
Editorial

This is a bumper issue. It is a first because it is the first time we have had more papers than we can possibly publish.

The wide diversity of ideas included in this issue well reflects the New Zealand psychotherapeutic scene and the wide ranging dialogue that NZAP encompasses. The subjects in this issue range from metaphor, desire, dream-work and spirituality to fathers and fatherlessness, adoption, cultures, the body and dance. This is an extraordinary span that indeed represents the rich melting pot of New Zealand psychotherapy.

A curious thing is this 'psyche', that word that lies at the centre of our Association. It means the soul, spirit, breath or breathing that we never seem to be able to actually touch, smell, taste, see or hear. Its presence is inferred from our ongoing experiences, and the meanings we make of it outlined in our theoretical abstractions. We have a tendency to put together these abstractions to develop conceptual models of the psyche that end up being abstractions of our abstractions, meanings of the very meanings we make.

There is also a curious phenomenon at work here. Many of us will recall sitting down with a new client and after an hour's interview and another hour or so writing, coming up with a rigorous, taut, diagnostic dynamic formulation. For some time afterward we are convinced that what happened in that interview was in fact a deep penetration into the human psyche, afforded by the conceptual model we espoused at the time, and revealed by our marvellous formulation. On reflection, however, what is much closer to what happened in the interview is an exciting swirl of emotions and conversation in which neither we nor the client has much idea of exactly what the other was going to say next. Furthermore, in some cases it is unlikely in retrospect that the client would have even recognized that the formulation was about them or their psyche, let alone agreed with its conclusion.

A model is a representation of something. That "something" is the original, not the model. Conceptual and theoretical models are models, not the originals. They are abstractions, by very definition. Often our models are constructed out of abstractions of abstractions. The more abstractions there are and the more coherently we weave them together, the deeper and richer the meaning

appears to be. Yet at the same time, this has a tendency to take us further and further away from the actual experience. The more we try to pin down the meaning the more the actuality escapes us.

We are all familiar with the question we ask ourselves in a group or in a session: 'What is really going on here?' As if there were some reality, some fundamental aspect of the psyche being manifest beyond what is immediately accessible and obvious. And the answers will invariably carry the flavor of our own conceptual view of the psyche, and the authority with which we assert any answer is likely to be a function of how strongly we are wedded to it.

Models yield richness, diversity, interest and meaning, but at the same time they can lead us conceptually away from what is literally happening. Conceptual models of experience are fine, and in one sense they are all we have to go on, but let us not forget the source of our fascination: the "original".

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Editorial Group, Forum