

# Editorial: The climate crisis, clinical work and the work of mourning

*John O'Connor*

JUNGLIAN ANALYST, PSYCHOTHERAPIST, AUCKLAND

*Wiremu Woodard (Tuhoe)*

PSYCHOTHERAPY LECTURER, AUT UNIVERSITY, PSYCHOTHERAPY PRACTITIONER

Korihi te manu	The bird sings
Tākiri mai i te ata	The morning has dawned
Ka ao, ka ao, ka awatea	The day has broken
Tihei Mauri Ora!	Behold, there is life!

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

French analyst Jean Laplanche (1987) has suggested “All work is the work of mourning” (p. 298, cited in Davey, 2000, p. 59). Writers as varied in their understandings of therapy and psychoanalysis as Freud (1917/1950) and Jung (1961), Klein (1940) and Bion (1962), Winnicott (1974) and Edinger (1993), Kalsched (1996) and Steiner (1993), Benjamin (2004) and Stern (2009), all write of the centrality of the capacity for grief if inner transformation is to be a possibility. Whether their emphasis is on the intrapsychic, inter-psychic, inter-personal, transpersonal, or intersubjective, all these writers explore, from their very different perspectives, the importance of the “work of mourning”. Indeed, if the traumatised psyches who inhabit our clinical rooms are to free their imprisoned souls, face the terror of their inner lives, and gradually transform their persecutory hatred into creative potency and protective aggression, their dissociated powerlessness into human vulnerability and need, then the capacity for mourning and grief is crucial. The adult must grieve the child’s losses, the hurts, pains, and terrors of early life. And more than this they must grieve their loss of innocence, and the possibility that omnipotent control can keep pain at bay. In feeling the soft centre of our vulnerable humanity, facing the truth of the tender souls that we are, we have the possibility of living a life of creativity that can be born from the deep and profound acceptance of this humanity.

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We suggest this capacity for grief is not only central to the individual patient in our clinical rooms. Perhaps more urgently than ever, the centrality of this capacity challenges the whole of humanity, as the climate crisis and its life-threatening sequelae looms ever more frighteningly before us. Indeed, the current COVID-19 pandemic and its terrifying consequences invite us all to face the implications of an approach to life in which for so long we as human beings have assumed our superior dominion over the Earth and the more than human 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 the more than human 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 potent and essential invitation to experience our grief, to stay close to the terror, to stay close to each other and our relationship with the world. Three of the papers in this issue arose directly out of the New Zealand Association of Psychotherapists’ (NZAP) 2021 online conference, “Te Ipu Taiao — The Climate Crucible”. These three papers directly explore the enormous challenges of the climate crisis, and their implications for psychotherapists and psychotherapeutic work.

Robert Romanyshyn poignantly invites us all to regather our capacity for collective mourning in relation to the pain that we and the Earth are currently experiencing. Jem Bendell potently challenges us to face the truth of the seriousness of the climate crisis before us. And Jasmine Kieft provides us with considerable evidence for the urgent necessity of such emotional honesty, with her review of literature exploring the value of speaking transparently about the crisis the Earth faces.

In addition, four further papers are included in this issue, which do not arise out of the above conference, but continue, from different perspectives, to consider the emotional challenges of being able to think and feel together within and outside of the clinical room, often under significant emotional pressure. Elizabeth Day and Kerry Thomas-Anttila write about their research exploring student psychotherapists’ experience of needing to work clinically online as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the many challenges and opportunities such clinical work presents. Emma Green writes poetically about her personal journey in relation to indigenous *mataūrangā Māori* in Aotearoa New Zealand, as a person, and as a psychotherapist. Alisa Hirschfeld explores the immense challenge of maintaining the capacity to think under emotional pressure in difficult clinical situations, a challenge which will resonate with all clinicians. And Carol Worthington writes with grace and clarity about living and dying, as she encounters these profoundly human experiences in a recent visit to hospital.

Each paper, despite considerable differences in approach and topic, invites the reader to explore how emotional honesty, no matter how painful, might allow in each of us greater

creativity, as we face the losses, terrors and potentials that lie ahead and before us, clinically, and in our lives. We hope the combination of articles in this issue proves enriching for readers, particularly during these times of considerable disturbance and ongoing grief.

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Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa.

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