Internal and external destructiveness: The violence of the inner world and its potential transformation

John O'Connor

Psychotherapist, Jungian Analyst, Auckland

"The ego can kill itself only if … it can treat itself as an object."
(Sigmund Freud, 1917/1950, p.252).

Abstract

Stekel (1910/1967) suggests, "no one kills himself who has never wanted to kill another or at least wished the death of another" (cited in Bell, 2001, p. 24). In this paper, I will suggest that such inner destructiveness, if not murderousness, is reflected not only in the inner world of suicide but also in the microcosm of so many clinical presentations, be it, for example, relentless self-harm, the cruelty of emotional self-attack, the intrapsychic hatred of eating disorders, or the violence we perpetrate on ourselves, others, and the natural world. In the public sphere, such inner cruelty is further made manifest in Aotearoa's tragic suicide statistics, horrific attacks on public figures, particularly when they reveal vulnerability, and cross-cultural attacks in relation to ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation. These inner dynamics are further reflected in the macrocosm of interlinked global threats of the human-induced climate crisis, the threat of nuclear war, and the pandemic, in which psyche is writ large. Yet there is a profound absence in public discourse of reflection on the violence of our inner worlds, and how these cruel dynamics are replayed clinically, interpersonally, cross-culturally, and globally, generating destructive and murderous impulses and actions.

I will draw on a range of psychoanalytic and Jungian theoretical lenses in an exploration of the nature of inner destructiveness, and its manifestation, within both the clinician and the patient, and how this inner destructiveness also manifests in wider societal and global destructive dynamics. I will weave personal and composite fictional clinical vignettes to illustrate these ideas, and will conclude my paper with an exploration of how surrender to intrapsychic deaths, including surrender to the inevitable and painful mourning such surrender requires, might facilitate the emergence of more creative and life-giving responses, within ourselves as clinicians, within our psychotherapeutic relationships with patients, and in the cross-cultural and global communities and natural environments with which we are embedded, and within which life-giving responses are so crucially required.

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Whakarāpopotonga

Stekel (1910/1967): "kāre he tangata e whakamate i a ia anō kāre anō nei kia hiahia ki te whakamate i tētahi atu, e moemoeā rānei kia mate tētahi atu tangata" (tohutoro rō Bell, 2001, w. 24). E kī ana au ko tēnei tūmomo whakatakariri whakaroto, kōhuru rānei, e whakaahuahia mai ana, kaua e te ao whakamomori anake, engari i roto anō hoki i te moroitinga o te maha o ngā kitenga haumanu, ahakoa, hei whakatauira ake, te mutunga kore o te whakatūroro ihoroto, te tūkino o te whaiaro kare ihoroto, te kino o te whakaaro ihoroto ki te kai, tā tātau mahi kino ihoroto ki a tātau anō, ki ētahi atu, me te ao tūroa. I rō tūmatanui, ka kitea ake tēnei tūkino ihoroto mai i ngā tatauranga mate momori, tukinga kino i ngā tāngata tūmatanui, mātua tonu nei ko te kitea ake o te paraheahea, te tukinga kaikiri whiti ahurea whakapā atu ki te mātāwaka, te ira tangata, me te hōkakatanga. Whakaahuahia ake anō ai ēnei mahi e te ao whānui e ngā āhuarangi tumatumanga, te pakanga pakiri wehiwehi me te mate uratā, te pūaotanga o te mataora. Ahakoa tonu e ngaro kau ana te matapaki tūmatanui ki te whakaaro i te morearea o ō tatau ao ihoroto, me te putaputa ā-haumanu, ā-whaiora, ā-whakawhitinga ahurea, huri noa i te ao, te whakaputanga ake o te korokoro o Parata, ngā mahi kohuru manawa rere.

Ka huri au ki ngā tuhinga haumanu me ētahi kohikohinga wetewetenga hinengaro, me ērā e whai ana i a Hūniana/Jungian ki te tūhura i te āhua o te patu ihoroto me ngā whakaputanga, i te kaiwhakaora hinengaro me the tūroro, te putanga mai hoki o tēnei patu ihoroto ki ngā hāpori tumatanui huri noa atu ki te ao. Ka whiria haerehia e au ngā kōrero matawhaiora me ētahi tuhinga haumanu hei whakaahua i ēnei whakaaro, ā, hei whakamutu i taku pepa ka tūhurahiate āhua o te hauraro ki ngā mate ihoroto, me te hauraro hoki ki te mau kākahu taratara o te mate, e puta mai ai pea ētahi huarahi whakaoranga auaha i waenga i ā tātau nga kaihaumanu, o tātau whakawhanaungatanga atu ki ngā tūroro, ngā ahurea maha, ngā hāpori o te ao me te ao tūroa e tāwharau nei i ā tātau, te wāhi e tika ana kia tau te mauri, te hauora.

Keywords: destructive; internal; reparation; cultural; grief; climate; Jung; Klein.

Introduction

Stekel (1910/1967) suggests, "no one kills himself who has never wanted to kill another or at least wished the death of another" (cited in Bell, 2001, p. 24). In this paper, I will suggest that such inner destructiveness, if not murderousness, is reflected not only in the inner world of suicide but also in the microcosm of so many clinical presentations, be it, for example, relentless self-harm, the cruelty of emotional self-attack, the intrapsychic hatred of eating disorders, or the violence we perpetrate on ourselves, others, and the natural world. In the public sphere, such inner cruelty is further made manifest in Aotearoa's tragic suicide statistics, horrific attacks on public figures, particularly when they reveal vulnerability, and cross-cultural attacks in relation to ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation. These inner dynamics are further reflected in the macrocosm of interlinked global threats of the human-induced climate crisis, the threat of nuclear war, and the pandemic, in which psyche is writ large. Yet there is a profound absence in public discourse of reflection on the violence of our inner worlds, and how these cruel dynamics are replayed clinically, interpersonally, cross-

culturally, and globally, generating destructive and murderous impulses and actions.

I will draw on a range of psychoanalytic and Jungian theoretical lenses in an exploration of the nature of inner destructiveness, and its manifestation, within both the clinician and the patient, and how this inner destructiveness also manifests in wider societal and global destructive dynamics. I will weave personal and composite fictional clinical vignettes to illustrate these ideas, and will conclude my paper with an exploration of how surrender to intrapsychic deaths, including surrender to the inevitable and painful mourning such surrender requires, might facilitate the emergence of more creative and life-giving responses, within ourselves as clinicians, within our psychotherapeutic relationships with patients, and in the cross-cultural and global communities and natural environments with which we are embedded, and within which life-giving responses are so crucially required.

The reassurance of Melanie Klein

In Melanie Klein I find a reassuring maternal figure. Who would have thought! For, whilst her actual mothering capacities are worthy of considerable interrogation, the conceptualisation that we are all inevitably psychically terrified by the somatic primitive states of infancy and that we can experience these as annihilatory, leading inevitably to internal persecutory states, is strangely reassuring.

Like many therapists, my early environment taught me to read and anticipate the needs of others, and my intelligence and shy interpersonal capacity, combined with my interest from an early age in the religious symbolism of my upbringing, encouraged me towards premature 'symbolic' capacity. The protective psychic structure described by Chris Milton (2014) as the Mercurius complex is, I suggest, common amongst therapists; as children, we prematurely mobilise our intelligence and personal and emotional sensitivity to omnipotently and sometimes heroically navigate frightening external environments, and the terror of our inner worlds, via 'apparent' symbolic capacity, whilst sequestering the depth of emotional disturbance we experience. Clever psychoanalytic interpretations, devoid of any feeling, are one manifestation of such defensive operations.

By contrast, in Klein's (1923; 1940; 1946) writing, I find myself invited to notice my own self-destructive impulses, the tendency towards manic omnipotent therapeutic activity, and the risk of masochistic submission. In recognising these self-destructive possibilities, Klein invites me instead to gradually engage with repair of an inner world that might otherwise run rampant over my vulnerable interior. Her description of the movement from splitting defences to the possibility of mourning and reparation invites me to recognise the powerlessness that manic mercurial therapeutic activity might seek to hide, and to embrace this vulnerability rather than flee from it, in service of a more forgiving and human life.

In this paper, I suggest this is a task for us all: that each of us has within ourselves the capacity to terrorise ourselves, to attack the tender fabric of our being, whether that be by rageful self-criticism, or the apparent opposite, a flight to grandiose narcissistic importance, manic other-helping behaviour, or cruel self-attack in the form of drugs and alcohol, sex and food, putting ourselves on emotional starvation rations, or gluttonously feeding the terrorised body, or any manner of other seductions, so viciously promoted by our technology-infused culture and its corporate economic underpinnings.

In articulating this perspective, I am suggesting that in our attempts to flee from the vulnerability of being a human being, whether in our personal lives and clinical work, or our sociocultural and global context, such manoeuvres necessarily require us to attack the vulnerability and dependency we seek to escape, and in so doing we perpetuate the destruction we see all around us.

Vignette one — Maliki[1]

Patients such as Maliki will stay in my heart forever. When he came to see me his body was wracked by vicious self-harm, his limbs were puffy and swollen, and his pain tangibly visceral as it visited my own body in the form of a tense and anxious fear of getting it wrong. His longing for contact was entirely camouflaged by his physical and psychic retreat. His aching body curled on my couch, his relentless withdrawal and monosyllabic utterances cloaked in suicidal silence. The first half dozen sessions were excruciating. Every word I uttered was pierced by withering withdrawals or prickly rejection. I felt despairing when, as the end of our eighth session approached, despite his attempts to hide it, a tear dribbled from his eye, and my careful enquiry provoked Maliki to tell me ."I'm so lonely". This was the beginning of several years of exploration of how his withdrawal, intended to protect himself, had become a persecutory prison inhabited only by himself and the self-hatred which had overtaken his life. Maliki unfurled before me, slowly revealing the grief, pain, and self-hatred that his gnarled body attempted to evacuate. As I too navigated by my own omniscient flight from powerlessness and vulnerability, I encountered impulses to save him from, rather than feel, his overwhelming distress. He revealed a dream of a face staring out of a foggy window; for some years this representation of his isolation provided a rich and creative vehicle for inviting him, often via forceful therapeutic challenges, to open the window and enter into the terrifying world of human and nonhuman connections.

Klein's infant

As we know, Klein's infant, via projection, perceives apparent somatic inner attack as coming from the external other, the frustrating other hatefully attacking the self, threatening our capacity for going on being (Winnicott, 1963). Bateman and Fonagy (2004), building on Bion, poignantly convey the phenomenology of this persecutory inner world, and suggest projective identification is sometimes a vital process for survival. Phenomenologically, I have suggested, the following as a description that captures something of this experience.

> I hate myself and everything about myself. I have taken this in from a traumatising attacking environment that not only fails to congruently recognise the internal states I experience, but actively attacks these states, invading me with an alien self that persecutes my very being. My only relief is to find a potentially caring other with whom I can get close enough to hate. If another comes close, they represent the deep longing I have that someone somewhere might care enough to reach my

1 All clinical vignettes are composite fictional cases and do not refer to any particular patient.

> terror. And yet they also represent the inevitability that this so-called caring other will become another persecutor determined to attack, abandon, abuse and hurt me. So, I will hurt them first. With all my might. I will attack the attacker that I know is in them. And then they can feel my powerlessness, and I will be relieved, if only briefly, of the terrifying terrorist and their powerless, dissociated victim within me.

Thus, the solution of projective identification, an unconscious act of survival, in which these splitting processes are now inter-personalised, as psyche seeks an interpersonal other, to relieve itself, if only temporarily, from the torment of its internal persecutor. As a patient of mine once offered when reflecting upon her tendency to communicate her tortuous distress via suicidal, immobile, silent, and hostile withdrawal:

> I wanna be stubborn. I want you to feel inadequate and incapable. I want you to feel like you failed. ... because that's how I feel. Failed. I might be resentful towards you. You say you'll do things and then you don't. I can't trust you — rely on you. Ever since I told you it makes me anxious when you lean forward, not a single session has gone by without you doing that — You don't take me seriously — you want to intentionally hurt me. That's OK, I'll hurt you back. ... How do I show you? By creating as much distance between us as possible. I still get anxious though. I really am scared that you're gonna leave — hand me over — lock me up — die soon. I can explain the fear, rationalise it but it doesn't make the fear any less intense. So I'll leave you before you leave me.

Reparation proper

By contrast, central to true repair of the inner world, as Henri Rey (1994) emphasises, is the ongoing development of the capacity to feel without enacting our terror, enabling mourning, self-acceptance, self-forgiveness, and trust in our capacity for creative rather than destructive aggression, even when mistakes are made, allowing us to have faith that fantasised damage can be repaired. This is an inner task as much as an interpersonal or cross-cultural one. Rey (1994) comments,

> The role of the internal [other] is the key to reparation proper ... [T]he achievement of forgiveness through the internal [other] seems to be ... vital ... This would mean that both mourning and tolerance and the capacity for maintenance and care have replaced intolerance and depression. (p. 223)

Patricia Williams (2021) recently published her first book at the age of 88, entitled *From the Mountain to the Sea*. In it, she offers us her contemplations on the natural world and its ordinary and wondrous manifestations. At one point she reflects on her response to reading of guards who worked in World War Two gas chambers. She comments, "I ... don't condemn those Nazi guards (although I utterly abhor their actions) because I truly believe that I'm part of them and they of me; we are only separated by geography and time. To condemn them is to condemn myself." (p. 112). William's recognition that the violence of Nazi guards is "us" and that to

condemn them is to condemn ourselves, I suggest, reflects an inner world in which love, aggression and self-forgiveness can cohabitate, enabling creative rather than destructive responses to ourselves, those around us and the natural world in which we are embedded.

Suicide

In relation to the inner world of suicide, Freud (1917/1950) gestures to the links between suicide and homicide, observing, “The ego can kill itself only if … it can treat itself as an object” (p.252). As Bell (2001) observes:

> [Some] patients … are continuously internally persecuted by an archaic and vengeful superego from which there is no escape: psychic claustrophobia. Its punishing quality is merciless. It inflates quite ordinary faults and failures turning them into crimes that must be punished. In this situation suicide’s submission to the internal tormentors may be felt as a final release. (p. 27)

David Rosen (1993) explores the dynamics of egocide versus suicide; how the magnetic pull of suicide tragically provokes the killing of the physical self, in unconscious preference to the emotional turmoil which is egocide, the death of ego and its protective defences. For some, such inner violence necessary for true repair, is sometimes too unbearable. Sometimes the destructiveness wins. As I write this paper my heart breaks again as I recall the funerals I have attended of patients who have ended their own lives. I am grateful to have colleagues to speak with of this. We all need company for our grief if we are to face the truth of ourselves and of others.

Therapeutic stance of reparation proper

By contrast to avoidance of suicide’s excruciating finality, a therapeutic stance informed by deep faith in the possibility of true repair of the persecutory inner world requires of me the capacity to bear pain: both the emotional pain involved in grieving the hurt and terror that so infuses patients and my own vulnerability, and to bear the guilt arising from fear that aggressive impulses, both my own and my patients, might cause irreparable damage. Instead, I aim to mobilise my therapeutic potency and care against the intrapsychic persecution, and on behalf of the patient’s vulnerability. An often-fierce engagement with the patient’s destructive self-attack emerges. As Mark Thorpe (2016) has noted,

> acceptance of depressive pain is a prerequisite for true reparation. … true reparation implies becoming aware of one’s own aggression. (p. 212)

The therapeutic maxim of “tough when they’re tough, tender when they’re tender” is a helpful guide. The capacity to bear such pain and grief, to accept our guilt without being overly fearful that our aggression might do damage, enables internal forgiveness, in which we forgive the child we were for its desperate needs, and fantasised destructive attacks on the other, in so doing forgiving both the child and our own caregivers, as they exist within us

now, mourning the losses of our early life, enabling gratitude and forgiveness, and disabling paranoid fear and hostile attack.

Vignette 3 — Mandy

Mandy's withdrawal into passive depressive helplessness, whilst raging at her mother's cruelty, was relentless. Whilst her fury at her mother appeared fully justified, the passivity of her rage, and the emotional withdrawal of all energy for life, was slowly killing not only her soul, but her body. To confront the destructiveness of her despair required that I trust the potency of my challenge, as I sought to consistently feel the depth of her distressing pain, whilst challenging her that her withdrawal was only enacting and repeating an identification with her mother's cruelty; rather I would challenge her about her desire to learn to surf the waves of life, that, "you are not going to learn to surf by sitting on the beach." In mobilising my therapeutic potency, I also had to get into the waves, surfing my fear that my potency might cause damage. In turn, Mandy needed to allow her fury at me for the directness of my challenge, gradually discovering her trust that her fury would find a home in my body and mind, without collapse or retaliation, and that slowly she might learn to redirect her aggression in order that it might serve her own life force.

Shame

So often, underpinning such dynamics is shame. The unwillingness to bare the vulnerability so often soaked in shame by early relational histories that have made our fear, our tenderness, bad, and wrong, and thus to be banished, attacked, sequestered, cut out, and tragically, sometimes killed. To engage in true repair of the inner world, both our patients and our own, is to avoid the reactive temptations of retaliation, "Fuck you", "Well, fuck you, too", submission, "I'm sorry, *mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa*", or bystander avoidance, "perhaps Dr Omniscient Love, whose office is across the road, will be a better therapist for you than me." Rather, we must bear the pain and beauty of our importance to each other, even as shame, fear and guilt attempt to derail us; we must seek to go towards what is most distressing: "it seems like something painful has happened between us, can we explore this together?"

Collective omnipotent destructiveness

As I suggested in the abstract of this paper, just as these persecutory horrors tyrannise our inner life and those of our patients, particularly those for whom love and hate has not been well mediated in early life, so the flight from these states fuels the manic destruction we see all around us.

Cross-culturally

Cross-culturally in Aotearoa New Zealand I suggest these relentless and hateful dynamics are revealed in the shame that motivates our flight from knowing, much less feeling, the grief that haunts us, the ghosts of our dissociated violent colonial and migrant histories.

Abraham and Torok (1994) suggest that transgenerational trauma is encapsulated through entombment via silence, "the words that cannot be uttered, the scenes that cannot be recalled, the tears that cannot be shared, everything will be swallowed along with the trauma that led to the loss. Swallowed and preserved." (p. 130).

In Aotearoa New Zealand silence entombs grief and violence that must be felt if our histories are to be meaningfully and honestly met. Patricia Williams' (2021) words that to condemn Nazi guards is "to condemn myself" is in stark contrast to the notion which infused the collective after the Christchurch Mosque attacks in March 2019, that "they", the victims of this horrific violence, are "us", and "he", the perpetrator of the violence is, as Prime Minister of the time Jacinda Ardern articulated, "not us". Such a stance disassociates, denies, and avoids the history of this country, a history in part built, as Anne Salmond (2019) subsequently pointed out, on the notion of "white supremacy".

Many of my patients have revealed that, in their cultural difference, they feel a mixture of the fear that I will perpetrate an attack on their racialised selves, as has so often happened in the past, mixed with the introjected shame of cross-cultural colonial and/or racialised contact, in which the dark other must see themselves in the white man's eyes. They feel the impulse on the one hand to aggressively assert their difference and attack me for my privileged otherness, whilst testing whether I can possibly glimpse an understanding of their difference, or, on the other hand the temptation to defensively idealise my whiteness, to create me as the saviour, to rescue them from their dark badness. The white superego and the black id. To accept this emotional challenge is to avoid the temptations of manic restoration that Rey (1994) described, in which I, the guilty white person, seeks absolution for the violent aggression of my ancestors, by manic restoration in the form of submission, guilt or idealisation, or the opposite, reactive denial or impotent bystander avoidance.

I suggest that central to this task is a shared labour of relational mourning (Gerson, 2009). The losses are profound. Yet most of us decline Akhtar's (1999) poignant invitation to embrace the painful task of ongoing mourning to which our immigrant histories gesture, tempted by submission to the feeling that something bad has happened so someone must be bad, either the monkeys which Māori were constructed as being during the colonial project, or the white British descendant whose cruelty is perceived as inarguable.

But when guilt and shame do not predominate, then we can misunderstand each other, be in aggressive states with each other, and stay. As the most punitive aspects of my own archaic superego have gradually repaired, and I am no longer so persecuted by an inner world that proclaims my cultural badness, I am more and more able to meet with love, aggression, and tenderness the cultural other, as they are able to do the same with me. This was one of Hinewirangi Kohu Morgan's many gifts to us: her willingness to be in affectively charged emotional contexts with us all, and to stay.

Perhaps we can all learn lessons from our profession's painful history regarding psychotherapeutic responses to same-sex sexual desire. I was both horrified and inspired to note our APANZ ancestor and former President Basil James's destructiveness, and subsequent honesty. In 1962, he wrote a paper entitled *Case of homosexuality treated by aversion therapy*. Subsequent to his dangerous pathologising of homosexuality, James, in 1999, offered an emotional reflection in which he regretted the harm which he had perpetrated. Guy (2000) quoted James as writing that,

> The treatment of the [homosexual] patient which I published not only, it now seems to me, sought to incorporate some of the avant garde thinking of the day (learning theory) but much more importantly, helped me to deal with my *helplessness and ignorance*. [Emphasis added] (p. 117)

Helplessness and ignorance. Perhaps the feeling psychotherapists most fear is helplessness. We will do anything but feel helpless. James hints at the possibility of transformation that exists in managing to bear our helplessness, of not being captured by the need to fix, heal, and cure. Can I bear the possibility of feeling something and knowing nothing?

And so, to the climate imperative

In the Latin class of my adolescence, I found an exhilarating solace in the myth of Icarus. It was the thrill of the flight to the sun which stayed burned in my memory. Those magnificent wings, fixed by wax, seemed to offer a magical flight to freedom. My young mind could not hold in mind the trauma of Icarus's fall to his death, nor of his father's, Daedalus's, unremitting grief. I used to think psychotherapy was about the flight, the all-powerful omnipotent flight to freedom. Now I recognise it is about the fall, falling into our vulnerability, humanity, and our embeddedness in the natural world.

At a global level Donna Orange (2016) links shame about our colonial and empire building histories to the climate imperative with which we all are faced, and which perhaps fuels our Icarus-like manic flight, encouraged by an economic consumer imperative, whose history goes back to the fabrication of New Zealand, in which colonial empire building, and its enlightenment faith in the racialised hierarchy of being, and the value of progress and commerce, informed the manifestation of colonial New Zealand as a resource to be farmed and a natural environment to be bought and sold, a food basket to be put in refrigerators and eventually supermarkets, distancing ourselves from the natural world upon which we are so utterly dependent and entwined.

Claire Miranda (2022) notes that Orange describes how shame about "the ecological crisis" creates "an evasion of knowing" (2022, p.26). Shame for those of British ancestry living in Aotearoa New Zealand, in relation to our colonial history, is in equal measure, both profound and dissociated, colonial European history in which psychoanalysis is banned, thinking about feeling is subsumed under the mantra of Jock Phillips' *A man's country* (1996), the unfeeling man alone, enabling our self-hatred to be banished from consciousness. In so doing we wilfully refuse encountering the shame of our histories. And as Jessica Benjamin (2018) has described, we avoid:

> the intense fear … of admitting the truth of harming because the loss of goodness is intolerable to the rigidly organised psyche. The fear of losing goodness expresses itself in a sense of being unfairly attacked, rather than being asked to take responsibility. The consequent denial of harming … The attachment to identity becomes organised by the imaginary battle of "only one can live". (p. 247)

Thus, just as we are challenged in the clinical room to bare our own vulnerability, neither fleeing into manic action, nor submitting to cruel attack, so in relation to the natural world we are faced with the enormous task of grieving and feeling guilt without being immobilised, neither fleeing from the damage caused, nor the shame we might feel for the pain inflicted by our degradation of the natural world.

My most recent analyst is fond of reminding me, "you are unimportant, and the fact that you are unimportant, is unimportant." I recognise in these words the risk that attachment to our unimportance can lead to the futile belief that we can do nothing. "What's the point … The Earth is fucked and so are we … Let's flee to a destructive technological distraction, or drown ourselves in depressive apathy, or retaliate by hating each other across constructions of gender, age, and nationhood, as society turns its destructive hate upon itself."

There is however an alternative. For where Thanatos lurks, so too does Eros.

Whilst I find Melanie Klein helpful in navigating the terrors of the persecuted inner world, a Kleinian view of the nature of psyche is ultimately insufficient for the challenges we face. Rather, I suggest that if we can bear the pain, grief, and anxiety in relation to our own guilt and aggression, then gradually our grief might transform to empathy, anxiety into determination, other and self-attack into potent action, and guilt into acts of restoration and reparation. Such a perspective opens me to the transpersonal possibilities of psyche.

Jung suggests that the mourning and recognition of internal goodness, involved in reparation proper, ultimately involves the death of our habitual self-destructive ego attitude, whose monarchy is so tempted to rule with omnipotent narcissism. The temptations of global suicide over collective egocide loom large in the climate imperative, so frightening is it to give up our relentless defensive pursuit of omnipotence over the natural world. In contrast to global ecological suicide, Lucy Husckinson (2002) invites us to consider the creative potential if we can surrender to the inner violence that might give birth to the truth of our vulnerability, in which the ego dies to the Transpersonal Self and openness to the creativity of the numinous is enabled. She writes:

> Violence … describes the destruction necessary to initiate the vital creative process of individuation, and the Self is "violent" because it is experienced as an overwhelming force that violates the self-containment of the ego and forces the ego, often against its will, into a new identity. (p.438)

Recently, following attendance at a group analytic workshop, in which themes of transgenerational trauma arose, I had the following dream.

> I was at a bookstore. I had my six-year-old son with me. I explained to my son that we were going to the bookstore to try and find the existence of an extremely rare coin, indeed, the only one in the world. It had come from Ireland, several centuries ago, to Aotearoa New Zealand. We wanted to know how it got to New Zealand. The bookstore owner said that he did not have the coin, but they had a book that had been written about the history of the coin and how it had come to be in New Zealand. I thought to myself, as I leant down to my son, "Wow this really must be a precious coin, if they've written a whole book about it!"

In the maelstrom of cultural transgenerational trauma which the workshop had evoked in me, this dream had revealed a greater conjunction between the young boy in me, and the man, who reclaimed in this precious unique Irish coin a transpersonal culturally mediated self, an Irish self, to be appreciated, a history to be understood, neither dissociated and denied, nor subsumed in postcolonial Pākehā guilt, but appreciated, in service of meeting the other with humility and potency and truth.

In summary

French analyst Jean Laplanche (1987) has suggested "All work is the work of mourning" (p. 298, cited in Davey, 2000, p. 59). 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.

Moreover, 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 COVID 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. The recent floods and their relationship to the climate imperative 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.

To conclude

To surrender to this grief is not to submit to hopelessness and despair, but to enable the birth of hope and creativity. The Czech statesman and writer Václav Havel describes, in his 1991 book, *Disturbing the Peace*, his distinction between hope and optimism, which he recognises can disguise a manic flight from truth. He writes:

> Hope is not prognostication. … It transcends the world that is immediately experienced, and is anchored somewhere beyond its horizons … The more uncompromising the situation in which we demonstrate hope, the deeper that hope is. Hope is not the same thing as optimism. It is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense regardless of how it turns out. In short, I think that the deepest and most important form of hope, the only

> one that can keep us above water and urge us to good works, and the only true source of the breath-taking dimension of the human spirit and its efforts, is something we get, as it were, from 'elsewhere'. It is also this hope, above all, that gives us the strength to live and continually to try new things, even in conditions that seem as hopeless as ours do, here and now. (pp. 181–182)

I like the phrase "climate imperative", for the word "imperative" suggests that something can be and must be felt, and thought, and acted upon. That reparation does not mean submission.

During cyclone Gabrielle, I woke to discover that my clinical office had flooded. The devastation which was the Auckland floods had crept stealthily into my office. My office became a building site, as floorboards were replaced, gib board stripped away in preparation for restoration. Whilst emotionally and physically demanding, the clean-up has not been too arduous, and the damage, distressing but not devastating. Nevertheless, nature's power rocked me, attempting I think to wake me from my somnolent desire to avoid the seemingly inevitable destruction we all face. Slowly, I began to glimpse how disturbingly uncomfortable I felt about my own contribution to the climate-induced destruction I saw around me, and how terrified I felt about the distress of others who, on this occasion, had been so much more devastatingly affected. Now, I find destructive forces inside me, tempting me to escape, to give up on the futility of therapeutic activity, and to avoid facing my contributions to environmental destruction. But in facing this as honestly as I can, I find something new growing. I have ripped up the concrete that surrounds my clinical office, doing something I had intended to do for several years, to grow a garden, ferns and flowers, where previously there had been only asphalt. Is this futile, naïve, privileged, defensive … or is it truthful? A small, perhaps unimportant action, filled with meaning. I am unimportant, and the fact that I am unimportant, is unimportant.

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John O'Connor is a registered psychotherapist (PBANZ), accredited Jungian analyst (ANZSJA), and NZAC counsellor, and has worked in clinical practice for over 35 years. He has extensive clinical experience, particularly in working with patients with severe trauma histories, in providing group psychotherapy and clinical supervision, and in working cross culturally. He is a former Director of Youthline Counselling Service (Auckland) and the Human Development and Training Institute (HDT). He also formerly worked at Segar House (which is part of ADHB Mental Health Services) and was a founding member of the therapeutic team at Segar which developed a residential treatment service (currently operating as a day programme) for patients with personality disorder diagnoses. He worked as a lecturer at the Auckland University of Technology (AUT) within the Psychotherapy Discipline between 1999 and 2019 and was formerly Programme Leader of the Master of Psychotherapy (adult programme) at AUT. He is the current Chair of the Association of Psychotherapists Aotearoa New Zealand (APANZ) Advanced Clinical Practice (ACP) psychotherapy training pathway, is co-editor of *Ata: Journal of Psychotherapy Aotearoa New Zealand,* and is the current President of APANZ. John currently conducts a private practice in Mangere Bridge. He is undertaking his PhD exploring the discourses underpinning the making possible of psychotherapy as a clinical practice in Aotearoa New Zealand. Phone 021 899 261. Email: johnnygj@xtra.co.nz