

CP-UK Open Board Meeting

Saturday 6 May 2017

Birkbeck College

This is a loose transcript of an introduction to agenda item on the 'Academy of Psychoanalysis' - the academic and educational wing of the College - presented by Gwion Jones at the above meeting. The views contained in this presentation represent those of Gwion Jones and not necessarily the College as a whole.

My remit is to stimulate some discussion about the function and purpose of the Academy, with the aim of generating renewed interest in its activities.

My sense is that the overall function of the Academy is still a little vague, so I felt my first goal should be to frame our discussion with some thoughts about its overarching purpose. While the notion of the *Academy of Psychoanalysis* promises much, it has delivered little since its inception. This leaves me wondering if this has this something to do with a certain lack of direction, or purpose even? So perhaps our first task should be to find a clearer definition of its purpose.

This lack of definition might also be linked to the broader remit of the College altogether, where I'm hoping I'm not alone in wondering what its real purpose is. We might well ask whether it's simply a professional organisation for practitioners? It does have a register of members, each paying a small fee to be on list, but then participating very little in its activities. Or is it more of a pressure group, a campaigning vehicle, which it certainly has been in the past. Or does it harbour a secret aspiration to be some form of training regulator for its membership? A rival to the BPC perhaps, though I must say the BPC seems quite a different entity. Or an alternative home to the UKCP, which many of us are also members of, but that the College represents something closer to our values perhaps. Operating as club of like-minded individuals?

Or is it just what it says on the tin. If we look at what's written on the 'About us' page of the CP-UK website, we discover that its principal aim is to, and I quote: *'advance the discipline of psychoanalysis by encouraging discussion amongst psychoanalytic practitioners from all schools of psychoanalysis'*; but along with that it makes the even bolder claim that its aim is to promote debate amongst these practitioners. Even more importantly perhaps, in its very opening paragraph it also claims to be a body that insists *'upon the diversity of practice that developed with and since Freud.'*

These three statements put together might serve to orientate us, where I might hazard a guess, though some might disagree, that the College in its original conception emerged in response to a particular historical circumstance that threatened our practice. Formed in opposition to certain vested interests endeavouring to restrict our practice as analysts in whatever way possible. To either stifle healthy debate about the fundamental nature of psychoanalysis and thereby fail to respect the real diversity that exists in psychoanalytic practice today. Using this as my starting premise to frame our discussion about the aims of the Academy, we might we suggest that the College aims to oppose, or at least undo, the operation of some form of repressive apparatus. Psychoanalytic to its core!

It might therefore seem quite plausible that in its original conception the Academy was to become an integral part of the College and its aims, beyond its mere existence as a register, occupying a crucial role negotiating our status in this political landscape by adopting an ethical stance representing psychoanalysis in its purest terms. And I will come onto this idea of ‘purity’ very shortly.

However, despite being a member of the college for a number of years I wasn't aware of the existence of the Academy until about 6 years ago, when I went along to one of its AGM's and raised a query about the College's position in relation to the empiricist bent that dominates the psychotherapy field and impacts directly on our professional livelihood. I received the response that there was something called the Academy, that it had been ‘dormant’ for some time, and that this kind of debate might suit that forum. Only then did I really start to wonder what kind of forum this ‘Academy’ was. I was subsequently asked if I'd like to collaborate with Dot Hamilton from the Guild to help her organise some events to highlight this issue of research. These events were framed around the idea that psychoanalytic research, in all its manifestations, has a quality of its own. Distinct, worth publicising more widely, and certainly worth speaking about.

What was eventually organised were a couple of Research Study Days staged over 18 months. These days constituted presentations from various College members speaking for about 20 minutes on their varied research interests. Around two dozen members turned up to listen and participate, and in a modest way these events turned out to be quite successful.

But there was something else that came as a surprise: There was something quite inclusive about the fact that these members had quite diverse research interests, irrespective of their affiliations and training. Ranging from the arts to philosophy, as well as the more academically orientated, or empirically inclined forms of research. What came over in waves however was their passion. Even more apparent, how this passion, this thirst for enquiry, seemed to inform their psychoanalytic practice. Something quite symbiotic perhaps? Or ‘dialectical’ I might even argue: Something fundamental in this relation between research and analytic practice. And I must declare my hand here. It's no accident that one of the reasons I chose to train with CFAR was the word ‘Research’ in its title. No other training organisation makes this so explicit in its mandate. There was another signifier that some of us remember in its original title, namely the word ‘Cultural’, but somehow that signifier was dropped, but that's another story.

What I'm trying to argue for is the idea that this inherent curiosity, in all its manifestations, seemed to feed, or I would even say ‘sustain’, the analytic attitude. That psychoanalysis, in and of itself, might well be a viable tool for researching in a variety of domains. This is what shone through in all these presentations. Which takes me back to a more fundamental question I feel compelled to ask. A question that gives some additional historical context to our discussion... Namely the age-old question of Freud's desire. What exactly was the itch that Freud's invention tried to scratch?

The question of Freud's desire

In his autobiographical account, published in the same year as *The Question of Lay Analysis*, Freud uttered the following:

“Neither at that time, nor indeed in my later life, did I feel any particular predilection for the career of a doctor. I was moved, rather, by a sort of curiosity, which was however, directed more towards human concerns than towards natural objects.”¹

It's easy to speculate whether this passing reflection carries some deeper significance for the project he founded. Even more telling that he added the following remark over 10 years later in a postscript, 4 years before he died:

“My interest, after making a through the natural sciences, medicine and psychotherapy, returned to the cultural problems which had fascinated me long before, when I was a youth scarcely old enough for thinking.”²

I'm keen to propose that the Academy might be just this kind of space for a return to addressing these broader cultural themes. A space to explore the very cultural 'problems' Freud alludes to: The societal problems that trouble us in our everyday lives. A discursive space that might help us define what a 'College of Psychoanalysts' should be at its heart: A 'College' in the true sense of the word, with some active debate and learning at its core.

Too often the organisations we sign up to professionally persist mainly for the purpose of clinical training. Those who have trained then retain their involvement just as a means of maintaining their professional status (with the occasional conference thrown in). It's rare to find a space where something really new occurs, something fresh, disturbing, that provokes debate. If we adapt the idea of a 'College' into something that resembles a 'School' perhaps, as a place of challenge, learning, or growth even (and not just growth, a space for dissolution). It might become a healthier alternative to those very institutions whose main function is to replicate tradition and simply promote dogma. It's a question of ideals: To support them or challenge them!

I'm keen to hinge my argument on the age-old division that Freud made back in the 1920's between the idea of 'pure' and 'applied' psychoanalysis, which he laid out long before any full blown psychoanalytic institution had established itself. In this era psychoanalysis still subsisted as a new-found discovery, where a certain ethic of novelty and innovation still presided and the idea of 'research' still took priority over the increasing demands for professional regulation.

Yet what we must remind ourselves is how this ethic still lies at the core of our psychoanalytic endeavour, and this is what shone out on those study days, whatever shape or form it took. A fundamental curiosity in both our inner and outer world. The manifestation of a curiosity that might actually be the most important component in the formation of each and every analyst. The most essential component of every analytic training. To lift the veil of repression, whatever the cost.

¹ S. Freud. *An Autobiographical Study* (1925). SE20, p.7.

² *ibid.* p.71

Holding this ethic in mind, I would like to propose that Freud himself had a very similar ambition for such a ‘College’ himself, one which Lacan was keen to pick up on when he founded his Ecole Freudienne in 1964. When in his argument for the legitimacy of Lay Analysis Freud once mused:

“If - which may sound fantastic to-day - one had to found a college of psychoanalysis, much would have to be taught in it which is also taught by the medical faculty: alongside of depth-psychology, which would always remain the principal subject, there would be an introduction to biology, as much as possible of the science of sexual life, and familiarity with the symptomatology of psychiatry. On the other hand, analytic instruction would include branches of knowledge which are remote from medicine and which the doctor does not come across in his practice: the history of civilisation, mythology, the psychology of religion and the science of literature.’³

A couple of pages further on he takes his argument one step further, suggesting that:

“The use of analysis for the treatment of the neuroses is only one of its applications: The future will perhaps show that it is not the most important one.’⁴

Hinting at some greater ambition for his fledgling science, he tentatively suggested that psychoanalysis might even be applied to “...*all the sciences which are concerned with the evolution of human civilisation and its major institutions such as art, religion and the social order*”⁵

Freud, I believe was compelled to make these remarks as a tacit acknowledgment of the particular historical circumstances that spawned his project, this ‘science’ and especially its mode of inquiry. That it’s peculiar form emerged from something much wider than the clinic, and so was keen to show his appreciation for the diversity of disciplines, and *disciples*, that helped psychoanalysis along its difficult path. From poets to philosophers, archaeologists to sexologists.

More specifically, Freud was actively trying to combat the manner in which psychoanalysis was being imported into Anglo-Saxon countries particularly, specifically Britain and America. If we consider things from this perspective, a clear ethic emerges in Freud’s pronouncements. As an attempt to position psychoanalysis as something quite distinct from any other disciplines, set itself apart a landscape dominated by the prescriptive ideals of medicine, with its modern equivalent in the contemporary emphasis being put on the empirically supported therapies. Back in the 1920’s however Freud’s main concern was with the enemy within, and in his postscript to The Question of Lay Analysis Freud also wrote:

“I want to feel assured that the therapy will not destroy the science”⁶

³ S. Freud. The Question of Lay Analysis (1926). SE20 p.246.

⁴ *ibid.* p.248

⁵ *ibid.* p.248

⁶ *ibid.* p.253

An aside:

There is a romantic comedy that I remember watching back in the early 80's entitled 'Lovesick'. It starred Dudley Moore as a troubled analyst who falls in love with his patient, and so the plot unfolds – a battle of the passions. At key moments, the ghost of Freud appears to the beleaguered Dudley Moore. This very gentlemanly version of Sigmund Freud is played by Alec Guinness, who in that *Obi-Wan Kenobi* way of his, calmly whispers words of wisdom to the main protagonist. He assures the anguished clinician he's made the right decision to give up his career for the love of a woman, stating that psychoanalysis was only ever intended as an "experiment," *never* as an "industry."

The scene that really resonated especially however was when Freud bids farewell to Dudley Moore. Dudley asks him what he's going to do now his task is complete and Freud declares nonchalantly that his interests have moved a long way from therapy since his death, that he's now off the mountains of Mexico to inquire further into the use of psychotropic drugs to delve into the subconscious mind. I was quite amused by this subversive portrayal of Freud, as a somewhat radical 'alternative' figure, running roughshod over established practice. A Freud keen to work at the cutting edge, whatever the damage it causes to his reputation, yearning for the latest developments, passing off the clinical application of psychoanalysis as a passing fad - an interesting 'experiment'. Of course this is just 'my' Freud, the subversive non-conformist Freud, there are many other representations I may add... Elizabeth Roudinesco has recently published her own version of the great man. A rather more reserved and patriarchal version I should add, but I digress.

My proposal:

Arguing in 1953, Jacques Lacan attempted to make a much more refined case for a new kind of psychoanalytic institute. One that, as he put it, should be '...far from enclosing psychoanalysis inside doctrinal isolation, [but] will consider itself the designated host and guest in any confrontation with adjacent disciplines.'⁷ And Lacan likewise tried to utilise Freud's division between a 'pure' i.e. a scientific and research-orientated psychoanalysis and an 'applied' version, one orientated mainly towards healing and treatment. By the term 'applied' Lacan meant "therapeutic and pertaining to the medical clinic", thereby quite distinct from its purer forms. By contrast of course, what the term 'pure' means precisely has been subject to much debate, which I'm keen to avoid. I'm using these terms merely as a rhetorical gambit to provoke some discussion about the future of the Academy.

To give a brief example of what I mean. Lacan chose to locate the practice of supervision within this rubric of 'pure' analysis. Not as some lesser instance of its clinical application, but the idea that exploring things on a 'case by case' basis has some wider purpose, way beyond its clinical application, with the potential to extract something universal from each particular instance. Supervision might produce endlessly new *psychopathologies of everyday life*, where each new finding might seek further applications, in quite disparate areas, bring some new understanding to these cultural 'problems' even. For example, such insights might help us understand the complexities of the contemporary life; from selfies to deeper confusions around gender identity. In turn I'm advocating for a space where we can debate the core of

⁷ J. Lacan. A project for the amendment to statutes proposed by Sacha Nacht. (1953) p.56

psychoanalysis; what makes it work, on a case by case basis, but also as a way of venturing beyond its conventional application, as something with the capability of going out into the wider world.

What I'm tentatively trying to formulate, through this peculiar reading of 'pure' as opposed to applied, is the anticipation of a distinct kind of space where a different kind of speech might occur. Distinct from either the academic or clinical discourses that dominate our professional activities. And by playing with Freud's wild suggestion - that there might be something more fundamental to the psychoanalytic endeavour we've yet to discover, bring something new into relation with psychoanalysis. Something that reaches beyond its strict confines in the clinic, yet in its return, contribute something vital to it.

So how do we define this kind of space? Perhaps as something that helps define a position in opposition to the dominant discourses, not just in the clinical field, but in academia generally. A space where the arts and humanities are just as relevant to the study of the human psyche as the latest randomised control trial? A space where the demand for empirically supported therapies should be acknowledged, but only as a necessity and not an ideal. Or perhaps a place to debate the manner in which academic discourses intrude into our experience of listening to an ineffable other; for example, where the language of neuroscience leans increasingly into our comprehension of internal mental states (what is 'affect regulation' really?). Or the way various corporate and university discourses increasingly try to prescribe the training experience in terms of a certain relation to knowledge, or of measureable competencies and skills acquisition.

The Academy could well become such a space. A much-needed space I think. Where psychoanalysis could become, to use Lacan's words *'the designated host and guest in any confrontation with adjacent disciplines'*⁸

Postscript:

I've deliberately framed my introduction around the question of research, as something fundamental to the analytic attitude, but with the notion of an 'Academy of Psychoanalysis' we also have its links with academia more widely, as well as more specifically with education as a distinct activity. While this is a whole topic in itself, there's no denying that many of us in this very room work in the field of 'academia' as well, so it's worth raising the question how we can operate analytically in this field. And with this highlight the contrast between the analytic relation and the transference that operates in teaching, as dynamics that often work against each other.

Of course this also links with the broader question of clinical training, which many of you are also involved in, including myself. As it happens I teach a module on an University based IAPT Post-graduate CBT course, without any practical qualification in CBT I may add, yet manage to retain something resembling an analytic position in relation to this practice. Impossible some might say; but that goes with the territory.

⁸ *ibid.*