

## Editorial: Diversity and the everyday – a widening view

Sheridan Linnell

This may offer inspiration to those who wonder how the emergent scholarship of the creative arts therapies represented by *JoCAT* can ever have sufficient influence: the term ‘neurodiversity’ was invented by Australian sociologist Judy Singer in her undergraduate honours thesis, published by the University of Technology (UTS) Sydney in 1998.[1]

In the latest issue of our journal, Freya Pinney takes up the challenge of the ‘double empathy problem’ and other oppressive, ableist paradigms that dominate the landscape of psychological and psychotherapeutic practice with neurodiverse people. Pinney shows us that her so-called bias as a neurodiverse creative arts therapist is precisely what allows her to so sensitively companion arts therapy participants living with autism.

Damian Milton offers a relevant definition,

The ‘double empathy problem’: A disjuncture in reciprocity between two differently disposed social actors which becomes more marked the wider the disjuncture in dispositional perceptions of the lifeworld – perceived as a breach in the ‘natural attitude’ of what constitutes ‘social reality’ for ‘neuro-typical’ people and yet an everyday and often traumatic experience for ‘autistic people’ (Author’s concept and definition). (Milton, 2012, p.884)

Milton’s point is that neurotypical people and theories frequently label neurodiverse people, especially those living with autism, as lacking empathy and a theory of mind, when in fact it is these neurotypical people and ableist theories that lack empathy and understanding for the life experiences and world views of neurodiverse people (Milton, 2012). Empathy is not only a ‘two-way street’ – for neurotypical folk, some streets where neurodiverse people live are not even on the normative map. Like Milton, Pinney challenges the view that people living with autism lack the capacity to empathise with others. Instead, it is that neurotypical folk mostly lack the imagination and humility to appreciate that what they see, experience and practice as ‘empathy’ might be experienced by neurodiverse people as dissonant and invasive.

Cut on the bias and swirling with creativity, Pinney’s article invites readers to witness something *magical*, something *overwhelming* and something *energetic* (Pinney, 2022 [2]) – diffracting the creative arts therapies into a wider spectrum of possibilities.

Sometimes our lives invite an insider/outsider relationship to experiences that disrupt the normative order and open our minds and other senses to marginalisation and difference. As an experienced educator, therapist and researcher who is also the parent of a child with dysgraphia (a term encompassing severe and persistent writing difficulties), Elvira Kalenjuk calls her son her greatest teacher.

Making art for the autoethnographic prelude to her PhD thesis reminds Kalenjuk how writing – a site of anguish for those living with dysgraphia including her son – is nevertheless central to her own sense of self:

*My stained fingertips have left fingerprint markings on the parchment and these inky blotches have seeped into the pages underneath. The stained ink presents as a metaphor for my love of writing, seeded in early childhood and growing deeper into my late adult years. My unique fingerprint markings remind me that writing itself is part of my identity.*

Through a bricolage of emergent and reflexive writing and making, Kalenjuk raises key ethical dilemmas for able-bodied creative arts therapists who are committed to practising and researching with communities of differently-abled people in ways that amplify their voices rather than speaking ‘for’ them. This act of writing an autoethnography in the first person with co-authors reminds us that every ‘I’ is a complex intersection of cultures, places, institutions, identities, and relationships.

Perhaps it is apt to punctuate the editorial at this point with an image from Heather Easton’s podcast interview with Chris Smith – an artwork that may serve as a *CAT’s Own Guide* to the shared reading of complex texts, including the current issue of *JoCAT*:



Heather Easton, *Turn Over*, 2022, mixed media.

Christopher Hinkel reminds us that we dialogue as much with our artwork and performance as we do with our human counterparts; and that we connect through felt sense with the diversity and otherness within as well as beyond ourselves. The participant in Hinkel’s study befriends *herself* for a significant moment, through drawing. For Li June Han, too, drawing allows her to navigate a visceral experience of chaos until the torrents subside into peace. Ursula Schorn, in an article translated from the German, also finds intelligence in the body. This ‘moving’ and deeply philosophical approach is further elucidated through a podcast interview with Amanda Levey, who, like Schorn, trained with Anna Halprin, before taking up practice on the other side of the globe.

Melinda Jane unfolds a pulsating exchange between memory, and being in the present, through an iterative, arts-informed enquiry into place and belonging. For those who experience homelessness, the arts may *be* their belonging place; performances of marginalisation and displacement may be so powerful, as Adrian Jackson tells Amelia Yiakmis, that they shake audiences out of any possible complacency.

Ying Wang reaches out with humility across cultures, to learn from the wisdom of the Māori kaitiaki (guardians) of a place that she now calls home.

Returning to exhibit at the Pah Homestead, Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland, the artists of Māpura Studios embody such wisdom in their latest show, the modestly named, ‘Just my Imagination’.

The creative arts therapies burn brightly in these accounts. Yet we are reminded that those who care most diligently for others can be at risk of ‘burning out’. Leticia Martin, Amy Burton, Jane O’Sullivan and Katherine Winslow demonstrate how a strategic and skilful use of validated scales evidences the potential effectiveness [3] of an art therapy intervention to moderate the effects of burnout among childcare workers.

Elsewhere in this *JoCAT*, Sophia Sabbagh contains a literal and emotional flood, expanding her window of tolerance through comic as inquiry. In *Ukraine Heartbeat*, Anita Lever, Mandy Evans and Genevieve Jobs respond through exquisite and poignant image and sound to unthinkable devastation.

A recent book edited by Joseph Scarce (reviewed by Özlem Güler) also offers insights into how arts therapists are responding to the onslaught of climate crises, disasters, political violence and pandemics, while a volume edited by Helen Kara and Su-ming Khoo (reviewed by Amanda Woodford) curates methodological suggestions for ethically researching these challenges.

Amidst all this, Bettina Evans is set at ease under an old cypress tree by internationally renowned writer and Cambridge Fellow, Robert MacFarlane, whose books take readers to the outer and inner wild places and mountainous territories that can still animate Western thought.

For MacFarlane the fetch of an idea is akin to the fetch of a wave, stretching so far that its origins may be invisible and almost unimaginable (MacFarlane, 2008). At the end of the conversation with Evans, MacFarlane demonstrates this reach. Reading from his latest book, the author links the concerns of his writing to the ethos of the creative arts therapies. I’d like to end with his words:

*Communitas, conviviality, consolation... ‘weeping for feelings I cannot name’*

## Endnotes

[1] <https://www.autismawareness.com.au/aupdate/in-conversation-with-judy-singer>

[2] In this issue. <https://www.jocat-online.org/a-22-pinney>

[3] ‘Effectiveness’ is measured under naturalistic, ‘real-world’ and/or quasi-experimental conditions, and hence the majority of quantitative and mixed method evidence produced in small studies by practitioner-researchers falls into this category, including what has been published in this research tradition in *JoCAT* and previously *ANZJAT*. ‘Efficacy’ is more stringently measured under replicable circumstances according to experimental scientific method with a minimum number of participants, clear exclusion criteria and limited variables, in randomised, controlled trials (RCTs). The Australian, New Zealand and Asian Creative Arts Therapy Association (ANZACATA) has recently published a research report on efficacy in the Creative Arts Therapies (Gray, 2022) that is free to members or can be purchased from the Association <https://anzacata.org/Sys/Store/Products/307766>

## References

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Sheridan is Associate Professor of Art Therapy in the School of Social Sciences at Western Sydney University, where she is also Discipline Lead for Arts Therapy and Counselling, and teaches in the Master of Art Therapy program. She is interested in arts-informed, narrative and new-materialist approaches with the potential to decolonise teaching, research and clinical practice. She works with others to question and reshape professional and therapeutic discourse, counter marginalisation and move beyond individualistic accounts of well-being. Sheridan has more than 30 years of field experience working therapeutically with the effects of violence, abuse and neglect on individuals and families, supervising and training other therapists and formulating new approaches to this area of work. She trained in psychodrama as well as narrative therapy and art therapy, is a practising poet, and occasionally participates in collaborative art exhibitions and performances.



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