

RECONSTRUCTING WORLDS THROUGH EXPRESSIVE ART

Society for Descriptive Psychology 2024 Conference
Presidential Address
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DESCRIPTIVE
PSYCHOLOGY &
WORLD
RECONSTRUCTION

Behavior Potential

Deliberate Action

Person Characteristics

Social Practices

Worlds & Status Dynamics

POETRY & HEALING

A Way to Process Grief
& Trauma

Wallace Stevens &
Gregory Orr

Poetry as Survival



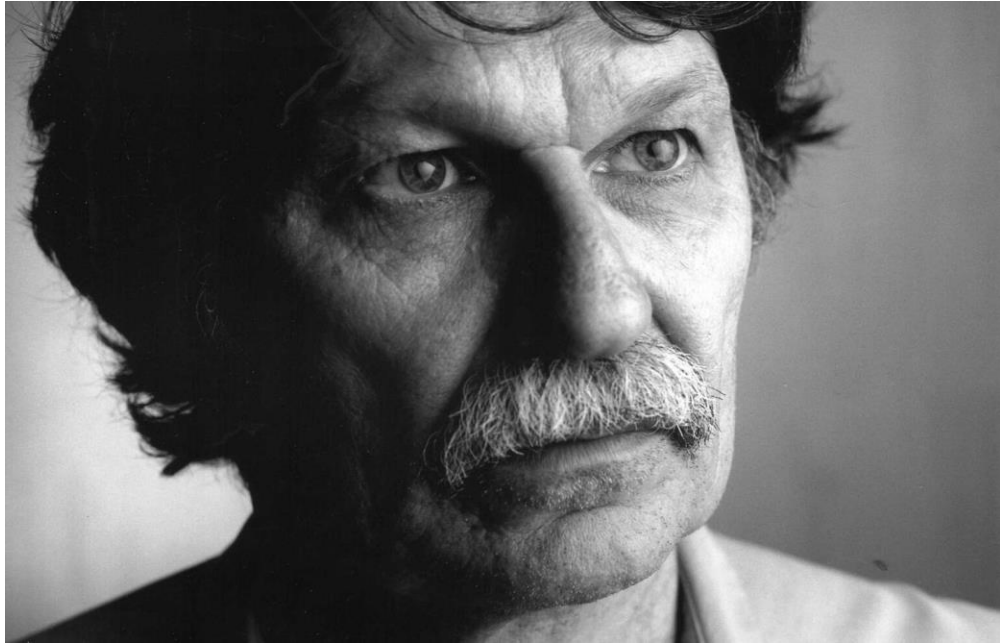
WALLACE STEVENS (1879 – 1955)

Anecdote of the Jar

I placed a jar in Tennessee,
And round it was, upon a hill.
It made the slovenly wilderness
Surround that hill.

The wilderness rose up to it,
And sprawled around, no longer wild.
The jar was round upon the ground
And tall and of a port in air.

It took dominion everywhere.
The jar was gray and bare.
It did not give of bird or bush,
Like nothing else in Tennessee.



GREGORY ORR

B. 1947

some part of the lyric

Some part of the lyric wants to exclude the world with all its chaos and grief and so conceives shapes (a tear, a globe of dew)

whose cool symmetries create a mood of security. Which is something all need and so, the lyric's urge to exclude

what hurts us isn't simply a crude defense, but an embracing of a few essential shapes: a tear, a globe of dew.

But to what end? Are there clues in these forms to deeper mysteries that no good poem should exclude?

What can a stripped art reveal? Is a nude more naked than the eye can see? Can a tear freed of salt be a globe of dew?

And most of all—is it something we can use? Yes, but only as long as its beauty, like that of a tear or a globe of dew, reflects the world it meant to exclude.



Profile

Intervention

Outcomes

CASE IN POINT: POETRY & GRIEF



WHAT I WEAR

This world above worlds is a prairie
of clouds and sun glare.

Below, the smoldering hearths
shed smoke like irradiated hair.

Worth less than his breath
on earth, his song plays

in my ear. Still, I listen
for clues, the gift of his verse.

See me wear this blue plain shirt?
I play his red guitar.

TIGER BARK PRESS 2019

MECHANISMS OF CHANGE



● Cognitive Restructuring?

● Relationship Change Formula

● World Reconstruction

RELATIONSHIP CHANGE FORMULA

If P R to Q	P B with Q	B Consistent S Inconsistent R	R Direction S
Q is Grief R Avoids	B Writes About Q	B Approaches	P Faces Loss
R is Chaotic and Ugly	B Fashions a Container for Q	B is Stabilizing and Beautiful	P Makes Sense of and Bears Loss
R is a Novice	B Studies a & Practices Poetry	B Gains KH & Confidence	P Publishes Honors Beloved Helps Others

UNDERSTANDING THE WORLD & STATUS

- The World:

- The total psychological environment.
- Includes all actual and possible objects, processes, events, and states of affairs.

- Reality Construction:

- Individuals construct their realities within the world.
- Reality is subject to constraints but shaped by individual perspectives.

- Status and Place:

- Status = Place or position in the world.
- Dictates behavior potential and eligibility for actions.
- Individuals appraise their status and act accordingly.

THE PROCESS OF WORLD RECONSTRUCTION

- Assessing the Client's World:

- Empathic and objective understanding.
- Focus on relevant and significant portions.

- Identifying Problematic Aspects:

- Determine why the world is problematic or impossible for the client.
- Explore the client's perceived position within their world.

- Reconstructing the World:

- Expand the world so the loss becomes thinkable.
- Make the world less problematic or impossible.

CONSCIOUSNESS, STATUS CHANGE & COMMUNITY

- Consciousness and Status:

- Change in status = Change in consciousness.
- New statuses open up new behavioral possibilities.

- Community and Status Reassignment:

- Statuses have a public aspect, recognized within communities.
- Art forms like poetry help in reconstructing statuses.

- Grieving and Status Reassignment:

- Grieving integrates loss into the world.
- Community validation of reconstructed statuses can be therapeutic.

STATUS

Place

- Father
- Bereaved
- Poet

Practices

- Parenting
- Grief/Mourning
- Learn
- Create
- Share

Potential

- Share Life
- Degraded
- Heal
- Recover
- Meaning

RESEARCH SUPPORTING ART THERAPIES

Reduction in
Depression &
Anxiety

Improved
Cognitive
Function

Enhanced
Quality of Life
& Socialization

APPLYING EXPRESSIVE ARTS IN THERAPY



Integrating Poetry & Art Clinically

Encouraging Mindful and Deliberate
Engagement in Creative Activities

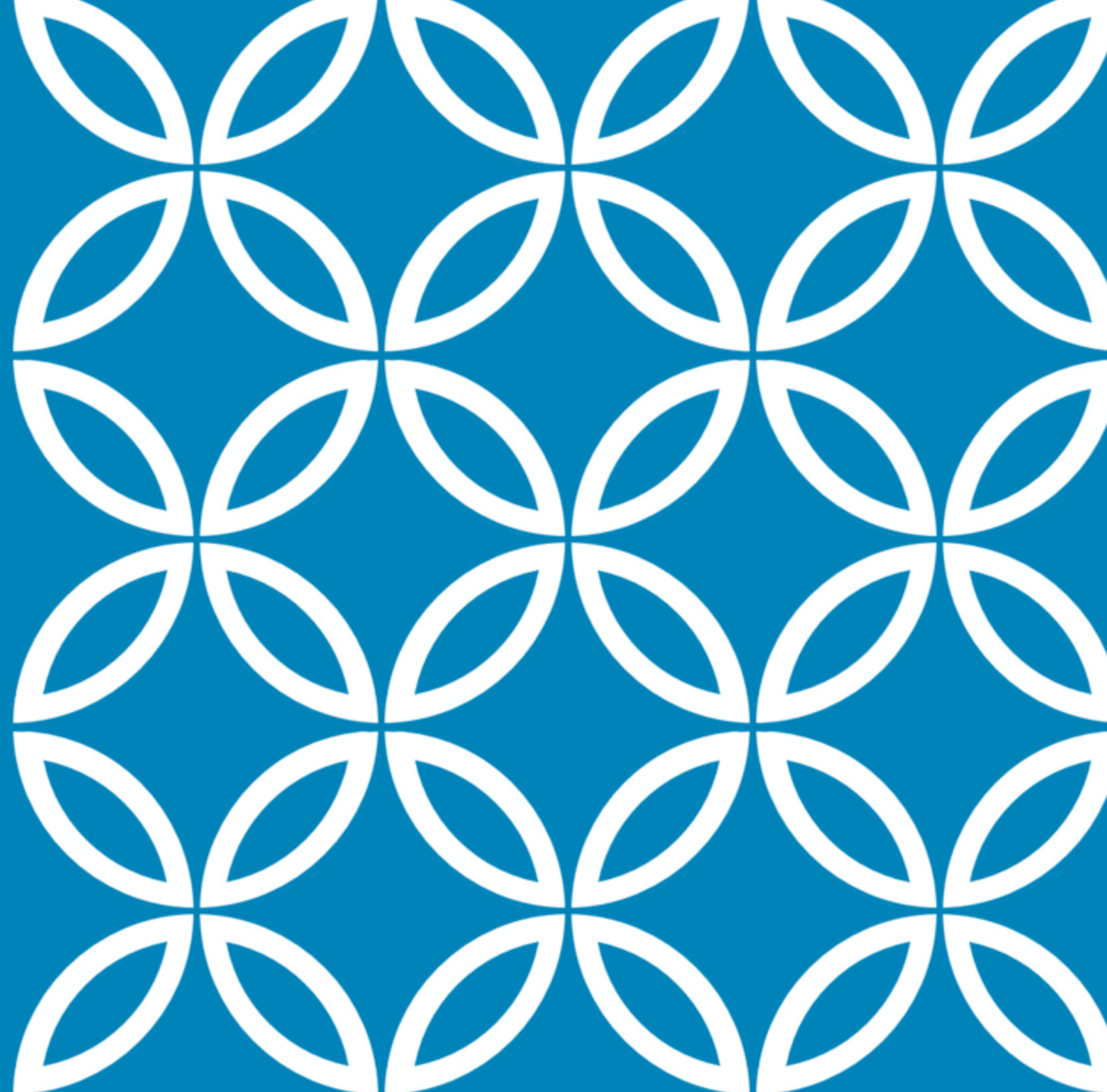
Utilizing Group Art Therapy to Enhance Social
Support

CONCLUSION & CALL TO ACTION

The “Poet”ential to
Foster Resilience &
Transformation

Personal and
Professional
Contexts

Invitation for
Further Exploration
& Discussion





QUESTIONS & DISCUSSION

Many Thanks!