

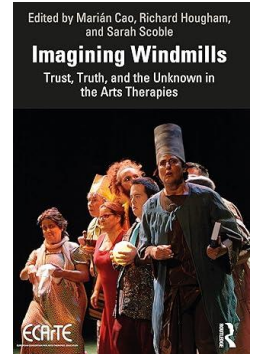
BOOK REVIEW

Imagining windmills: Trust, truth, and the unknown in the arts therapies (Cao, Hougham & Scoble, eds.)

Reviewed by Bridget Grant

Queen Margaret University, United Kingdom

Title: Imagining windmills: Trust, truth, and the unknown in the arts therapies **Editors:** Marián Cao, Richard Hougham & Sarah Scoble
Publication Year: 2022 **Publisher:** Routledge **Pages:** 250 **ISBN:** 9780367626693



REVIEWER BIOGRAPHY

Bridget Grant is an art psychotherapist and clinical supervisor living and working in Scotland. She has worked in many different contexts with a wide range of clients, maintaining a special interest in perinatal art therapy. She is a lecturer for the MSc Art Psychotherapy at Queen Margaret University and British Association of Art Therapists (BAAT) Scotland Committee representative for private practice. Bridget is particularly interested in how imagination, metaphor and the irreducible and ineffable aspects of the image in art therapy create opportunities to connect more deeply. [BGrant@qmu.ac.uk]

Publication history:

Submitted 31 Jan 2025

Accepted 2 May 2025

First published 13 Jun 2025

Published in 2022, this edited collection of papers emerges from the bi-annual conference of the European Consortium for Arts Therapies Education (ECARTE) held in 2019. *Imagining Windmills: Trust, Truth and the Unknown in the Arts Therapies* reflects the conference's theme, inspired by Cervante's masterpiece, *Don Quixote*, first published in 1604 (Cervantes, 2000, p. xi). The question of finding truth within "imagination as a place of multiple realities" (Cao et al., preface) is the stuff arts therapies are made of and feels particularly relevant to the socio-cultural-political context in which the conference was conceived and the chapters written. The conference happened just before the COVID-19 pandemic, and authors refer to writing their chapters in the subsequent lockdowns when people were thrown from one reality into another. The flourish of innovative artistic projects appearing in the online space at that time, provided a means of expression and connection, suggesting imagination and creativity are what got many through. However, in the UK, the Government's declaration "we are all in this together" rang hollow as the pandemic revealed local and global inequalities, which could mean the difference between life and death. With the appearance of Orwellian like "alternative facts" (Herrmann, p. 32), it all began to feel a bit 'mad' and unknown as truth and trust seemed to unravel.

Global contributions from established arts therapists provide a cross-section of innovative philosophical approaches and clinical practice. The result is a rich multiplicity of explorations. As an art therapist myself, I am interested in how the ineffable qualities of images create opportunities to

connect more deeply. These themes highlight a fundamental part of what we do as arts therapists; being with the unknown within intersubjective realities. Staying with the unknowable and irreducible in any art form, within the therapeutic relationship, allows the unconscious to do its work and transformation to happen.

Marian Cao's opening chapter "On the Unknown that Art Addresses" carries a poetic drift. Informed by Foucault's notion of heterotopia, Cao uses three art works and a personal narrative to explore the theme. An eerie sense of the spaces we inhabited in lockdown resonates with the artworks where dwellings become strange, other-inner worlds and boundaries of time and place dissolve. Following this, Robert Romanyshyn highlights the mutuality between Quixote and his companion Sanches, symbolising contrasting aspects of the human psyche. Both are transformed and grow in relationship to the other. For Uwe Herrmann, the art materials and images she used with a young blind client held and offered exploration of changing truths, in a world which is increasingly polarised with reduced capacity for tolerating not knowing.

Dramatherapists Richard Houghman and Bryn Jones present their account of an experimental workshop designed to explore the process of constructing a social space using a strange environment and unconventional materials. Extending the invitation to make meaning, they wonder: where will the truth emerge? In contrast, Salvo Pituzzella's model, Dramatic Self Paradigm, seeks to identify and name the complex systems which inform the feeling of Self. Acknowledging these are fluid states of being, Pituzzella suggests dramatherapy may help to rework what is stuck or problematic. This embodied fluidity is also emphasised in Jean-Francois Jacques research into dramatherapy which frames aesthetic experience as an embodied way of knowing and locates the aesthetic within interpersonal interactions. His findings suggest the aesthetics of performance have a role in regulating interpersonal connections helping to effect change and insight.

Iris Bely's thought provoking chapter explores her work as a "secular Jewish art therapist" with "religious Muslim Arab" women patients in Israel (Bely, p. 105). Acknowledging the socio-political tensions, she states that her focus extends beyond polarised stereotypes to find a third, more nuanced space. Such spaces are vital as the recent events in Gaza and Israel show. Framing the work as intercultural art therapy, Bely considers issues of oppression for women and briefly mentions her client's perspective regarding the Jewish hegemony (Bely, p.112). However, given the context, and notwithstanding the time in which the chapter was written, bringing more of an intersectional lens might help to consider the power-dynamics at play and explore the deeper implications for transference and countertransference, not only in terms of different cultures, beliefs and the client's personal material, but also in relation to social identities and power structures (Talwar, 2022). I could not help but wonder, for example, how "the search for an inner home" (Bely, p.105) might link to issues of land and displacement. Continuing the subject of cultural consideration, Arts therapists Oihika Chakrabarti, Tripura Kashyap, Maitri Gopalakrishna and Nina Cherla (from the Netherlands) – trained in the West and working in India – make an important contribution to this book. Their decolonising, de-westernising stance is energising. Referencing processes of acculturation, they assert the need for professional arts therapies trainings to form within India, mitigating the replaying of colonial views when "transplanting" a Western, ethnocentrism training model and curriculum.

The sociopolitical focus continues as Anna Serrano Navarro, Tania Ugena Candel and Andrea Lopez Iglesias explore community-based art therapy with women in Madrid. Informed by feminist and community art therapy frameworks they engage women who may not access traditional psychological services. The richness of this research emerges in the findings; in the material that women shared in relation to their internal and external worlds.

Clinical innovation runs as a thread through the next chapters. Israeli dance movement therapists, Einat Shuper Engelhard and Maya Vulcan's fascinating work posits movement as a third language (alongside the verbal and emotional) within couple relationships. Their qualitative research found that communication through movement promoted trust when conflict arose verbally in couples. This finding resonates with music therapist Joy Gravestock's work with an adopted child with learning disabilities which is profoundly moving. In this impressive case study, Gravestock coins the term "micro moments of attunement" using countertransference and transference to understand her client's internal world. The courage and determination of both client and therapist are a powerful testament to the importance of psychoanalytically informed work with people with learning disabilities. Working as an art therapist with autistic children in the Netherlands, Caroline Schweizer moves beyond the intricacies of interpersonal dynamics and addresses the need for clarity regarding aims and treatment. Seeking to find a shared language to communicate with other involved parties, she presents a model incorporating Context, Outcomes, Art expression of the client and Therapist behaviour (COAT) as a way forward (Schweizer, 2022).

Sibylle Cseri's concluding chapter examines issues of trust in art therapy when working with adopted children. Her metaphor of a hermeneutic spiral helps to conceptualise the therapeutic process, and her case vignettes deepen our understanding of the transformative potential in aesthetic phenomena, held within the therapeutic relationship.

As rich as they are, the chapters are a lot to digest altogether, and the book feels a bit unwieldy. This reminds me of Don Quixote himself, and you could say the book's resistance to being neatly wrapped up or explained embodies this archetypal paradoxical character. A product of the 2019 ECARTE conference, *Imagining Windmills: Trust, Truth and Unknown in the Arts Therapies* is relevant for all arts therapists, whilst certain chapters will be of particular interest to certain modalities. It emerges in a time of significant historical sociocultural and political change; as I write, Donald Trump has just become the American President - for a second time. It feels increasingly important that the arts therapies continue to engage with the challenge of not-knowing, and trust "truth-as-unconcealing" as opposed to "truth-as-correctness" (McGilchrist, 2021. p. xvii). The diversely creative and imaginative contributions in this book offer the arts therapies a way forward in negotiating the territory of the unknown.

REFERENCES

- Cervantes, M. (2000). *Don Quixote*. Penguin Books Ltd.
- McGilchrist, I. (2021). *The matter with things: Our brains, our delusions, and the unmaking of the world* (Vol 1). Perspectiva Press.

Talwar, S, K. (2022). Forward. In J. Collier & E. Corrina (Eds.), *Intersectionality in the arts psychotherapies*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.