

ATOL: Art Therapy OnLine

Editorial

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Editorial

The last volume of this journal, Number 11, celebrated our achievement in publishing a peer reviewed, open access journal of consistent quality for 10 years. The task now is to maintain our publishing practices and, where we can, increase the importance of the dialogues that ATOL offers readers. More essentially we want to keep ATOL alive as that journal which provides papers, comment, reports and reviews devoted not only to the theory and practice of Art Therapy, but also the visual arts, cultural, social and political issues, as they relate to psychotherapeutic practices, 'free at the point of use', as is said of the NHS.

Here in the UK the NHS is, as might be expected, very much in the news, and the threat of the world-wide pandemic, as our readers will know, has affected all our practices, exposing inequalities, economic, political and social failures, which demand attention. This volume of the journal, produced under the shadow of our contemporary anxieties, addresses the imperative of the present situation. The contents of this issue reveal aspects of the current contexts in which art therapy practitioners, artists, trainers, students and researchers, are exploring experience, developing new practices and creating fresh understanding.

Papers

We have one reviewed paper in this journal by Jessica Small, which describes the impact of the pandemic on the delivery of art therapy in the school environment. The change to working through Zoom is carefully and sensitively presented and Jessica shows how the loss of the usual space and facility creates difficulties, for the child and the therapist, but this loss is shared in the therapeutic dyad, and a commitment to find solutions brings with it unforeseen significant gains and insights in terms of therapeutic movement. Jessica explores this changed and changing environment with an analytical presence of mind.

Open Dialogue: Covid 19 – Creativity or Collapse

The next section of the Journal presents the responses to our call for short pieces that would not be reviewed. We asked readers to provide pieces of around 1000 words to contribute to, and stimulate, an open dialogue in relation to the current global situation under the heading 'Creativity or Collapse'. We received thirteen submissions which are

full of visual interest. The pieces reflect the personal experiences and situated nature of the responses, but also the thinking that has been engendered through creative activity.

2020-21 has art therapists continuing to face professional challenges due to the global pandemic that are unprecedented in our known history. Both our professional and personal lives have been drastically altered. The parameters of normal appear to change month by month, rules of engagement have needed careful reconsideration and frameworks broken in order to stay safe. Providing appropriate services within these contexts has led many into alternative and creative approaches whilst acknowledging that Covid 19 has upended both clients' and therapists' way of life along with our professional ways of proceeding.

The conversations that follow in words and art make up responses to this situation. There are no absolute answers to either personal or professional lives, as we all continue to learn, adapt, and share. 'The right way to wholeness is made up of fateful detours and wrong turnings' (Jung, 1953). We share these musings in that context.

The first three pieces are focussed more directly on the tragedies and difficulties that impact directly on individuals. Jessica Hall's piece explores her responses to the suicide of a client just before lockdown. She naturally turns to art making to process this traumatic loss and finally finds some help in recovery from life drawing, which enables her to connect with her body but also to others via this group activity. Annamaria Cavaliero shows how her landscape drawing, in part through its repetitive aspect, helped in her recovery from Covid. Again the body is foregrounded but also, importantly, the discovery of agency in the midst of a debilitating illness. Jacqueline Pearce has described her response to her husband's delay in receiving cancer treatment, and the realisation that all could not be controlled in the given circumstances. A return to drawing as an activity provided Jacqueline with hope.

The following three papers could be described as more deliberately reflective, although the reflection remains personal and experience is processed through art making activity, thereby allowing the unexpected to emerge. David Edwards observes that people became creative in 'large numbers' in response to 'lockdown', and he provides us with material taken from his visual diary to show how he responded to the existential threat,

and shrinkage, of his inner and outer worlds. Arnell Etherington reflects on her work with children via Zoom and in school classroom bubbles. She records events other than Covid, that were shaping the world and she presents her collages of Autumn trees, which embody the natural continuity and 'steadying effect' of the seasons. In 'Nest Suspended' by Joanne Sullivan, the natural world is referenced via painting and poetry. Jo describes how the slow emergence of the image over time enabled her to navigate in 'unexplored emotional territory' and 'resolve inner conflict'.

Two submissions that perhaps are more directed towards the unconscious are presented next. Julie Green's 'Lament' addresses the Zoom environment where the loss and peculiarity of this communicative environment are imaginatively explored through poetry and referenced psychoanalytically and phenomenologically. Daria Klima uses photography and video to reconnect with her body and emotions, increasing her self-awareness and documenting shifting feelings.

Serena Martinez-Coleman et al describe and illustrate how relations to others, mediated through the shared language of art making, can provide support in a stressful political climate where loss and anxiety shapes the context. Aisling Fegan has made use of a group analytic large group to help keep her thinking alive and she has produced a small sculpture to show how conflicting feelings have become conscious to her.

The final three submissions focus on training. Ronald Lay outlines the problems faced by trainers in the context of the pandemic. He suggests that there are opportunities in the pandemic situation and through his own art making, which focuses on masks, he explores restrictions that impact on practices. Yap Rae Yi is a third-year student who finds herself conducting therapy and engaging with others via Zoom. She discusses her many roles and the effort needed to connect with herself to achieve 'congruence'. Jess Baum has just begun training and in her first year, her thinking is directed towards the future and future practices. Whilst it is 'exciting to be a pioneer' in this time of a pandemic, it is also 'incredibly hard'.

Reviews

We have four reviews in this issue of the journal. Christopher Brown reviews *Civilization and the Discontented: A Presentation by Christopher Bollas* who offers his thoughts

arising from previous political activity and the application of Object Relations as they relate to the current social and political context. Kevin Jones reviews *Making Sense* by Martin Stanton, a book that offers a radical account of the value of dreams, imagination and humour in psychoanalysis, philosophy and the therapeutic endeavour in the political present. Jussi A. Saarinen's book *Affect in Artistic Creativity – Painting to Feel* argues that painters paint in order to create feelings of a particular kind and because of this painting, the activity becomes existentially transformative. Robin Tipple provides a review of this book. Finally *Inventing Transgender Children & Young People* edited by Michele Moore and Heather Brunskell-Evans, is reviewed by Diana Velada. As Diana suggests, some books are 'troubling' but also 'convincing' in their argument. This book has been embroiled in controversy and there may be readers who would not want this book to be given any publicity. There was not a unanimous agreement in the editorial team to publish this review, but after a careful and difficult discussion, which explored issues of censorship and the freedom to publish, and a vote, we decided that it was important to publish. We invite, as always, any reader who wants to offer a different view to please submit it to us.

This edition, at this moment, has embraced the impact on our personal and professional practices of living in the midst of a pandemic. At publication we feel that we have, with our authors, collectively augmented our understanding of the contingencies of the new contexts. We want to continue to sustain our appreciation of informed writing that, it is hoped, will contribute to our readers' work and deliberations as artists and art therapists.