

Art Therapy Online: ATOL

Art Therapy Studio's Project

Dave Edwards

Over the course of the last year I have had a number of very interesting conversations with colleagues about the spaces we work in as art therapists. These discussions have often revolved around the contested nature of these spaces and how they may be compared with those art therapists previously occupied. It would appear that the passing of the years has not necessarily been kind to art therapists, or our clients in relation to this.

This set me thinking about what we have and what we have lost. It may be, for instance, that we do not yet fully understand the impact the loss of dedicated studio spaces, and the increasing use of multi-functional rooms shared with other professionals has had upon art therapy. So far as I am aware, there has been no co-ordinated attempt to document and record for posterity the environments within which the practice of art therapy currently takes; or has taken place in the past.

To begin to address this gap in our knowledge and understanding I wish to invite all art therapists, wherever they are working, to email me (d.g.edwards@sheffield.ac.uk) one digital photograph of either, or both, of the following:

- The office, art room or studio space you currently work in.
- The office art room or studio space you have previously worked in.

The photograph should be formatted as a JPEG image file, or similar.

With each photograph please also provide the following information:

- Details of when and where the photograph was taken.
- A short description of the space, including any relevant contextual information not apparent in the photograph.
- A few thoughts on the meaning and significance these spaces have for you.

An example of what I mean can be found below.¹

Please note: it is advisable not to include human subjects (clients) in any of the photographs submitted. If clients do appear it will be the responsibility of the contributor secure the necessary permission.

Once sufficient contributions have been received the intention is to establish a permanent online archive linked to this journal.



¹ Although the aims of the project are somewhat different, what I have in mind is something similar to the Artists' Studios and Writers' Rooms feature regularly found in the review section of the Saturday Guardian.<http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/series/artistsstudios> & <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/series/writersrooms>

This photograph is of the Art Therapy Department at Stanley Royd Hospital in Wakefield was taken back in the late 1980s; probably in 1985 or 1986. The hospital, along with the art therapy studio, closed in 1995.² The Art Therapy Department had only moved into this space - the refurbished dormitory of one of what had once been a male ward – a year or so prior to this photograph being taken. It still looks relatively new, clean and uncluttered. I notice too that the tables are arranged in two blocks, with eight spaces at each. This was only one of the various permutations we tried out over time. As I recall, by the time I left in 1989, everyone worked at one table which occupied the whole of the main studio space.

What you can't see in the photograph are the office, tea and coffee making facilities, toilets, kiln room and storage space, which were to the left in the photograph. There was also another smaller and more private studio space behind the wall to the rear of the photograph. This, though, was the space in which most patients were seen and preferred to work. Not only was it spacious, it was light and airy too. Compared to the previous space we had been housed in - an abandoned green house where we froze in winter and damn near melted in summer - relocating the Art Therapy Department, despite the disruption, was a definite step up in the world. Privacy was still an issue (despite the signs on the door, unsolicited interruptions were not uncommon) but at least we didn't feel like goldfish in a bowl. I still like to believe the move had something to do with the increasing credibility of art therapy that time as well as the policies of a more enlightened, less institutionalised hospital administration. Only a couple of years previously Stanley Royd Hospital had been labelled a 'scrapheap hospital' following the public enquiry into the outbreak of salmonella poisoning at the hospital during which nineteen patients died and many more staff and patients were seriously incapacitated (Edwards 1986).

Looking at this photograph 20+ years on I feel a mixture of emotions. I miss the people, some of whom I know to be dead. I met and worked with some truly wonderful and talented people (patients and colleagues) in this space. I also

² <http://www.thetimechamber.co.uk/Sites/Hospital/StanleyRoyd/StanleyRoyd.php>

miss the daily engagement with image making. But most of all I miss the space itself; its atmosphere. What you can never get from a photograph is how the space smelled, or what it sounded like. This studio smelled of art making, and more specifically of instant coffee, tobacco, fixative, damp clay, white spirit and paper. While the smell of the room was more or less a constant, it sounded different every day. Sometimes we played music, sometimes we talked or argued or shared a joke, and sometimes we just got on with whatever we were busy doing. It felt comfortable and informal, but at the same time safe and containing. At one time the majority of art therapists worked in similar spaces to this. Over time, however, such spaces have become increasingly rare.

Biography: David Edwards qualified as an art therapist in 1982, having trained at Goldsmiths College, University of London. In addition to being employed by the University of Sheffield Counselling Service, David works privately as a clinical supervisor. He is also an Associate Lecturer with the Northern Programme for Art Psychotherapy in Sheffield. A former member of the Editorial Board of the International Journal of Art Therapy, David has lectured and published widely on art therapy and related topics. His book *Art Therapy* was published by Sage in 2004.

References

- Edwards, D. (1986) Surviving the Institution. *Inscape*, Summer: 3-11.