

Towards a visual *après coup*: retroactive resignification of memory in art therapy

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This presentation explores memory and remembrance in art therapy by intersecting the notion of *après coup* with material drawn from both clinical and personal contexts. It does so by briefly unpacking the notion of *après coup* as the retroactive resignification of memory, and it locates this concept within a Laplanchean tradition. *Après coup* or afterwardsness—and the role of memory in psychic determinism—is understood here as the reverberation or 'structural dialectic' (Doane, 2002, p. 36) between two events separated across time, so that that which comes after may be understood to re-signify that which comes before. This phenomenon, it is argued, can also be understood visually and two examples are given. The first locates a visual *après coup* within the art therapeutic relationship, working with an adolescent boy in a bereavement service in London. Here the complex entanglement between past, present and future, characteristic of *après coup* in memory formation, is visually evidenced by a retroactive resignification of his earlier art making by that which was made after.

The second involves a more personal example of the presenter's visit to their ancestral village Žeimelis, in northern Lithuania, following working on an art therapy summer school in Vilnius, in 2008. Here, the visual site and witnessing of the geographic location resulted in the resignification of childhood memory and identity, so that which was visually experienced after transformed that which was remembered before.

Both examples illustrate a visual *après coup* where the formation of memory can be considered analogous to that of the kaleidoscope, in which a new position or another image, suddenly reorganises other images *après coup*. Through this exploration, this presentation argues for the need of a more nuanced notion of temporality in the formation of visual meaning and memory, and how greater cognisance of this may inform art therapy theory and practice.

Biography

Jonathan Isserow has a PhD in Psychoanalysis and Documentary Film Studies from University College London (UCL), and a MA in Psychoanalytic Observational Studies from the Tavistock Clinic. He is a state registered art psychotherapist who has worked extensively within child, adolescent and family psychiatry. He convenes the MA art psychotherapy programme at the University of Roehampton, London.

Recent publications and conference presentations

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