

Editorial: Feeling and thinking under emotional pressure

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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!

The environment, both physical and emotional, within which we all live, work, love and hate, is increasingly disturbing, if not unbearably undoing. The relentlessness of the Covid 19 pandemic, the ongoing nuclear threat and catastrophic horror generated by the war in Ukraine, and the evermore urgent climate crisis with which we are all faced, produces states of mind within us all that are often terrifying. To be able to feel and think in such circumstances is perhaps an impossible challenge, and yet an absolutely necessary one for us all to face, if we are to act with wisdom, courage and care, in the face of these multiple and unavoidable terrors. In these very difficult circumstances, does psychotherapy and its accumulated wisdom have anything to offer? We suggest it does.

Foundational to the creative uniqueness of Wilfred Bion, we suggest, is his conceptualisation of the process of thinking under emotional pressure. That the mind is a pictogram, continually dreaming itself, an unconscious cinema, playing beneath the surface of our awareness. As Ferro (2011) commented,

I believe that the “waking dream thought” (Bion, 1962) is the most significant and important of [Bion’s] concepts. Aside from the night dream, our mind, through

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its alpha function, constantly creates a continuous operation of “alphabetisation” of all the sensory stimuli and proto-emotions that we receive. The endpoint of this operation is the formation of alpha elements, which, when we put them into sequence, produce the waking dream thought. (p. 155) ... the mind that brings this transformation does not only transform the proto-sensorial and proto-emotive chaos into affectively meaningful representation, but, through the constant repetition of this mental work, also transmits “the method” [of thinking] deployed to achieve this (alpha function) (p. 162).

What this means for how we might inhabit the therapeutic moment is poetically captured by Thomas Ogden (2001),

... the analyst must be able to experience ... what it feels like being with the patient, and yet, for the most part, these experiences are unconscious. The analyst is initially, and for quite a long time, more “lived by” these predominantly unconscious feelings than he is the author of a set of thoughts, feelings, and sensations that he experiences as his own creations and can name for [her]himself. A good deal of my work as an analyst involves the effort to transform my experience of “I-ness” (myself as unselfconscious subject) into an experience of me-ness, (myself as object of analytic scrutiny) (p.19).

Central to the phenomenology of what Ogden described is the capacity for reverie: to hold our dream thoughts, evoked in the presence of our dreaming patient, in our mind, even as these fleeting fragments slip illusively from us.

Jung (1966) described, in his psychology of the transference, the encounter, unconscious to unconscious, of the pictogram of the mind of patient and analyst. Ogden (2001) and Bion (1962) encourage my phenomenological enquiry into these fleeting dreams thoughts, slowly allowing them to cohere into representation of inevitably disturbing affective states. And Foucault (2006) warns me that to react too quickly, is to risk enacting the discourses of our time, and thus to avoid inhabiting myself, feeling, dreaming, and eventually thinking, while recognising the immense emotional labour such a stance requires. If psychotherapy is not to be a further “monologue of reason about madness” (Foucault, 1967, cited in Rose, 2019, p. 150), then our only hope, is to surrender to, and linger with, the irrationality of the encounter, unconscious to unconscious, therapist, and patient.

Further, we suggest that a similar challenge faces us all as we, together and individually (though most importantly together, given how essential other minds are in service of feeling and thinking creatively and honestly), if we are to grapple and meaningfully engage with the collective challenges of our time. This is the challenge with which we must intentionally engage if we are not to “grasp for certainty,” but rather inhabit the negative capability which our frightening times demand.

We suggest that each of the papers in this issue of the journal, assists us in this daunting task. Keith Tudor provides us with a comprehensive and insightful consideration of the depth and essence of person centred psychotherapy, the wisdom of its founders, particularly Carl Rogers, and the gifts it has to offer us all, if we but have ears to listen. Mihili Alexander

offers us a poignant and timely exploration of her research reflecting upon the experiences and perspectives of self identifying non-indigenous ethnic minority psychotherapists in Aotearoa New Zealand, and the multiple perspectives they bring to the psychotherapeutic and cross-cultural encounter in this context. John Farnsworth brings his sharp intellect to the many potentials and challenges which technology provides, for the practice and craft of psychotherapy in today's complex technological world. And Tiana Pēwhairangi Trego-Hall and Lily Kay Matariki O'Neill, in conversation with Anna Fleming and Verity Armstrong, provide voices of ranagatahi, voices which members of the New Zealand Association of Psychotherapists (NZAP) first heard during their panel contributions, offered as part of the NZAP 2021 Te Ipu Taiao — Climate Crucible online conference. Tiana and Lily call us to turn our attention towards the terrors we all face, and to listen to the wisdom of indigenous youth, in relation to the environmental catastrophe that is upon us.

We hope the combination of articles in this issue proves enriching for readers, particularly during these times of such disturbance, and of creative possibility.

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Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa.

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