

# Editorial

*John O'Connor and Wiremu Woodard (Tuhoe)*

Korihi te manu  
Tākiri mai i te ata  
Ka ao, ka ao, ka awatea  
Tihei Mauri Ora!

The bird sings  
The morning has dawned  
The day has broken  
Behold, there is life!

E ngā mana, e ngā reo, e ngā manu tioriori, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa!

In late March 2020, Aotearoa New Zealand entered Level 4 lockdown in response to the Covid 19 pandemic sweeping the world. In the same month, the Wellington branch of the New Zealand Association of Psychotherapists (NZAP) was due to host the NZAP national conference, celebrating the work and heart of NZAP and its members, and exploring the disturbing possibilities and creative potential of the conference theme, “Wiwini Wawana Wehi Ihi — Terror in the Transference.” Whilst some conference events were possible, including the delivery of the keynote addresses via Zoom by Dr Larry Hedges, sadly, most of the conference events, including presentations from psychotherapists based in Aotearoa New Zealand and in Australia, were cancelled, as the impact of Covid 19’s arrival in Aotearoa New Zealand dawned upon us all. Whilst some of the planned conference presentations have subsequently been offered via Zoom in 2020, the cancellation of much of the conference, and the rich embodied experience it would have offered conference participants, was a very painful decision for the NZAP Council, and particularly for the local organisers of the conference. The grief of those losses and the cancellations these entailed were shared by us all.

In many ways, the papers which appear in this latest issue of *Ata: Journal of Psychotherapy Aotearoa New Zealand* reflect the extraordinary mahi of the local conference organisers and are a tribute to them, for all but one of these papers was due to be presented at the conference in Wellington. Therefore, as we publish this issue, we wish to begin by offering our heartfelt thanks and appreciation to the local Wellington conference organisers for the tremendous work they did in preparing for the conference, and for the offerings which have been possible via Zoom. Whilst much of your work did not come to fruition in the way that had been planned, the creativity you brought to these challenging circumstances, and the work you undertook, which has enabled the papers that appear in this issue of *Ata*, are a reflection of your endeavour, commitment, and aroha. Kia ora and thank you.

The Covid 19 pandemic and its terrifying consequences have invited us all to face the implications of an approach to life in which for so long we as human beings have assumed

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our superior dominion over the earth and the nonhuman world. The temptations of consumerism, technology, individualism and material wealth have seduced humanity to believe the fiction of our superiority. Covid 19 and its relationship to the climate crisis that we all face have, like Icarus, brought us shudderingly back to Papatūānuku. And with this crashing fall we face our tremendous collective fear and grief, as we face the loss of the fantasy of a planet under our control. We meet instead the truth of our humanity: that the earth is not “our” planet, to be lived upon, dominated and owned, but rather that we are in and of the earth, that the human and nonhuman world are interdependent and inseparable, and that our lives are changing and must change, if we are to live a life that respects this intertwined interdependence. To do so we must grieve our losses, and face the future together, connected to the tenderness of our humanity and of the earth’s and our own vulnerability.

We suggest that the papers offered in this issue of *Ata* provide a stimulating invitation to face our grief, to stay close to the terror, to stay close to each other and our relationship with the world. The theme of this issue, in keeping with the theme of the planned March 2020 NZAP conference, is “Wiwini Wawana Wehi Ihi — Terror in the Transference.” Each paper, despite considerable differences in approach and topic, invites the reader to explore the nature of destructiveness and the possibility that recognising our destructiveness may allow for greater creativity, as we face the losses, terrors and potentials that lie ahead and before us, clinically, and in our lives.

In her provocative and eloquent exploration of the nature of pre-birth annihilation terror and infanticidal attachment, Violet Sherwood invites us to linger with these disturbing and murderous impulses, whilst movingly reflecting on the possibility that we might engage in such life-destroying forces creatively. Violet integrates a wide variety of theoretical lenses, along with entries from her own journals, to evoke the possibility of psychotherapeutic and life-giving responses to infanticidal experiences.

In Rod Sandle’s intelligent exploration of the terror that arises from our fear of death and longing for life, he considers the profoundly disturbing emotional impact this is likely to have on us all. Rod uses Sabina Spielrein’s 1912 paper, “Destruction as the Cause of Coming into Being” as a beginning point for attempting to deepen our understanding of her theory linking terror to primitive sexual transference. Rod creatively explores how we might work with the dissociative responses evoked by such terror.

In collaboration with David Nicholls, Seán Manning utilises his experience working in prison in Aotearoa New Zealand to explore the idea of the self as a performative assembly. In doing so, Seán and David challenge the more common developmental perspective found within psychotherapeutic clinical and theoretical realms, regarding the emergence of the self. In contrast, Seán and David utilise the work of Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, and Nikolas Rose to offer us a lens which perceives the self, and in particular the criminal self, as a construction. Seán and David offer the perspective that the “criminal self” might develop as a product of incarceration and as a natural extension of the self in the neoliberal era, with implications for why this may significantly limit the impact of psychotherapeutic intervention. Seán and David’s creative exploration challenges us all to grapple with the discourses underpinning subjectivity, and how these may give rise to the experience of a self which we as psychotherapists often assume is developmentally and relationally formed.

Jennifer De Leon wrestles creatively with the question of how to go on being. In this evocative piece, Jennifer utilises moving images and poetic narrative to invite the reader into a visceral, intellectual and emotional “dance.” In this, she invites us all to surrender to the divine and emphasises the notion of morphogenesis as a guide to this potent call.

Finally, John O'Connor, in the only piece appearing in this issue not prepared for presentation at the NZAP 2020 conference, provides an exploration of the challenges of staying close to the terror in clinical psychotherapeutic work. Beginning with Winnicott's (1974) engagingly titled paper “Fear of Breakdown,” John suggests that when working with patients with severe trauma histories, terror is often disguised by persecutory attack, both of self and other, leaving the psychotherapist with the disturbing clinical challenge of moving towards the terror, and inviting the patient to do the same. He suggests that such an invitation may enable the possibility that terror might transform to grief, and the possibility of creativity. John surveys a wide range of theoretical material, particularly from psychoanalytic and Jungian perspectives, and deduces a range of clinical principles and creative formulations to understand and respond to intrapsychic terror arising from traumatic histories.

We hope the combination of articles in this issue proves enriching for readers, particularly during these times of considerable disturbance and ongoing grief.

We thank Hineira Woodard for her generous and expert work providing te reo Māori interpretations of the abstracts; tēnā koe, Hineira. Our deep thanks to our creative, skilful, unfailingly cheerful and always punctual designer, Katy Yiakmis; tēnā koe, Katy. Thank you to Nikky Winchester who brings a keen eye for detail to the role of assistant editor. We are greatly appreciative of her dedicated contribution to the preparation of this issue: tēnā koe, Nikky. We thank Trevor Pye for the artwork which appears on the cover of this issue. Trevor's stunning work was originally designed as the logo for the March 2020 NZAP conference. It creatively captures the theme of the conference and of this issue, “Wiwini Wawana Wehi Ihi — Terror in the Transference”; tēnā koe, Trevor. Finally, we thank you, the reader (NZAP member or subscriber), for your continuing support of the journal; we hope you will find this issue an evocative, provocative, enjoyable and engaging read, and we look forward to editing the next issue.

Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa.

## References

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- Winnicott, D. W. (1974). Fear of breakdown. *International Review of Psycho-Analysis*, 1, 103-107.