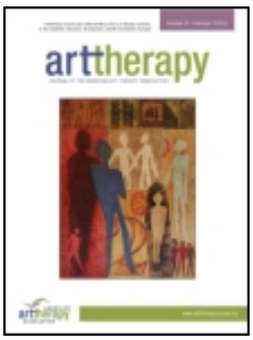

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Beyond Counseling and Psychotherapy, There Is a Field. I'll Meet You There

Janis Timm-Bottos

Abstract

Beyond a counseling or psychotherapy practice, the future of art therapy demands a new type of creativity, solidarity, and social inclusion. This viewpoint explores the art therapy profession and the role of educational practices to envision change in uncertain times. Art therapists have the ability to offer expertise in the serious dilemmas facing humanity. In order to do so, art therapists need to learn to tolerate the messy margins of participatory experimentation, expanding conventional ways of practicing art therapy.

Art therapy is an interdisciplinary profession situated between at least two distinct academic disciplines: art and psychology. Art therapy programs invite a merging and blending of theories, methods, and studio practices that produce a wide range of skills located along a continuum that includes "art as therapy" and "art psychotherapy." Once clinical skills, knowledge, engaged scholarship, self-reflection, and—hopefully—cultural humility are combined, the result is more than the sum of its parts. Not quite a science and not quite an art, art therapy is a hybrid. Its tenets and practices are palpable, but not easy to classify as evidence-based. It is a profession that offers surprises and can evoke moments of discomfort and ambiguity. This viewpoint explores the potential of creating "third spaces" or places of transformation, like an art hive, as part of art therapy education and practice (Timm-Bottos & Reilly, 2014).

Growing up next to a polluted salt marsh in a white, working class neighborhood in many ways prepared me for the discomforts associated with art therapy's hybridity. Messy, muddy, liminal, and unstable, the marsh had no exact point where the land ended and the water began. Littered with rusting steel cans and discarded tires, the waterlogged banks matted with cattails and duckweed were home to many small animals, amphibians, and a host of different birds. Beyond the tall grasses there was always something moving that could not fully be seen or easily apprehended.

Marshlands were routinely filled in with dump truck loads of dirt and then divided into grids for suburban housing. The importance of the ambiguous middle ground was not known or appreciated. Fortunately, today the environmental contributions of such diverse ecosystems, which offer curative methods for regenerating the earth's waterways and protecting fragile river banks, are better understood and valued. Instead of being filled in, wetlands are now being constructed in order to treat toxic rivers and lakes.

In the profession of art therapy, practitioners have followed a path of filling in and undervaluing not only the ambiguous world of the psyche, but also the parts that don't fit a professional identity. We have attempted to clean up the messy edges by embracing cognitive psychology, counseling skills, the "clinification" of art therapy (Allen, 1992), and standardization measures. Although "art therapy ushers forth terrains of images that decenter identification rather than contain it" (Whitaker, 2012, p. 349), its practitioners prefer to adopt other disciplinary boundaries and definitions. In doing so art therapists risk covering over our ambiguous curative potential and uniquely positioned identity, which is situated at the in between. By narrowing our educational practices in response to securing licensure, art therapists may or may not be providing best practices to secure new or better roles for advancing the field of art therapy. This modernist trajectory has led to a monoculture without much soul, like the housing developments built without consideration of diversity, inclusivity, walkability, affordability, and potential damage to the environment. Are there any marshes left in our profession where the blurred edges remain wild, layered, and unkempt?

The Art Hives Network

The salt marshes share qualities with the Montreal "art hives" that are based on the community art studio developed in the United States known as ArtStreet (Timm-Bottos, 1995) and OFFCenter Arts (Timm-Bottos, 2006). For the past 5 years the small and idiosyncratic art hives (Art Hives, n.d.) have deliberately blurred the lines separating art therapy, art education, critical cultural studies, popular pedagogy, public science, and creative arts. Located in storefronts, low-income housing, libraries, universities, and museums, art hives are regenerative places where everyone—especially those living at the margins—is welcomed to make art (Timm-Bottos & Chainey, 2015). "Things in the margins," wrote Hurd (2001), "including humans who wander there, are often on the brink of becoming something else, whose memories may not include the

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significance of old markers" (p. 7). Past trauma, mental illness, developmental measures, or psychological labels are not what is most significant in places where strengths are cultivated and built upon.

Art hives, like the edges of the marsh, are third spaces, which serve as diversely layered places of innovation, healing, and repair (Timm-Bottos & Reilly, 2014, 2015). The third space is a liminal in-between place, located between the home and the institution (work, school, or hospital), that offers opportunities to connect with people unlike oneself, to form studio relationships, and to develop informal interactions where "the positing of things becomes possible" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 243). At the art hive new ideas are exchanged in lively dialogue and debate; spontaneous art making provides the potential for strategic actions. Although relatively rare in our culture, places like this help to shift awareness "by leaving the space of one's usual sensibilities" and entering "into communication with a space that is psychically innovating" (Bachelard, 1992, p. 206). It is a place where we have opportunities to shape our identities and learn to see from multiple points of view.

Gloria Anzaldúa, in her book *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987), discussed this type of awareness when she outlined strategies associated with the benefits and struggles of growing up in the borderland between Texas and Mexico. She wrote that the *mestiza*

> constantly has to shift out of habitual formations; from convergent thinking, analytical reasoning that tends to use rationality to move toward a single goal (a Western mode), to divergent thinking, characterized by movement away from set patterns and goals and towards a more whole perspective, one that includes rather than excludes. (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 79)

For a profession in pursuit of proof and clarity, the borderlands of art therapy, like other hybrid spaces, are contested sites that hold contradictions causing both a narrowing of vision—as we position ourselves within boundaries of related professions like counseling and psychology—and an expansion of vision apparent in the creativity associated with resistance. The new art therapist, like the new *mestiza*, will need to get comfortable in an uncomfortable profession by embracing contradictions and developing an acceptance of ambiguity and paradox.

The uncertainties facing humanity in the next 50 years—diminishing access to water, increasing urbanization and the effects of increasing poverty, and increasing corporatization of democracy, to name a few challenges—make the borderlands of art therapy more relevant than ever. Preparing to take action within the context of the changing world requires art therapists to expand how we approach mental health. Law (2004) suggests:

> If we are able and willing to tolerate the uncertainties and the specificities of enactment, flux and resonance, then we find that we are confronted with a quite different set of important puzzles about the nature of the real and how to intervene in it. (p. 141)

A Curative Root System

The blossoming of art therapy will come from networks of partnerships with unlikely suspects. Whitaker (2012) drew on the work of Deleuze and Guattari to describe the term *rhizome* that points to the process of marsh plants "that reproduce through roots and shoots emerging from nodes of an underground stem. It denotes a system of three dimensional growth with multiple entryways and exits that can be approached through many different vantage points" (p. 345). Further, "It is an open network, a movement across a terrain of space that is not stratified but continually growing and circulating with newly assembled intersections of growth" (Whitaker, 2012, p. 345).

Art therapy is located in this kind of underground grassroots network, where social innovation and change begin. By developing networks of third spaces in communities and within established institutional settings, new ways of seeing and doing, along with currently unrealized new identities, will burst forth and—like the rhizome—will have "no beginning or end: it is always in the middle, between things" (Deleuze & Guattari, as cited in Whitaker, 2012, p. 345).

To explore new identities and expanded ways of practicing art therapy, consider the following roots and shoots:

- Democratize art therapy by swinging open the doors of the American Art Therapy Association and joining in solidarity with anyone using the arts for healing, including seniors who have started coloring book clubs and neuroscientist artists.
- Expand our field of knowledge beyond limited disciplinary silos, welcoming multiple ways of knowing (e.g., nature, women's ways of knowing [Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule, 1986], African American ways of knowing, individual and family knowing, and ways of knowing informed by experiences of homelessness [Casanova, 1996] and/or disability [Snow, 2011]).
- Decolonize research methodologies by expanding to include quiet and slow research methods (Law, 2004), dialogical methods (Watkins & Shulman, 2008), open studio process (Allen, 2016), and indigenous research methods (Cajete, 2000; Wilson, 2008), which are developed collaboratively.
- Revive suppressed or forgotten art therapy histories to recapture the full spectrum of our early beginnings and rethink current methods through alternate historical viewpoints.
- Practice an "ethic of discomfort" (Rabinow, 1994, p. xviii), regularly challenging biases through intentional, creative interaction with people who are dissimilar.
- Develop a relational ethic (Rasmussen, 1996) to include ourselves and our families in the work we do, scaling within a context of social justice, social change, and the

care of the planet for the health and cultural success of future generations.
- Establish storefront classrooms for teaching and learning (Timm-Bottos & Reilly, 2014, 2015) and community spaces for making art in local neighbourhoods (Timm-Bottos & Chainey, 2015).

Art therapy is more than what has gone missing in contemporary psychology. Art therapy is a way to reimagine the world, demonstrating how to develop noncompetitive, relational ways of working. As a messy, liminal, and in-between field it requires art therapists to venture forth into the unknown and trust one other and the variety of skills and methods each contribute. Understandably, art therapists may not be rushing out to buy rubber hip waders to muck about in the swamp together, but I invite art therapists to leave open a space for what could be possible if practitioners send up shoots, even if it is a bit muddy and they are not sure where they are or where they are going. When art therapists "cultivate an attention to the conditions under which things become evident," (Rabinow, 1994, p. xix) and do not sell out or pin down the rich and diverse field called art therapy, they can meet in a field that does not second-guess art therapy's relevance in the world today. In the words of Rumi (as cited in Jalāl & Barks, 1997):

> Out beyond ideas of wrong-doing and right-doing, there is a field. I'll meet you there. When the soul lies down in that grass, the world is too full to talk about. Ideas, language, even the phrase *each other* doesn't make sense. (p. 36)

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