

EDITORIAL

This issue, 37.1, marks an important point in the evolution of *Existential Analysis*. The first issue in 1990 followed the SEA Founding Conference and since then we have published some sixty-five issues and over a thousand papers and reviews. Thirty-seven years ago the publishing and communications world was very different. Digitalisation of documents was a specialist technical application and although home computers were available, they were very expensive and websites only began to emerge in the mid-Nineties. The first smartphone appeared in the mid-2000s.

The change we are referring to is that you are most likely to be reading a digital version of this issue, rather than the usual paper version. One reason for the change has been increasing postage costs for a membership which is currently over six-hundred and growing. Additional readership of *Existential Analysis* is hard to estimate but is considerably more, and this is aided by digitalisation. The main reason though is that more and more people prefer to read online. We are now in a digital age. Of course, paper copies of *Existential Analysis* will still be available for those who wish to have one.

Since 1990 the therapy world has also changed enormously and existential therapy, which hardly existed in 1990, is now a major international influence and for this we can thank the foresight, passion and energy not just of the initial founders but also all the people who have written, published, discussed, debated, taught and promoted it since that time.

Existentially of course, the change is not just about convenience; digitalisation has implications for how we live. Within existentialism there are many debates but one thing there is agreement about is our dynamic nature. The world, our world, our being-in-the-world, changes. We are change. We are co-constituted by change. Having said that, there is always a tension between change and stasis. Change makes us anxious because we do not know what will happen. This is an unsolvable dilemma that we live every day. It is an everyday dilemma.

Hand-in-hand with digitalisation and electronically mediated communication has been the exponential development of Artificial Intelligence (AI). *Existential Analysis* has also embraced this in the sense that from this issue we have a policy about the use of AI in the papers we publish. In this issue it is on the inside back cover.

The way we use technology changes how we see ourselves. The development of the wheel changed not just transport but also agriculture and warfare. And while the printing press democratised knowledge as well as changing the way we communicate with each other; it also became a medium for

the exploitation of power. Before the printing press there were few books, and reading and writing were skills practiced only by the powerful elites.

Perhaps our most characteristic feature as human beings is that we are future-directed, we are able to translate imagination into reality by touching, feeling and manipulating physical objects and making things with our hands. But although there will undoubtedly be benefits to technologies like AI, one of the changes we can already see is a reduction in manual skills. A simple example of this is that handwriting is becoming less common. Many people prefer the ease of typing and automatic spell-checking to the hard work of handwriting. Although fingerprints predated the signature, they are both prototypical autographical marks, they are both archetypal ways we say “This is me and no one else”. Although there are national styles of handwriting, every individual’s handwriting is different. With typing this disappears, our identity becomes reduced and we become merely a name. We become digital rather than human.

When we use technologies like AI in our everyday life – and they are hard to avoid – they may make life easier, but they make living more difficult. Moreover, research has shown that the more we use these technologies to solve problems, the more we see life as a technical problem with a predetermined solution, and the less we learn how to solve problems ourselves and the less we can own our unique and personal solutions. We can see this in the tendency to diagnosis and medicalisation of the challenges of everyday life. The term ‘cognitive offload’ has been used to describe how we use technology to save us some mental effort. Like using a calculator to add up, or a GPS instead of reading a map. We can extend this to describe existential offload which is when we use technology to avoid these challenges. This leads us to lose sight of the existential truth that by being active and not passive, by persevering and overcoming failure, we can develop creativity, humility, agency and respect for the human as well as the material world. When we access predetermined solutions we imagine we can get something without having to work for it, but this means that we do not learn resilience. The use of AI, artificial intelligence, can limit the development of HI, human intelligence.

Existentially, the use of AI to aid writing presents some obvious challenges. The most obvious is ethical. In what sense can a piece of writing produced by AI from notes given to it by a person, be described as written by that person? And is it ethical for that person to claim authorship when it has been ‘written’ behind the scenes by someone in a tech company in order to make money for that company? Another issue is that of personal style. In addition to every individual’s handwriting looking different, people have different ways of expressing themselves and it is these that make the piece of writing human and unique to them. Using AI to write removes

this and while the end result may be slicker, it also becomes impersonal and more homogeneous. Literally, anyone could have ‘written’ it. The value of everything we read lies not just in the content, it lies in the fact that this particular author has chosen to express themselves in this way.

Using AI for writing takes the agency, the challenge, out of writing. It makes writing passive, not active. The writer does not have to struggle to find the right words to say what he or she means. And because of this the writer also ends up with a less profound understanding of what has been written. Consequently, individual style, idiosyncratic syntax and a distinctive personal vocabulary is replaced by bland processed homogeneity in which the writer becomes hidden behind an algorithm, and the issue of who has responsibility for what becomes mystified. The consequence of this incursion of technology into everyday life constitutes a gradual erosion of our agency in the name of convenience and the cost to our being, our Being, is enormous.

The papers in this online issue of *Existential Analysis* make a valuable contribution to the impressive body of scholarship that, as we have noted, has accumulated since its founding in 1990. It opens with five papers based on presentations given at the Society of Existential Analysis Conference held in London on 8th November 2025. Each responds to the conference theme, ‘Right Here, Right Now: The existentialist’s role today’, which invited reflection on how existential practitioners remain grounded and relevant amid the demands of contemporary life. Next we feature one more paper, authored by Dr Xuefu Wang, from the Existential Movement’s inaugural conference held online in February 2025, ‘Into the Wild Woods: Existential responses to turbulent times’; this concludes a series of contributions from the conference which began in the July 2025 issue of this journal.

These are followed by six papers which focus on various aspects of existential theory and practice. We have decided to reprint a paper by Andrea Sabbadini, who died on 11 July 2025. Andrea will be known to many of our readers as an early contributor to the Journal. The paper we have chosen, ‘Existential analysis and psychoanalysis: Some points of contact’, appeared in the 1990 Founding Conference edition of this Journal, and it illustrates well the way in which Andrea sought to encourage creative dialogue between these two fields. Prof Emmy van Deurzen’s appreciation of Andrea and his oeuvre expands on this and provides an ideal overview for readers wishing to explore this further.

We also include a comprehensive appreciation of Naomi Stadlen, who died on 6th June 2025. This is authored by Dr Claire Arnold-Baker, who reflects, alongside NSPC research supervisees and colleagues, on their experiences of working with her, and on her contribution to the literature on families and, in particular, on mothering.

We conclude as ever with our Book Reviews section. Ondine Smulders, our book reviews editor, has brought together informative and inspiring discussions of five publications likely to be of interest to readers concerned with existential-phenomenological analysis and its application to therapeutic practice and everyday life.

Prof Simon du Plock
Dr Martin Adams