

Editorial – Playing string figures and CAT's cradles: An edition of embodied entanglements

Deborah Green

String figure games are practices of scholarship, relaying, thinking with, becoming with in material-semiotic makings... cat's cradle is a game of relaying patterns, of one hand, or pair of hands, or mouths and feet, or other sorts of tentacular things, holding still to receive something from another, and then relaying by adding something new, by proposing another knot, another web. Or better, it is not the hands that give and receive exactly, but the patterns, the patterning. Cat's cradle, string figures... can be played by many, on all sorts of limbs, as long as the rhythm of accepting and giving is sustained. Scholarship is like that too; it is passing on in twists and skeins that require passion and action, holding still and moving, anchoring and launching. (Haraway, 2011, p.15)

I've always been partial to a juicy metaphor – one that, when approached using James Hillman's (1983) invitation to let it run around on its own legs, can take us new places. Donna Haraway's (2011, 2016) string figures is just such a metaphor. Strung and gently knotted together in this edition are many creative contributions that resonate with Haraway's (2011) entanglement of string figures and scholarship. Like the cat's cradles described above, these research articles, professional practice pieces, creative works, podcasts and book reviews twist and tangle with and through each other in intricate patternings that reflect the sustained accepting and giving that characterise our profession of creative arts therapy (CAT). Haraway (2011, 2016) uses string figures (SF) as a powerful vehicle for re-imagining worlds, introducing several nested and entangled SF practices that employ creative thinking with/through science fiction, speculative fabulation, speculative feminism, science fact, so far... (Haraway, 2016). She approaches these as all carrying 'response-ability' in their mutual creations, representing the combination of various "methods of thinking thoughts and telling stories together in ways that emphasize a shared nature of giving and receiving, of participation, of crafting, tracing and following" (Museum Fatigue, 2020, para.1). (The modernist composer, John Cage [1957, p.10], referred to the word 'responsibility' as "response ability", shifting the emphasis from an ethics of accountability to an "aesthetics of engagement".)

Akin to our embrace of the creative arts within therapy, Haraway's (2011, 2016) playing string figures within these notions is not mere artifice. Rather, she attempts to "outline a practice for generating imaginative patterns of thinking and ultimately being that may lead to ways of 'staying with the trouble' of our present" (Museum Fatigue, 2020, para.3). These processes – like our various sympoietic CAT practices – embody ways of connecting and creating kinship between the human, the other-than-human, and the more-than-human – relational inter- and intra-actions which sometimes work and sometimes fail, are sometimes active and sometimes still. Haraway's

(2016) sympoiesis, meaning ‘making with’, used within our CAT context, acknowledges the intricate tentacular imbrication of “I-make-the-art-and-the-art-makes-me” (Green, 2021, p.20).

Our attention to crafting CAT practices that are world-worthy yet also reach beyond mere representation and re-enactment of present troubles is exemplified in this edition. Like Haraway’s (2011, 2016) string figures, each published piece suggests “a method for working together, collaborating and recognizing the power of fabulating and fabricating – thinking and making – together to live in the trouble, the way things are” (Museum Fatigue, 2020, para.3) while also inviting “knowledge-making and world-making” (Haraway, 2011, p.2). And knowledge-making and world-making encapsulate our foundational intentions as scholartists, as CATs and as editors of this journal. Haraway (2016) could be describing our CAT practices as they are featured in this edition when she writes that these “inform a craft that for me is relentlessly replete with organic and inorganic critters and stories, in their thick material and narrative tissues” (p.2). Our sympoietic CAT’s cradles are “patterings, risky co-makings, speculative fabulations”, because “thinking or making cat’s cradle with string figures... is not an innocent universal gesture, but a risky proposition in relentless historical relational contingency” (Haraway, 2011, p.15).

Within these risky co-makings during troubled times, our CAT work involves “passing patterns back and forth, giving and receiving, patterning, holding the unasked-for pattern in one’s hands, response-ability” (Haraway, 2011, p.5). And this reciprocal sympoiesis transpires not only between therapist and client, but between the authors and editors and reader-viewers of this journal. This points to the ways that how we do and how we ground what we do – with each other, with our words and worldings, with materials and matter – matters. Drawing on the ideas of social anthropologist Marilyn Strathern, Haraway (2011) states:

It matters what matters we use to think other matters with; it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with; it matters what knots knot knots, what thoughts think thoughts, what ties tie ties. It matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories. (p.4)

We cannot therefore denounce this world in favour of an ideal world – and this edition is full of thickly described approaches taken by CATs as they strive to stay with the trouble of this world while birthing new worlds, grounded in the knowing that our decisions in sessions take place in the presence of those who will bear their consequences (Haraway, 2011).

Held within the tentacularity and provocation of this CAT’s cradle metaphor, I now trapeze towards the rich collection published in this edition. My one set of hands cannot adequately play string figures with so many richly woven threads, so I simply offer a way in, the first of a giving and receiving invitation.

I begin by tweaking the newly forged mycelial threads connecting Caryn Griffin and Daniel Wong into our editorial entanglements. While further details appear in the Editors’ section, here I ask them to lean into the string figure metaphor with me and introduce themselves with line drawings and trceries of poetic words. They respond, Sheridan joins in, and a playful zipline of words and wonderings creates new patterns of giving and receiving between us.

Welcome to new Co-Editor Caryn Griffin as she haikus and line-draws herself into our tangles

The line twists turns loops
Passing byline of my mind
Stretching drifting off

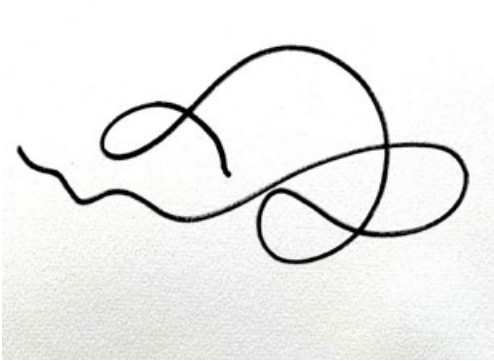


Figure 1. Caryn Griffin, *Looping turns of Caryn*, 2023 line drawing.

And welcome to new Co-Editor Daniel Wong as he haikus and line-dances himself into our tangles

on toes it may be
bodies entangled and soar
sweep away in thrall

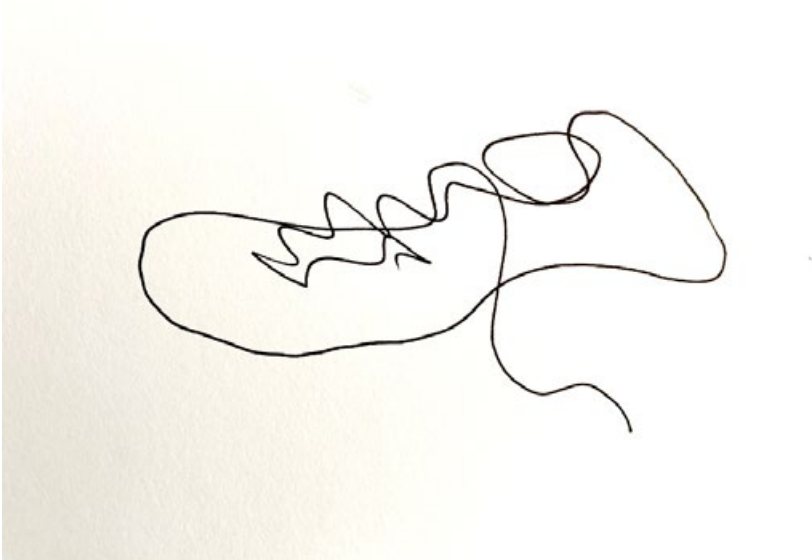


Figure 2. Daniel Wong, *Soaring Daniel*, 2023, line drawing.

When I share the draft comings-into-being of this editorial, we enter into call-and-response cycles and are thereby tumbled into experiencing the rhizomatic tendencies of the string-figuring process. Daniel responds and Sheridan playfully expands Daniel's response and then casts her net wider to loop in a video created by Caryn (Melbourne Centre for Women's Mental Health, 2020), knotting an extra skein or two into our emerging CAT's cradle.

Daniel, with light tinkerings from Sheridan

I am intrigued by the actions of Deborah drawing together with Donna Haraway in creating this cradle –

holding still to receive something from another

relaying by adding something new

passing on in twists and skeins that require passion and action.

I love how Caryn's lines twist, stretch, and drift off, suggesting a sense of movement and fluidity. How I line-dance into the team, offering energy and, hopefully, a sense of rhythm and coordination. Your collage/imagery of looped yarns over outstretched fingers draws us closer to the circle and cradle. Celebrating the entanglement of string figures and scholarship in this edition of JoCAT, we invite readers to participate in CAT practice and scholarship's mutual creation, knowledge-making, world-making (or is it worlding?) and response-ability (Cage, 1957).

Sheridan musing on Caryn's video (Melbourne Centre for Women's Mental Health, 2020)

A tension between line and flow, microcosm and macrocosm, intention and accident...

trace upended bowl

entangled leaves and colour

worlding onto white

Holding my fingers aloft with multiple looping threads, feeling the tension of line and flow as Sheridan and Daniel and Caryn's fingers enter the play alongside mine, I now turn and tug gently on the skeins that weave each contribution into this edition, seeing which keywords tipple down the line to me. I lace these together into a CAT's cradle of poetic patternings.

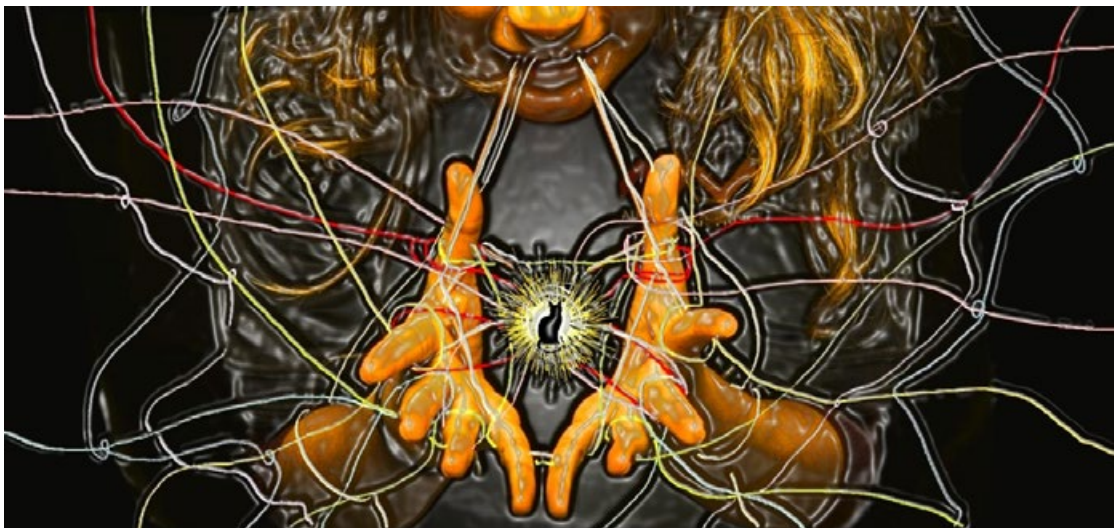


Figure 3. Deborah Green, *Cradling CATs in this editorial entanglement*, 2023, digitally altered collage.

A walk of im/possible snails: A tender tracing of a mother/child 'us' by Ariel Moy (plus podcast)

Expanding to more-than-human
Through
Im/possible snail tracings
Intersubjective
Relational co-creations
Of mother's holding children
Form mother/child/more-than 'us'

Intra-active identity stories: How a storm, pine-needle basket, waterfall, and satellite entangle and trouble a creative arts therapist's ecological and professional identity by Naomi Pears-Scown (plus podcast)

Stories of a storm, a pine-needle basket, a waterfall, and a satellite
Entangle with
Intra-active ecological and professional identities
Forming new materialist
Shifting notions of CAT

The pact of Zariel Deer and Tarak Hawk: A youth Zoom group journey by Marion Gordon-Flower

An ongoing, unfolding archetypal story
As glue holding
Transient youth
Together
Through Zoom
Inviting deep reflection on practice

Working with layers: A heuristic study utilising single-canvas art-making to illuminate personal responses of the therapist by Amanda Brown and Maggie Wilson

The impact of
Human(therapist)
Upon
Human(client)
Layering of images over previous images
Tensions, awarenesses and illuminations
Through single-canvas self-supervision

Drumming, rhythm and regulation through a polyvagal lens by Simon C. Faulkner

An offering of

Rhythmic music

And practical insights where there are few

Drumming, percussion, voice

Embody

Polyvagal theory and emotional regulation

Re-establishing healthy relationships

Untying knots of emotions with threads: A reflection on the curative powers of memorialisation with yarn by Li June Han

Haptic qualities –

Textiles, fabric, threads –

Harnessed for self-care

Creating a safe space

For curative memorialisation

For difficult emotions

For comfort

For self-empowerment

Sponge, ink, snow, and hand by Jo Davies

Moving together into the world

The art, materials, artist

Unfurling

Reflecting upon ephemera

Temporality

Entangled intra-activity

Nature-based art at Pablos Art Studio by Sarah Rossiter and Pablos artists (plus podcast)

A nature-based art group

Rugged beaches, native bush

Connecting people, places and emotions

Collating into a zine

A sense of pride and accomplishment

And

Community sharing

Mandala: Reflecting on my experience of the embodiment of Tibetan Buddhism in the moulding of mato (clay) with women in Nepal and Australia by Tricia Ong (plus podcast)

A pathway to enlightenment

Women in Nepal,

Women in Australia

Combining

Mato (clay)

Mandala

Tibetan Buddhism

To mould

Wisdom and compassion

And then there are book reviews

Joanna Jaaniste

Reviewed by Kirsten Meyer

Explores

Enabling developmental well-being

Using dramatherapy with elders and people with dementia

AND

Tricia Ong

Reviewed by Tania Blomfield

Explores sensitive research

Within a feminist approach using

the Clay Embodiment Research Method

Welcome into this string-figuring CAT's cradle of "scholarship, relaying, thinking with, becoming with in material-semiotic makings", of "holding still to receive something from another, and then relaying by adding something new, by proposing another knot, another web" through a sustained "rhythm of accepting and giving" of "passing on in twists and skeins that require passion and action, holding still and moving, anchoring and launching" (Haraway, 2011, p.15).

And so, we editors lift our hands, draw the circles of brightly coloured looped yarn of these many offerings over our outstretched fingers and invite your hands to join ours...

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About the author

Deborah Green

BA(Hons)(Drama), MEd, PGDip(Adult Ed), MAAT(Clin), PhD, AThR

Based in Ōtautahi Christchurch, Deborah is Programme Leader at Whitecliffe's School of Creative Arts Therapies. Following a career in the South African university and health sectors, she moved to Aotearoa New Zealand, gained her Master of Arts in Arts Therapy (Whitecliffe) and spent several years working with those affected by the Canterbury earthquakes (2010–11). She received her PhD from the University of Auckland for an autoethnographic arts-based thesis exploring this experience. She has published in books and journals, and presented at conferences in Aotearoa New Zealand, Australia, Singapore, Canada and the UK.



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