

Teaching ‘origins of depth psychology’: overview and candidate-members’ experience

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Abstract: In 2002 the North Pacific Institute inaugurated a new seminar series on the ‘origins of depth psychology’ for incoming candidate-members.¹ This approach emphasized the historical and cultural embeddedness of analytic theory, practice and institutions. The seminar was experienced as enlightening and freeing, as well as sometimes painfully disillusioning. The overall feedback indicated that it fostered an opening of creative space for their education as analysts. This paper² describes the structure, and some of the rationale and process of the seminar. It includes firsthand expressions of the candidate-members’ experiences.

Key words: embeddedness, candidate-member, immersion, potential space

When our analytic training programme re-commenced in 2002 the training committee asked me to organize a ten-week seminar on the ‘origins of depth psychology’. It was the very first training experience for our new candidate-members.

It was conceived as an ‘immersion’ experience. The explicit goals were: (1) to develop a sense of the cultural and historical embeddedness of ‘depth psychology’, and how its theories and practices emerged from their contexts; (2) to learn about the evolution of Jungian institutes and training within their larger milieux, including some of the problems and conflicts that arose. An implicit goal was to set a tone of critical inquiry and scholarship that would last through training and beyond.

Such an ‘immersion’ experience made clear that fallible human beings in their concrete personal, cultural, and historical circumstances created analytic

¹ In an attempt to lessen the hierarchical feeling of the term ‘candidate’, our group has adopted the term ‘candidate-member’. The acceptance of this term has been varied. Some analyst-members always use it, some sometimes do, and some never do.

² This paper was presented at a workshop at the *Journal of Analytical Psychology* Conference, ‘Jungian Analytic Training for the 21st Century: New Contexts and New Directions’, McGill University, Montreal, 16th – 18th June 2006.

theory and practice. This approach was sometimes threatening. It often broke down idealizations, which was sometimes painful and anxiety-provoking. More importantly from an educational point of view, it opened the way for future learning and the development of individual approaches to analytic thought and practice. Rather than becoming memorizers of ‘the known’, candidate-members generally felt encouraged to think critically and creatively.

My view was (and still is) that the seminar members were mature people, and it was a matter of respect to discuss the significant issues in a frank and open manner. They ranged in age from the forties into the sixties and had many years of clinical experience. Most had had lengthy analyses before entering our training programme. It would have been condescending and infantilizing to ‘protect’ them from the truth—as best as we can know it—of the origins of depth psychology. As shown by their responses to the seminar, our candidate-members were mature and capable adults, well able to withstand any ‘traumas’ that arose from encountering some of the problematic origins of the analytic world and its idealized founders.

Understanding the vulnerable humanity and embeddedness of these revered figures humanized them and led to a more solid ground for the appreciation of their work. It lessened the tendency toward an unrealistic ego-ideal stemming from over-idealization of our ‘ancestors’. Such an idealization often invokes a severe superego reaction when we—invariably, in our difficult and uncertain profession—fall far short of the ideal. This is a factor that often haunts institutes and analysts of every persuasion. The sense of relative ‘failure’ to live up to an unrealistic clinical ideal often leads to chronic guilt and shame, anxiety, envy, and interpersonal conflicts. Lessening the idealization can in turn lessen the oppression of the super-ego (Colman 2006). There are indeed no ‘pure’ paragons.

One could see the goal of education, similar to the goal of analysis, as encouraging the unveiling of a potential space, a ‘thirdness’. This involves tolerating uncertainty. One could call the absence of thirdness ‘a corollary of the individual’s inability to maintain a sense of potential space in their experience of themselves and the world’ (Slavin 2007). Without this potential space one is stuck in a world that is fixed and concrete. The best analysis and the best education foster the opening of such a space where individual agency and creative thought can emerge.

The closedness of the analytic world and its frequent avoidance of genuine discourse has led to a tendency toward concreteness and fixedness in the passing on of knowledge. Critical thinking has often been seen as disloyalty to revered elders. That is, analytic training is particularly prone to function as a dependency, basic assumption group (Bion 1961; Colman 2006). In such groups, ‘members perceive the leader as omnipotent and omniscient and themselves as inadequate, immature and incompetent. They match their idealization of the leader with efforts to extract knowledge, power and goodness from him’ (Kernberg 1998, p. 4).

The seminar on 'origins of depth psychology' was to some degree similar to the university model. All of us who have been in the academic world know its drawbacks. However 'at their best [the university] represents the pinnacle of Western, humanistic endeavors, the broad quest for the advancement of human knowledge regardless of disciplinary boundaries and at the risk of challenging the comfortable and the known' (Slavin 2007).

The readings for the seminar included Ellenberger's *Discovery of the Unconscious* (1970); *Freud: Darkness in the Midst of Vision* by Breger (2000); *Jung and the Making of Modern Psychology* by Shamdasani (2003); and Kirsch's *The Jungians* (2000). Acquaintance with *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (Jung 1963) and one major biography of Jung was required. Articles by K. Eisold and D. Kirsner on the vicissitudes of analytic institutes were provided, as well as many others that added to the general background. Seminar participants took turns in presenting the material, and a paper was required at the end of the series.

My introductory lecture was intended to set the tone and frame the series, and in order to convey the atmosphere I will describe the seminar process in some detail.

First I brought in a round mirror about three feet (a metre) in diameter and sat it on the floor at the centre of our circled chairs in the seminar room. Then I placed a wine cork in the middle of the mirror and asked the question, 'How does this cork get to know itself?' Eventually I added several other corks of different colours and posed the same question.

As you might imagine, there was an initial silence with some puzzled looks. The sense of the mirror's power predominated at first. It felt a bit uncanny. They soon began to play with it as a metaphorical display of the culture and history into which we are all originally 'thrown'. They said such things as, 'Then, do we become what we see in the mirror, what's mirrored back to us?' 'Do we imitate our reflections?' 'It feels like we're prisoners of our reflections!'

This eventuated in wondering whether we can know anything except in terms of what we see in the mirror. Does this context determine how we see ourselves as well as others? Is the individual ever 'free' from a context? 'How does the self emerge out of this. . .or is it already there?'

The image of embeddedness with its mind-boggling questions set a tone that stuck with the participants over time. 'Embeddedness' became a leitmotif for the seminar.

Following upon the mirror example, I provided some perspectives on the study of history and culture. For instance:

1. (Jung 1946, paras. 340-42). In *CW 8, The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche*, Jung expressed how difficult it is to detect the philosophical assumptions of one's own time: 'We must ask ourselves how the spirit of an age gains such uncanny power. . . it is. . . a prejudice so deeply rooted that until we give it proper consideration we cannot even approach the problem

- of the [individual] psyche. . . It is an ethnopsychological problem, and as such cannot be treated in terms of *individual* (my italics) consciousness. . .’
2. (Greenberg 2001): ‘For better or worse, ours is not a discipline in which new discoveries are likely to be made. . . Every one of our major themes has been explored and written about for over two thousand years. . . When we see ourselves as knowing something never known before, we run the risk of cutting ourselves off from our history, both the hundred-year history of psychoanalysis and the larger history of discourse in the humanities’.
 3. (Bakhtin 1986, p. 146): ‘There can be neither a first nor a last meaning; [anything that can be understood] always exists among other meanings as a link in the chain of meaning, which in its totality is the only thing that can be real. In historical life this chain continues infinitely, and therefore each link in it is renewed again and again, as though it were being reborn’.

After this introductory material, I proceeded to a more specific study of history and historiography by discussing the evolution of ‘modernity’ over the last 400 years, along with the emergence of late modernity or the ‘post-modern’. Steven Toulmin’s book *Cosmopolis* (1990) was the main source in describing the transition from the ‘pre-modern’, to the ‘modern’, to the ‘post-modern’.

According to Toulmin, Renaissance modernity emerged during the late 1400s to the early 1600s, which he also terms the pre-modern. An urbane open-mindedness and sceptical tolerance were novel features of a new lay culture. Human modesty alone, they argued, should teach us the limitations of our ability to reach unquestioned ‘truth’ or unqualified ‘certainty’. Influenced by Aristotle, theoretical issues were balanced by attention to practice and context.

In the first half of the 17th Century, the Thirty Years War, a little ice age in Europe, and an economic depression following the end of Spain’s plunder of its American colonies contributed to deepened cultural anxiety. Toulmin’s view is that, in response to this situation, a ‘counter-renaissance’ ensued, which gave birth to what we know as ‘modernity’.

Attitudes changed in important ways with the emergence of modernity. Most especially there was an increasing quest for ‘certainty’. Descartes was the symbolic figure of this search. Formal, logical truth became more valued than the embodied process of argument. There was a flight into the universal, and away from the particular. Emotion was increasingly seen as a lesser thing, a distraction from ‘truth’. Such views are parts of the mirror we have inherited, and they still prejudice our theories and practices (Scott 1998).

In our own time, factors such as the shocks of World Wars and genocide provoked a shift in the zeitgeist that Toulmin termed the ‘late modern’ or ‘post-modern’. It encompassed a spirit of scepticism about human perfection and a renewed emphasis on embodied contextuality. One could see this as a partial return to something resembling the pre-modern or renaissance modernity. There was a re-emphasis on discursive thought, on phenomenology, on particulars and ‘local knowledge’, and a stress on ethics and practice in philosophy. Last but

not least 'depth psychology' emerged, with its emphasis on emotions and the non-rational.

This perspective helped candidate-members understand some of the conflicts between the modern and post-modern in contemporary analytical psychology. For instance, Jung searched for the certainty of a scientific psychology on the one hand, but on the other was all too aware of the limitations imposed by the 'personal equation' (Shamdasani 2003, pp. 30-31; pp. 75-77). This has been reflected in many of the theoretical issues discussed in the *Journal of Analytical Psychology*; for instance, the archetype as a timeless essence, as a 'thing in itself', versus the archetype as an emergent entity that is culturally and biologically embedded. Now when candidate-members read such articles they better understand the background and context of such issues.

I concluded my introductory lecture by repeating the questions that we might ponder during the course of the seminar: If all theories have their personal-historical-cultural biases, what does this say about all of our theorizing? What claims to 'truth' can we make? In what unconscious waters of history do we now swim? And how does the specific history of depth psychology affect us now, as reflected in our analytic institutions; how do we live it, and how does it live us?

We went on to study Henri Ellenberger's *Discovery of the Unconscious*. The candidate-members responded very positively to the book's richness of context and balanced perspective, as well as the author's concept of 'creative illness'. He portrayed depth psychology as originating in the personal emotional crises of its progenitors, and as the manifestation of their search for self-healing and meaning. Beginning with early shamanic practice, and continuing through hypnosis and the evolution of psychoanalysis, it is an 'alive' history, and provoked much animated discussion. The candidate-members were often excited to find, for instance, some of the similarities between Mesmer's practices and some theories and practices today, and the social context of hypnosis and the role of hypnosis in analytical theorizing.³ The degree to which Freud and Jung's ideas were already present in the intellectual culture of their times was often striking to them, as well as the often unappreciated influence of Pierre Janet.

After the three Ellenberger seminars I invited several senior psychoanalysts to discuss their own traditions. During the seminar the guest analyst spent two meetings discussing Louis Breger's thoughtful biography of Freud, which included a balanced perspective on Jung and the psychoanalytic movement. This approach was universally well received, especially by those who had never before

³ For instance, Mesmer's emphasis on the doctor's 'animal magnetism' vis à vis the patient was an early version of transference; the belief in a 'universal fluid' that needed to be 'balanced' is similar to psychic energy and its emotional regulation; his observations about the interpenetrations of a 'universal fluid' presaged ideas such as projective identification. In addition, the hypnotists were generally of a higher social class than their patients (Ellenberger 1970, pp. 56-64).

encountered a ‘real, live’ psychoanalyst! The guest analysts have consistently enjoyed the experience, and it has helped nurture our local ecumenical spirit.⁴ It provided new and different perspectives, and was a living encounter with the broader culture of the world of analysis. No longer was the psychoanalytic other so ‘other’.

We spent at least two seminar sessions on Shamdasani’s book, *Jung and the Making of Modern Psychology*. The participants rotated with presentations to begin the meetings. Shamdasani’s book, although difficult for some because of its intellectual detail and density, was a fruitful vehicle for understanding the contexts and development of Jung’s ideas. They often mentioned using it as a valuable, continuing resource.

For the last session we read parts of Thomas Kirsch’s book on the history of the major institutes, and discussed how our local group fitted into that context. Using the work of Eisold and Kirsner, we concluded by discussing the history of conflicts within institutes that have sometimes led to various splits and feuds. This is all by way of helping these new candidate-members learn their own place in the culture of analytical psychology, in its problems as well as its glories. This was sometimes a bit of a shock! They began to understand that such conflicts have their roots in the specific history of psychoanalysis, as well as in a broader cultural and intellectual history. The various modern and post-modern perspectives they saw in analytical psychology were now seen as attempts to resolve, transcend, or at least clarify some of these issues.

The new candidate-members were accepted in mid-summer and I sent them the syllabus and reading assignments a couple of weeks after that, so that they could begin their studies. There were mild complaints about the demands of the reading, but on the whole they responded to the challenge with enthusiasm.

The majority eventually tended to view the seminar as having been a useful, even essential, foundation and perspective for their education as analysts. Negative reactions were mostly about the traumatic effect of the seminar on previous idealizations of Jung and of the organizations and culture of analytical psychology. At times a lot of patient, non-reactive containment on the part of the seminar leader was required.

The expectations and mindsets of the candidate-members varied widely. I recently asked for feedback from the eleven seminar participants from two and four years ago. Interestingly—and I think significantly—there was a 100%

⁴ On both the trainee and analyst levels, there has been a great deal of interaction between our own institute and the three psychoanalytic institutes in Seattle. For instance during the period of the ‘origins’ seminar there was an ongoing monthly colloquium attended by many analysts and candidate-members of all the institutes. Clinical presentations were rotated between the institutes. In fact, our own seminars are still held in space rented to us by the local Object Relations institute. This ecumenical atmosphere has helped decrease mutual suspicion and projection.

response to my request.⁵ A sampling of their comments will give you a better sense of their learning experience than anything I could say.

One person wrote:

I thought that that seminar was pivotal in my training, giving the entirety of my training thus far a context in which to place Jung and his analytical psychology. Ellenberger’s was a horrendously long book, but worth every minute we gave to it. . . I would recommend that every training programme ‘endure’ such a gruelling first initiatory experience, because without it Jung exists as a man—or worse a concept—out of time and place.

Another:

Beginning analytic training with ‘Origins of Depth Psychology’ provided an internal structure like a backbone—a framework. . . I have benefited from this foundation not only in understanding the development of the ideas of these pioneers, but it has also provided me with a context within which to organize my own personal development. . .

Another:

This was a masterful strategy of debunking the religion of Jung and of throwing me into a contained psychotic void from which I have. . . only more questions. I would entitle this stage of my training as. . . ‘Training as the death bearing stranger!’ [However]. . . In the course of my training. . . my artistic endeavours have become more prolific and I want to write more. Was that your intention by grounding us in the sacred cesspool of our historic Ganges?

Another:

What I recall is the mirror and the corks that emphasized its characteristics. It has remained with me as a metaphor. It has reminded me of the mind that sees through a glass darkly and never what is really there.

Another:

In summary I would say it was a most painful seminar for [me] as it cut into my desire for certainty [regarding] Jungian Psychology and Jung as the. . . [wisest] one we could emulate. I knew intellectually this was not true. . . yet [I had] my shadow side of wanting to. . . arrive in this world and. . . be perfect. . . to assist the world to be perfect back. . . [I called] this seminar. . . ‘The debunking of Jung’ at a time when I felt I had given my life and blood to learn at his feet. . . four years later I can deeply say thank you for challenging me from the word go to live with the ambiguity of the uncertainty of training programmes, analytic process, the world at large, and most of all being human myself.

⁵ Seminar leaders do not give formal or informal reports on candidate-members to the Training Committee, so the responses were not attributable to meeting a requirement or fearing a negative evaluation. A positive transference to me as a seminar leader with certain values was certainly part of the picture, and one shouldn’t underestimate the desire to retain the good opinion of a senior analyst. However, my basic evaluation is that the seminar continued to be creatively psychoactive more than four years after completion, and I see that as a very positive result.

Finally:

The history seminar laid the groundwork for our studies. You are able to see the ongoing dialogue and better grasp your own place in the dialogue. It gives you permission to be yourself. It's too easy to get into a cult mentality if you don't see the embeddedness of your own organization.

Conclusion

Both from the feedback and my own impressions, I concluded that the seminar achieved its goals and laid a solid ground for future studies. It set a tone of scholarship and critical questioning that encouraged creativity and fostered a fair amount of personal evolution. It was clearly not pain-free! The seminar process provoked significant anxiety in some, and there were elements of loss and grief and sometimes anger. However, traversing the gaps and voids seemed to open the way for a space of deepened learning and creativity.

My Seattle colleagues have been very supportive of this approach. Some have advocated that the seminar be given later in training, but in my opinion providing such an initial context was not only worthwhile but also essential. It helped open a space for thought and imagination, and encouraged an attitude of honesty and openness. It respected the integrity and maturity of the candidate-members. After teaching it twice, I couldn't imagine beginning training without such an immersion in our origins.

TRANSLATIONS OF ABSTRACT

En 2002, le North Pacific Institute inaugura à l'intention des nouveaux candidats un séminaire sur «les origines de la psychologie des profondeurs». L'accent y était mis sur le contexte historique et culturel des idées analytiques. Certains participants vécurent ce séminaire comme libérateur et d'autres en retirèrent une amère désillusion. L'ensemble des réactions indique que ce cycle favorisa une plus grande créativité analytique, tant sur le plan de la théorie que de la pratique.

Cet article aborde le séminaire dans sa thématique et dans son processus, en s'appuyant sur l'expression directe de l'expérience des participants.

Das North Pacific Institute begann 2002 erstmalig eine Seminarreihe zu den 'Ursprüngen der Tiefenpsychologie' für neue Auszubildende. Dieser Ansatz betonte das historische und kulturelle ‚Eingebettetsein‘ der analytischen Ideen. Einige Auszubildende erlebten das Seminar als befreiend, andere wiederum als schmerzlich desillusionierend. Insgesamt zeigten die Rückmeldungen, dass durch das Seminar die Beziehung zu analytischer Theorie und Praxis kreativer wurde. In dieser Arbeit werden Inhalt und Prozess des Seminars beschrieben einschließlich direkter Kommentare der Kandidaten und Kandidatinnen hinsichtlich ihrer Erfahrungen.

Nel 2002 il North Pacific Institute inaugurò una nuova serie di seminari sulle 'origini della psicologia del profondo' per i nuovi candidati. Questo approccio enfatizzava le radici culturali e storiche delle idee analitiche. Per alcuni candidati l'esperienza del seminario lasciò un senso di liberazione, per altri fu una dolorosa delusione. Il feedback nel suo insieme indica che dobbiamo incoraggiare una relazione più creativa verso la teoria e la prassi analitica. In questo lavoro si descrive il soggetto e il procedimento del seminario, che include anche le prime impressioni dell'esperienza dei candidati.

En el 2002 el Instituto del Pacífico Norte inauguró una serie nueva de seminarios sobre los 'orígenes de la psicología profunda dirigido a los nuevos candidatos. Esta aproximación enfatizaba en los basamentos históricos y culturales de las ideas analíticas. Algunos candidatos experimentaron los seminarios como liberadores y otros como dolorosamente decepcionantes. La conclusión general indica que sirvió para nutrir una relación mas creativa con la teoría y práctica analítica. Este trabajo describe el sujeto y proceso del seminario, incluyendo experiencias de primera mano de las experiencias de los candidates.

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