

Editorial: *an opening*

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I am writing this on the country of the Wangal people of the Eora Nation, land that has never been ceded, and wish to offer respects to elders past and present.

Abstract

There is nothing particularly ‘abstract’ about dying. As I write this, the number of recorded deaths worldwide from Covid-19 has reached 1,355,963; the number of confirmed cases is 56,623,643 (WHO, 2020). I hear too of the loss of a singular life, the first identified First Nations art therapist to graduate from an Australian masters program, Murri woman¹ Carmen Lawson, whose family have granted permission though her dear friend Professor Tarquam McKenna to write her name. And I think of the very talented and dedicated Dr Kim Dunphy, leader of the Creative Arts Therapy Masters Program at Melbourne University, who in September of this year wrote that the time had come for her to step back from long-term work commitments – a farewell of such discretion and grace that it was only after catching my breath I realised Kim might be telling us of her imminent departure from this world.

Introduction

Dear Reader

It is with great pleasure that I introduce to you the inaugural issue of the *Journal of Creative Arts Therapies (JoCAT)*, formerly known as *ANZJAT*. According to the *ANZJAT* style template, which I am obediently typing into at the present moment, “The Introduction is a standard element” (*ANZJAT*, 2019), but there is nothing ‘standard’ about our current situation in the midst of a pandemic, the effects of which are at once unprecedented in scale and reach, yet inequitably cruel in their impact on people and places already subjected to marginalisation, poverty, colonialism and other violence.

Racism is virulent and Covid not the only killer. Masked and unmasked tyrants dominate seats of power. Atmospheric and political climates change rapidly; disasters – natural and unnatural – crush, kill

and maim. Democracies (compromised and fragile, yet precious), social contracts and the fourth estate are undermined. There are revelations of systemic abuses; parliamentary walkouts; protests in the streets; a swelling of hope; the Mattering of Black Lives everywhere. The daily experiences of creative arts therapists and those who meet with them in virtual and material spaces are steeped in this, and so too in subtle and obvious ways are the pages of our journal.

This Introduction and indeed the entire tenor of the journal *could* I suppose be described as “left-justified”, and if a “single-spaced line is [to be] placed before a new element or sub-element” (*ANZJAT*, 2019), then clearly I must resort to poetry at once. Found or made in response to each author’s text, this series of haiku honours the diverse and often surprising contributions that are our first *JoCAT*.

Images

these familiars –
tea, coffee, ink – sustain him
through isolation

suddenly locked down
she draws solace from a cup
and feeds newborn life

cherry blossom time
nagomi means harmony (和)
soft pastel shades us

stillness and movement
a painterly abstraction
created by light

gentle she is named
and gentle is the art of
participation

do not atomise
restorative art practice
find community

these highlands bring hope
each one and every *thing*
is resilient

offering us a
heterogenous reading of
lived experience

tentacles of flame
giants throw boulders across seas
people are dying

envelop(e) or cross
stitched-up deep wound burning red
bedevilled edges

contemplate tensions –
when is personal practice
appropriation?

think outside the box
("we adjust" or "we are just"?)
light finds a way in

holding 'change' lightly
in the therapeutic space
we fight for justice

Yimba! Danali! 2
David Dungay. Say his name.
432 and more.

we walk in shadow
proximity to wildness
sunlight breaking through

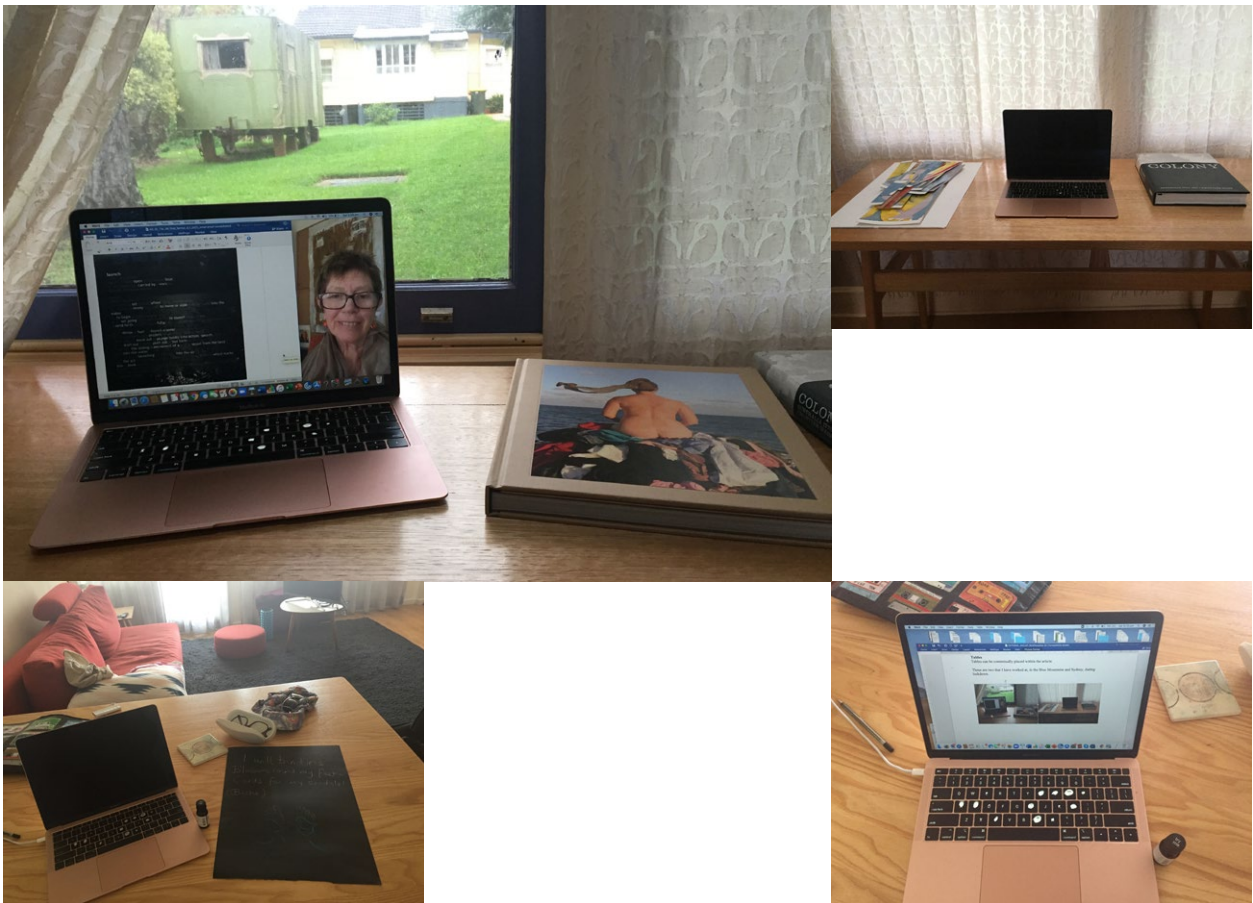


Figure 1. Sheridan Linnell, *Tables 1 & 2*, 2020, digital photographs.

Tables

"Tables can be contextually placed within the article"
(ANZJAT, 2019).

These are two tables, one made of Tasmanian oak
and the other of ash, where I have worked in the Blue

Mountains and Sydney, Australia, during lockdown
and its tentative lifting. Perhaps what is most telling
is the vigour with which I habitually attack the
keyboard – how some 'key' symbols crack, blur and
glow – but, after all, I did promise to 'have a bash'

at the Editorial this weekend. Or is it the stagey book covers and titles,³ or the faint transcription of a haiku by Basho and barely visible rapid sketch of my own bare feet, or the view through the window, or glare blocked by opaque drapes. The test sample of essential oil of lavender labelled ‘Try Me’, that my local pharmacist sold me half-price because so many people wanted to buy peace that she could not source any more, might be read as a provocation. So might the collage pieces lying on the table from the work of another artist in my family, with/holding the hint that I too might somehow find time for making. And then, the inevitability of how, through images and writing, we cannot help but give ourselves away...

Conclusion

“The Conclusion is another standard element” (ANZJAT, 2019).

Contemplating how things come to a conclusion and yet continue to resonate reminds me of the words of Carmen Lawson in conversation with Tarquam McKenna. Lawson speaks of her work over many years with a young Australian Aboriginal man:

I believe that art therapy with Evan serves to demonstrate he has used art to sense and know the world both in the old ways and now in ‘modern’ ways; that our people’s art is able to bring us to our centre but also serves to open us to understanding of our marginalisation as a given. (McKenna, 2013, p.18)

Elsewhere Lawson touches, as does her passing, on the powerful intertwining of past, present and future, life and death, love and loss. She tells how each person is so much more than an individual, connected with community and country.

Indigenous science collapses both time and space with the result that our fields of enquiry and participation extend into and overlap with the past and present. To me this is the idea that the story is directed by a series of relationships rather than a set order... when we tell stories we are transcending time and space. (Lawson, Woods & McKenna, 2019, p.98)

For Lawson, a deep capacity for self-knowledge and reflection that is not generally valued in White knowledge systems typifies both the arts therapies and Indigenous ways of knowing:

These art therapy sessions were strong in affect for me too... I recognised that I too was

certainly working through my own experience of grief and loss... I too am reminded that life experiences, particularly those that involve an intimate encounter with death, may shape an individual’s unique beliefs about death... (McKenna, 2013, p.24)

And then she reminds us,

... spiritual, psychological and emotional well-being comes through art and art therapy – what more can you need in life? (McKenna, 2013, p.25)

There is not this separateness... (Lawson, Woods, & McKenna, 2019, p.98)

Endnotes

1. This is how Carmen Lawson chose to identify herself in publications including McKenna (2013) and Lawson, Woods, & McKenna (2019). Murri is a term for First Nations people from Queensland and Northern New South Wales, Australia.
2. Listen! Stand Up!
3. *Katthy Cavaliere* (Mudie Cunningham, 2015) was published in association with the exhibition *Katthy Cavaliere: Loved* at the Museum of Old and New Art in Berriedale, Tasmania and Carriageworks, Sydney. The late artist embraced a mistake on her birth certificate, spelling her given name with a double ‘t’. *Colony* (Leahy & Ryan, 2015) is the catalogue for the major exhibition of the same name at the National Gallery of Victoria.

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The editorial team wishes to thank all the peer reviewers who have generously contributed their time and expertise to this edition of *JoCAT*. Accepted submissions are reviewed by people well-versed and respected in the subject or methodology of the submission. Articles 6, 8, 9, 12, 13, 15 and 16, and creative contributions 7 and 10, were double anonymously peer-reviewed.

Volume 15, Number 1, 2020

Published by The Journal of Creative Arts Therapies

Online and open access at <https://www.jocat-online.org/vol15no1page>

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ISSN: 2652-9459

Design and production Vic Segedin

JoCAT is produced by the School of Social Sciences, Western Sydney University on behalf of the Australian, New Zealand and Asian Creative Arts Therapy Association.

