

Editorial: *What is this thing we do?*

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We write this on Kabi Kabi country in Australia, land that has never been ceded, and Ōtautahi Christchurch in Aotearoa New Zealand. We wish to offer respect to elders past, present and emerging, and to acknowledge the mana and rangatiratanga of Ngāi Tahu.

Working from different countries, New Zealand and Australia, we begin this editorial by way of some email conversations. Floating ideas and impressions back and forth across the Tasman, a way into co-creating this edition's editorial slowly opens before us.

Deborah: Many of us working as creative arts therapists in Australia, Asia and Aotearoa have spent yet another year watching from within lockdown as the rough nails of Covid-19, climate change and conflict have pried up the corners of our worlds. I carry the disconnect, the uncertainty, and the anxiety bred from this into a ramshackle forage and fossick through the works to be published in this edition of *JoCAT* – the second in 2021. I've been trying to get a feel for what seems quite elusive within this collection of articles, creatives and reviews... and I'm wondering if my muddle-headedness is a symptom of the pervasive exhaustion that seems to be infusing us all. Stacey and I confer...

Stacey: I admit I am still bubbling here, moving slowly, trying to find a way to crystallise what I am thinking/feeling about the bigger/broader themes that seem to be calling. Deb, you seem to be doing the

same... this is taking a bit of processing. It has been a long year, indeed a long two years, in which we have all had to adapt to new ways of being with each other. It strikes me that it is precisely the *how* of being with each other and being with ourselves on which the works contributed for this edition are focused. And, in each contribution, the arts are foregrounded as playing a central role in this *how*.

Deborah: I, too, am noticing a whispering thread lacing through the works... As you've observed, Stacey, there is a writing and creating into the central role of the arts in 'the *how* of being with each other and being with ourselves'. All of the scholartists (Cahnmann-Taylor, 2017) contemplate this *how* from within various distinct but overlapping locations. Wong leans inquisitively into Heidegger's Dasein or "being-in-the-world"¹ which resonates with Tapper's "worlding"² and Lay, Baraba and Khoo's "inter-being". Khoo engages authentically and reflexively with herself using response art, while Jewell and Camden-Pratt's PATH-creating "practice of freedom" requires active allies...

1. *Being-in-the-world / Dasein* "means people exist in a context that is an 'indissoluble unity between the person and the world' (Koch, 1995, p.831), which implies there is 'an inseparable connection between mind and body, lived experience, historical or social context' (Standing, 2009, p.20)" (Wong, 2021).

2. *Worlding* can be defined as an embedded and enacted process, a way of being in the world, consisting of an individual's whole-person act of attending to the world. New materialists Palmer and Hunter (2018) write that "worlding, is the setting up of the world. Worlding is a particular blending of the material and the semiotic that removes the boundaries between subject and environment.... Worlding affords the opportunity for the cessation of habitual temporalities and modes of being" (para.2).

Stacey: And connected to the *how* of being is the *how* of knowing. The work that this edition has attracted shares a foregrounding of the powerful role the arts holds as a means to express, explore and reflect on our living experiencing as therapeutic arts practitioners toward new knowing. Highlighted is the value of staying with the practice of reflective reflexive exploration using the arts, to both maintain our own well-being within, and support the development of our practice as creative arts therapists, peer workers and researchers. Commitment to reflective reflexive creative exploration is a process that ongoingly works to clarify what is meaningful towards knowledge co-creation. By making visible and valuing the emergent process of creative exploration and inquiry, alongside theory and findings, the relational nature of engagements with art materials, artworks, others, the world is made explicit – process becomes content. The relational being in living experiencing with others is a space of becoming together, a space where binaries can be disrupted. Within these spaces the arts provide a means to gain understanding, an approach to knowledge formation/co-creation as we interrogate ‘this thing we do’.

‘This thing we do’ is explored in many ways throughout the contributions to this edition, highlighting ‘the how of being with each other and ourselves’. We continue floating ideas and impressions back and forth across the Tasman, to offer a taste of each of the articles.

Deborah: I’m drawn to **Jewell and Camden-Pratt’s** call to join in critically questioning the discourses that shape arts therapy and arts therapy education. They call for these to be a “‘practice of freedom’ (hooks, 1994, p.21)” that “cannot and should not be done alone. It requires active allies” to support “stepping forward” and locating peer art therapists as essential within the art therapy profession.

Stacey: Yes, and in this Jewell and Camden-Pratt provide a much-needed background on the uprising of peer art therapy work. They advocate for therapist Lived Experience, “I have lived this”, as a key and valued resource for peer art therapists, where ongoing rigorous and well-supported personal reflection and reflexivity is a core requirement. Transparency, open disclosure, and active demonstration of well-being strategies and survival are vital. They advocate for a profession where open disclosure of Lived Experience and diagnoses is actively valued and no longer marginalised.

Stacey: **Wong** speaks to “active being” in mutual processes of interaction within a therapeutic relationship by way of reflexive exploration of her practice. She explores the mutual co-constructed intersubjective process within relational intersubjective spaces between herself as therapist and a young client. Within these spaces the arts facilitate connection towards deeper, more nuanced understandings.

Deborah: When I return to the metaphor I’ve borrowed from Jewell and Camden-Pratt, I experience Wong’s phenomenological “stepping forward” as she tracks her engagement with a traumatised child, where she maps how the therapist and client mutually influence “one another from moment to moment”. This form of relational and interconnected ‘inter-being’ calls for the therapist to be internally and externally active in their interactions.

Stacey: **Tapper** explores what happens at the “confluence of arts and self”. She highlights the generative and emergent nature of the arts as she explores ways to invite relationality, open towards otherness, and reconsider how we know. She asks: How do we do arts based reflexivity, arts-based research? This is answered by way of bringing us into her process of creating and actively engaging with a series of paintings. Tapper paints herself into knowing as she refreshingly asserts that “we are the living data.”

Deborah: For me, Tapper does not so much ‘step forward’ as dance forward, charting “a series of unexpected arrivals: an uninvited guest, a soul-filled sky, and universes beneath my toes”, which allow for her “relational re-enworlding through *poiesis*.” She shifts our curiosity and attention to “the edge, the unknown, the unfolding through the arts within research which may offer tangible *sympoietic* experiences: of relationality, interconnection and entanglement”.

Stacey: **Khoo** writes of response art as an outlet to express and contain her lockdown experiencing of disconnection, isolation and stress. She demonstrates how using arts to respond to living experiencing can support self-care and reflection, and be a tool for practice.

Deborah: ‘Stepping forward’ for Khoo happens through proactive use of response art within a lockdown experience that evoked anxiety, uncertainty

and loneliness. She maps a process in which response art-making became “an outlet to express challenges, vulnerabilities and resistance”, opening a process that she suggests “increases the ability to form an authentic and therapeutic relationship with self and others”.

Stacey: Lay, Baraba and Khoo speak of the centrality of art as process and container of individual expression. They present experiences of creating *Inter-being*, a final-year exhibition of student-therapist work. The students’ work explores identity as a therapist and art as reflective practice



Deborah: ‘This thing we do’... I take this phrase and wander the streets and hills of Lyttelton in search of inspiration. I photograph and then digitally play with several images of tenacious plants (some would call them weeds) pushing through the resistive surfaces of tar and concrete. I’m struck by the ways these talk to me of how dogged we’ve all been to keep practising, to keep teaching and learning, to keep creating and growing, to keep worlding and re-worlding in the face of the challenges posed throughout 2020 and 2021. *Stacey:* Deb, I am intrigued by this metaphor of tenacity and doggedly staying with – I, too, take it for a walk along the headland at Yaroomba. What I am

that supports regulation, self-care, expression and interconnectedness.

Deborah: Yes, Lay, Baraba and Khoo ‘step forward’ through their group exhibition, *Inter-being*, to affirm the art in art therapy. They write into and acknowledge the collective growth and connectedness contributing to their “unique identity as art therapists who use creative and expressive means as part of [their] professional discipline”.

And now we step back and respond creatively to the experience of engaging with these works.



Left: Figure 1. Deborah Green, *I am still here*, 2021, digitally altered photograph.

Above: Figure 2. Deborah Green, *Stepping forward*, 2021, digitally altered photograph.

drawn to is tenacity in the face of powerful nature. I notice and photograph trees growing out of crevices in the side of a cliff, others standing proud exposed to the power of the sea and the salt-laden wind.

These examples of tenacious nature whisper to me something about the importance of finding balance, about an imbalance that has come about through a lack of connected relationship with the natural world, where tar and concrete reign. I think of worldviews that value connected, respectful and care-full relationship with the natural world and say, yes! Tenacity and adaptability in the face of challenges, standing in and drawing on our own strengths and meeting perceived weaknesses, in service of staying with the being with self and others – arts-based reflective exploration supports just this.



Left: Figure 3. Stacey Bush, *Tenacious staying*, 2021, Digitally altered photograph.

Below: Figure 4. Stacey Bush, *Growing still*, 2021, Digitally altered photograph.

Deborah: In response to our shared creative meanderings, I return to the articles and creatives, and bring with me these images of vulnerable shoots of organic growth finding nooks and crannies and cracks both as ways to push through and as ways to cling onto hard surfaces. I lean into the felt-sense evoked of juxtaposition and disruption alongside celebration of tenacity and stick-to-it-iveness. This leads me to begin creating a found-word poem using words and phrases snipped from this edition's array of articles and creatives. I offer this to Stacey, who steps in to complete it...

*From co-locations and intersections
of the arts and selves as therapists/ researchers/ artists/ clients/ students,
we are charting terrain
where extensive creative engagement
foregrounds the power of the arts to disrupt assumptions.*

*We ask: How do we embrace ourselves
when we acknowledge that
our 'existence is not an individual affair',
that we 'emerge through and as part of [our] entangled intra-relating'?³*

*There are multiple subjectivities alive
and we are located differently
yet held with grounded respect
providing a safe place
for political acts that signal expertise
and step forward into:*

*Lived Experience, saying, 'we are here' (thank you, Grandmother Tree),⁴
affirming the significance of actively engaging in one's own art and art making,⁵
the value of access to creativity for all,⁶
therapeutic arts providing a space for empowerment through the expression of stories,⁷
embracing the poetic agency of the arts and their relationship to self,⁸
reflexive and critical self-reflection of direct practice,⁹
proactive and responsive creative connections with self,¹⁰
carefully entering the land of remembering,¹¹
past experiences and understanding the role they play,¹²
marvelling that we are able to come together despite vast differences,¹³
going beyond borders of the norm, further afield from the benign, to see the situation anew,¹⁴
recognising that life happens and we must thus practice gently,¹⁵
celebrating the magic that happens in the complexity of marrying worlds¹⁶*

...

*We stop and linger in our creative meanderings, within processes that sometimes feel, as Morton (2021)
poetically describes, like an "in-between" world or "other land", something spiritual and beyond the scope of
everyday experience.*

*And finally, having offered some charting of this terrain where extensive creative engagement foregrounds the
power of the arts, we will step aside, and invite you to step forward.*

3. Barad, 2007, p.ix

4. Jewell & Camden-Pratt, 2021

5. Lay, Baraba, & Khoo, 2021

6. Segedin, 2021

7. Iyengar, 2021

8. Tapper, 2021

9. Wong, 2021

10. Khoo, 2021

11. Pursell, 2021

12. O'Connor, 2021

13. Morton, 2021

14. Han, 2021

15. Koh, 2021

16. Bosgra, 2021



Left: Figure 5. Deborah Green, *Now I step forward*, 2021, digitally altered photograph.

Below: Figure 6. Stacey Bush, *Staying I am*, 2021, digital photograph.

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Peer review

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 5, 7, 9 and 11 were double anonymously peer-reviewed.

Volume 16, Number 2, 2021

Published by *The Journal of Creative Arts Therapies*

Online and open access at <https://www.jocat-online.org/vol16no2page>

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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.

