is evidence of people reaching this level of consciousness, usually through creative absorption or spiritual practices. It is challenging to reach integrality. It requires

the absolute acceptance of all the different previous consciousness structures in their most fulfilled state past deficiency, regression, or excessiveness. If the goal is to integrate them all, we must know them all, experience them all, and realize they are eternally available (Figure 6).

Figure 6
Digital Collage



This paper proposed that art materials can be used to awaken qualities of different consciousness to bring them to the forefront, and then they can be witnessed, acknowledged, valued, and integrated. In Gebser's (1986) theory, art has always played an important role; unfortunately, people do not engage directly with art in our current moment in time. Even though art is valued, sold as an expensive commodity, and part of our daily lives, people still do not engage in the direct experience of making art. The proposal of this paper invites such experiences and is framed in the context of art therapy, which includes not only the experience of the material but also the presence of a supportive other that holds the creative space and can guide the experience towards health and integration.

Developing an integral consciousness might be determinant to the survival of our species and planet. Religions and the mythical consciousness generate wars between tribes

who claim to own the truth. The mental perspective values individuality and differentiation in such excess that we have forgotten about the inter-relatability of all things. We have disconnected from nature. Nevertheless, If we learn to use the different structures, we can, for instance, learn to use myth; we can also let it go and know when

we are in a myth. Through this awareness, we might become able to enter and use the different consciousness towards integrality. We must realize that nothing is separate and move towards using the transformation witnessed in art-making into real-life transformation, both individually and as a species.

References

- American Art Therapy Association (2021, March 14). *About Art Therapy*.
<https://arttherapy.org/about-art-therapy/>
- Aronson, A. (1991). Postmodern design. *Theatre Journal*, 43(1), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3207947>
- Azevedo, L. (2019). The Red Book Through New Eyes. *Jung Journal*, 13(3), 179–187. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19342039.2019.1636616>
- Belkofer, C. M., Van Hecke, A. V., & Konopka, L. M. (2014). Effects of drawing on alpha activity: A quantitative EEG study with implications for art therapy. *Art Therapy*, 31(2), 61–68. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07421656.2014.903821>
- Bella, K. A., & Serlin, I. A. (2013). Arts therapies. In H. L. Friedman & G. Hartelius (Eds.), *The Wiley-Blackwell handbook of transpersonal psychology* (pp. 529–543). Wiley & Sons. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118591277.ch29>
- Brown, Z. (2018). Art and the Evolution of Consciousness: A Look at the Work of Owen Barfield, Jean Gebser, and Gottfried Richter. *Journal of Conscious Evolution*, 12(12), 1–11. <https://digitalcommons.ciis.edu/cejournal/vol12/iss12/2>
- Chilton, G., & Scotti, V. (2014). Snipping, gluing, writing: The properties of collage as an arts-based research practice in art therapy. *Art Therapy*, 31(4), 163–171. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07421656.2015.963484>
- Combs, A. (2014). Art and the Evolution of Consciousness. *Eros and Kromos*.
<http://eroskosmos.org/english/art-and-evolution-of-consciousness/>
- Combs, A. (2009). *Consciousness explained better: Towards an integral understanding of the multifaceted nature of consciousness*. Paragon House.
<https://www.paragonhouse.com/xcart/Consciousness-Explained-Better-Towards-an-Integral-Understanding-of-the-Multifaceted-Nature-of-Consciousness.html>
- Combs, A., & Krippner, S. (2007). Structures of consciousness and creativity: Opening the doors of perception. In R. Richards (Ed.), *Everyday creativity and new views of human nature: Psychological, social, and spiritual perspectives* (pp. 131–149). American Psychological Association. <https://doi.org/10.1037/11595-010>
- Dissanayake, E. (1988). *What is art for*. University of Washington Press.
<https://uwpress.uw.edu/book/9780295970172/what-is-art-for/>
- Dissanayake, E. (2001). Becoming homo aestheticus: Sources of aesthetic imagination in mother-infant interactions. *Substance*, 30(1), 85–103. <https://doi.org/10.1353/sub.2001.0005>

- Feen-Callgan, H. (1995). The use of art therapy in treatment programs to promote spiritual recovery from addiction. *Art Therapy*, 12(1), 46–50.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/07421656.1995.10759123>
- Feuerstein, G. (1987). *Structures of consciousness: The genius of Jean Gebser: An introduction and critique*. Integral Publishing.
- Gebser, J. (1986). *The ever-present origin*. University Press. (Original work published 1949)
- Henley, D. (2002). *Clayworks in art therapy: Plying the sacred circle*. Jessica Kingsley.
- Hocoy, D. (2002). Cross-cultural issues in art therapy. *Art Therapy*, 19(4), 141–145.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/07421656.2002.10129683>
- Huss, E., & Cwikel, J. (2005). Researching creations: Applying arts-based research to Bedouin women's drawings. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 4(4), 44–62.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/160940690500400404>
- Hyland Moon, C. H. (2002). *Studio art therapy: Cultivating the artist identity in the art therapist*. Jessica Kingsley. https://uk.jkp.com/products/studio-art-therapy?_pos=2&_sid=21107cee9&_ss=r
- Kaimal, G., & Arslanbek, A. (2020). Indigenous and traditional visual artistic practices: Implications for art therapy clinical practice and research. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11, 1320. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.01320>
- Karkou, V., Martinsone, K., Nazarova, N., & Vaverniece, I. (2011). Art therapy in the postmodern world: Findings from a comparative study across the UK, Russia and Latvia. *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, 38(2), 86–95. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aip.2010.12.005>
- Lowenfeld, V., & Brittain, W. L. (1987). *Creative and Mental Growth* (8th ed.). Macmillan.
- Malchiodi, C. A. (2006). *The art therapy sourcebook*. McGraw-Hill.
- Mellick, Jill. (2001). *The Art of Dreaming: Tools for Creative Dream Work*. Conari Press.
- McConeghey, H. (1986). Archetypal art therapy is cross-cultural art therapy. *Art Therapy*, 3(3), 111–114. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07421656.1986.10758681>
- McNiff, S. (1984). Cross-cultural psychotherapy and art. *Art Therapy*, 1(3), 125–131. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07421656.1984.10758765>

Journal of Conscious Evolution, Vol. 19 [2021] Art. #: Gómez-Carlier: Grounded Approach to Integral Art Therapy

- Pearson, M., & Wilson, H. (2009). *Using expressive arts to work with the mind, body and emotions: theory and practice*. Jessica Kingsley. https://uk.jkp.com/products/using-expressive-arts-to-work-with-mind-body-and-emotions?_pos=1&_sid=07e0f9c06&_ss=r
- Potash, J. S., Bardot, H., Moon, C. H., Napoli, M., Lyonsmith, A., & Hamilton, M. (2017). Ethical implications of cross-cultural international art therapy. *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, 56(1), 74–82. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aip.2017.08.005>
- Seiden, D. (2001). *Mind over matter: The uses of materials in art, education and therapy*. Magnolia Street.
- Silverman, D. K. (2000). An interrogation of the relational turn: A discussion with Stephen Mitchell. *Psychoanalytic Psychology*, 17(1), 146–152. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0736-9735.17.1.146>
- Shlain, Leonard. (1993). *Art and physics: Parallel visions in space, time and light*. HarperCollins.
- Sholt, M., & Gavron, T. (2006). Therapeutic qualities of clay-work in art therapy and psychotherapy: A review. *Art Therapy*, 23(2), 66–72. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07421656.2006.10129647>
- Wadson, H. (2016). An eclectic approach to art therapy—Revisited. In D. Gussak, & M. Rosal (Eds.), *The Wiley Handbook of Art Therapy* (pp. 122–132). Wiley & Sons. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118306543.ch12>