

Rewilding, resisting and resting in collaboration with the more-than-human in art therapy education: tales from a walled garden

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This paper will focus on the experience of the art therapy educator within contemporary university systems. It will shine a light on the way things probably are and will begin to wonder about how they might otherwise be. The author will make a case for working in creative partnership with the more-than-human as a means of going beyond the trappings of the organisation and in search of more healthful personal and professional ways of being, knowing and doing within art therapy education and a wider context of climate emergency and age of mass extinction.

Following an intense, screen-based, apartment-bound period of work during the recent pandemic and in a continuing pressurised socio-economic environment permeating all aspects of life, the author committed to spending regular time in a walled garden, connecting, and creating in and with nature. She continued to work in personal supervision with eco-art-based processes to navigate her way through the challenges of working as an art therapy educator.

Taking a loose framework of eco-arts-based autoethnography, the author will present the emerging themes as they have sprung up within her creative work over an academic year (and the earth's seasons that it spans). She will share photographs of the work made from walnut shells, fallen apples, cherry blossom, earth, and fire and will include poetry, story extracts and images from an "El Duende" one canvas project. The personal journey will be considered in relation to the darkness of these times but also illuminating the transformational and emancipatory possibilities that lie within the creative processes. Tentative links will be made between an individual journey of rewilding, resistance and rest through eco-art-based processes and the collective situation in which we find ourselves within the world of arts therapies and arts therapies education.

Biography

Adrienne is an art psychotherapist and has worked in the fields of dementia, substance misuse and community and forensic mental health. EArTE 2024 will mark 20 years since her graduation from Queen Margaret University, where she now works as Programme Leader of the MSc Art Psychotherapy. She loves being outdoors, and in EArTE 2019 she presented her nature-based art therapy work with Forensic Mental Health Service patients, considering the possibilities of playing in the garden for mental health recovery. Whereas the covid-19 crisis led to some finding new connections to nature, the job of moving the MSc online meant long hours in front of a screen and an increased disconnection from the more-than-human world. Adrienne is resolved to maintain a focus on an ecological approach within the profession and has recently started a PhD focusing on the notion of rewilding art psychotherapy and more specifically, rewilding the art psychotherapist.

Recent publications and conference presentations

McDermid-Thomas, A., (2019). **The Magpie's Nest: Working in nature with forensic mental health service users** [paper presentation]. European Arts Therapies (EArTE) Conference: Imagining Windmills: Trust, truth and the unknown in the arts therapies, Alcala de Henares, Spain: 14 September, 2019.