

# ATOL: Art Therapy OnLine

## Editorial

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What stands out in the articles in this issue, for us, is the depth of thinking. Thinking is sorely needed at a time when neo-liberalist agendas push the art therapy profession further and further into a realm which favours simplistic methods and narrow goals, where the subversive, anarchic aspects of art, and the freedom involved in bringing 'whatever' into open-ended therapeutic relationships, is seen as a luxury of the past, even perhaps, as transgressive.

There is a split between theory and practice involved here and we need to start thinking of theory making itself as a practice and to recognise that all that we say and do is inseparable from it, and is political. This understanding is behind the papers published in this issue.

There has been some discussion in the art therapy literature about the need to 'take a long look at art' Gilroy (2014 p1); some of the papers in this issue take this a step further and analyse and broaden the ways in which visual art gets discussed by art therapists.

In Robin Tipple's paper we follow a process of thinking that gradually builds. Starting with a closely observed description of his appreciation of two of Chardin's paintings, Tipple draws on Foucault and Butler to draw out the social and cultural power relations that are implicit in the works. Relations necessitate communication and Tipple, using Jakobson's communication diagram, which emphasises materiality, considers how communication is worked between the two figures in one of the paintings. This leads him onto thinking about the fragility of communication and how easily it can go wrong, which is the case with much communication between therapists and clients with learning difficulties. He explores the development, over time, of thinking about communication in art works with this client group, ending with Isserow's notion of communication and attunement that is achieved through shared involvement with art. Tipple points to a conflict of interest resulting from power differentials between therapist and client in this communication. Giving an example from therapy with one of the patients he worked with, he considers the importance of receptivity of feeling states by not only the therapist but by the community in which one lives. The argument built thus far prompts a re evaluation of what might be understood by 'self-expression', a key word in art therapy discourses. Tipple ends by returning to Chardin, seeing his paintings as representing both a still moment in

time and a living moment in which identities create themselves with emotional intensity within a social field.

With a similar interest in the social context of art to Tipple, Chris Brown explores how communication or meaning making happens in art, and uses his own films as the medium for the investigation. He is interested in the extent to which the artist's subjective experience, with its accompanying phantasies, communicates through the medium of film to the subjectivities of his audience. Brown explores the making of his films, their content and the viewing of them by others, by using Rose's (2001) three sites: production, the artwork and audiencing, which each include the technical, the compositional and the social. Having contextualised his questions within both a broad, and yet focussed, body of relevant literature, Brown ends his article by considering the frames in which he might place his films – are they part of an artist's body of work, an art therapist's art practice, or work that is made in response to the activities of his working life as an art therapist and art therapist educator? He concludes by saying that these divisions are no longer relevant to him, which suggests a dynamic, ever changing mode of art practice and of context, which accompanies the trajectories of life.

Whilst Tipple explores an engagement with viewing art shown in a public arena, and Brown his own art making, both with the intention of developing the sensitivities of our looking and thinking about our client work, Jon Martyn considers the public viewing of clients' work.

Martyn brings new thinking to the issues involved in exhibiting patients' art that is made in therapy. Most critics of this practice have based their views on the potential disruption to therapeutic boundaries that keep therapy safe and which allow for unconscious feelings to emerge. Advocates of the practice have pointed out the social and empowering benefits to the artists and the importance of raising awareness in the audience of the emotional burdens carried as a result of past and present traumas. Martyn discusses these for and against views and doesn't avoid the thorny issues that relate to money and patient consent within a culture of austerity and hostility. Martyn does not fall into one or other side of the debate but instead describes his own practice in the New Art Studio to which he brings a

psychodynamic frame to all the stages of the exhibiting experience, including back in the studio after the exhibition

Thus we have a process of looking and thinking about art that leads us to consider discourses on art in art therapy; we have a long look at meaning making in a personal art practice that sensitises us to our own looking at art in client work; and we have the issues involved in the movement of art works out of the therapy studio into exhibitions, but still remaining within the therapeutic frame. We have art from the past and the present, from traditional and contemporary mediums. These papers are innovative.

We are also very pleased to be able to have, in Icelandic, Unnur Ottarsdottir paper 'Processing Emotions. Memorising Coursework through Memory Drawing', which was published in English in the last issue, ATOL 9 (1) (2018). We want to encourage the translation of papers into other languages and would really appreciate any help with doing this from bilingual and multilingual speakers.

The exhibiting of patient artwork discussed in Martyn's paper is relevant to two reviews of exhibitions in this issue. Chris Brown's review of a thirty-year anniversary exhibition by Studio Upstairs – an organisation offering art therapy to people with mental health issues which also exhibits – picks up some of the complex issues that Martyn refers to in his article. Brown questions the thinking around the lack of anything written about the collective authorship; what has brought the artists together to make art in the studio. In a similar vein, Naomi Perry, in her review of an exhibition of objects made in response to the history of art therapy, comments on how the stories told by the artists about the objects on display, inspire reflections on her own life and mementos more so than do the objects themselves.

We are pleased to have four reviews of books, two about art therapy, one about creative therapies and one about psychoanalysis. Arnell Etherington reviews 'Art Therapy in Private Practice, Theory, Practice and Research in Changing Contexts' edited by James West; Ronald Lay, 'Forensic Arts Therapies: Anthology of Practice and Research' edited by Kate Rothwell; and Sally Goldstraw, 'Therapies for Complex Trauma, Helping children and families in foster care, kinship care or

adoption' edited by Anthea Hendry and Joy Hasler. All give comprehensive and clear accounts of the contents of the books. Kevin Jones reviews Patrick Casement's latest book 'Learning Along the Way', which like previous of Casement's books, promotes learning from the patient. Casement stresses the importance of the therapist putting themselves into the shoes of the patient as they listen to what the therapist says. Speaking of art therapy, Casement talks about the imperative of the therapist experiencing the patients' art rather than interpreting it. This has echoes to what has been said in the papers in this issue.

We are fortunate to have a good collection of reviews for this issue.

In October 2018 members of the Editorial Board, Chris Brown, Dean Reddick, Sally Skaife and Robin Tipple, ran a Writing Art Therapy Conference the purpose of which was to encourage new writers in art therapy. This was a further development of a previous workshop run by Chris and Dean that is described in the previous issue, ATOL 9 (1). The conference was particularly aimed at thinking about the relationship between writing and art making, which share similar processes but whose difference can bring vitality to each. The conference began with short presentations from the four of us about our own experience of writing about art therapy, where we began, the process of getting to where we are now, writing collaboratively and our influences and preoccupations. The combination of the word and the visual is of course the building block for art therapy and we used this for the conference activities. Diana Velada, a participant in the workshop, writes vividly about the conference and her experience of it, including discussion of her own work, in a report in this issue. Subsequent to the one-day conference, there will be a follow up seminar in February for those participants wishing to develop their writing further.

ATOL is a peer reviewed journal and in this issue we would like to give special thanks to our reviewers who provide anonymous comments on the papers we think might be suitable for publication. They provide this service free of charge and their careful reading and thoughtful suggestions have helped authors to improve their submissions. In this way we maintain quality in the papers we publish and at the same time provide, and encourage, informed debate. The reviewers are listed on our site and can be found using the information for authors button on the home page.

Readers can see that we draw from an international pool of Art Therapists, Psychotherapists, and Researchers. We are lucky in having reviewers from, Australia, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, India, Italy, Spain, Taiwan, UK and the USA. If there are any readers who wish to join this group of reviewers please do write to us ([robin@ratipple.plus.com](mailto:robin@ratipple.plus.com)) and tell us about your practice and your experiences in writing and we will respond to you.

2019 marks the ten-year anniversary of the journals founding. The first issue was published in 2010 and we hope to produce a special anniversary edition in 2020 to celebrate ten years of open access publishing that provides a free, International and alternative voice for Art Therapy.

We encourage readers to subscribe to our mailing list, which will enable notification of each new issue of ATOL and any future events we may host. This can be found under contact in the home page menu bar.

Lastly, we are very sorry that Patricia Fenner is leaving the editorial group but thank her for the energy that she has put into ATOL and the contribution she has made to it, and wish her all the very best.

Sally Skaife and Tsun-wei Lily Hsu.

## References

Gilroy, A. (2014) *Taking a long look at Art: Reflections on the context of production and consumption of art in Art Therapy*. ATOL: Art Therapy OnLine Vol. 5(2), available at: <http://journals.gold.ac.uk/index.php/atol/article/view/366/396>

Rose, G. (2001) *Visual Methodologies*. Sage Publications, London