

EDITORIAL: Depth psychology as ‘terrible trouble’ for researchers

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As a professor and Research Coordinator at Pacifica Graduate Institute in Santa Barbara, California in the discipline of depth psychology, if I have any gift at all as a teacher of research, it’s for profoundly disturbing the peace of my students. There is one fundamental ontological assertion of depth psychology, I share with them – the assertion that we are partially unconscious human beings in the world. If you follow Freud, you work from the premise of the reality of the personal unconscious; if you follow Jung, you work from the premise of the reality of both the personal and the collective unconscious. Either way, the reality of the unconscious posits terrible trouble for researchers, I say. I lean in, and ask, what are the epistemological implications of knowledge that is created by partially unconscious human beings, done with or on partially unconscious human beings, and consumed and disseminated by partially unconscious human beings?

In depth psychology, we research the *logic* of the *psyche* with our psyche; we are the instrument through which we conduct our research. And again, I ask, what are the epistemological implications for knowledge created by a partially unconscious psyche, a partially unknown and unknowable instrument? My graduate students have long since left behind any fantasy of objectivity or they wouldn’t have chosen this field, but they aren’t quite yet ready for such a *radical subjectivity*. It troubles them. It troubles me.

Not only is psyche the main and unshakeable instrument of the researcher (try leaving your psyche at home when you conduct research in the world), its ontological foundation, but psyche can also be seen as an epistemology, a way of knowing. Depth psychologists *know* through the products the psyche produces autonomously, through dreams, fantasies, and associations, through

intuitions, synchronicities, and hunches, through obsessions, disturbances, and symptoms. A classic example is the dream of German chemist Friedrich A. Kekule in 1865 which led to his insight that the molecular structure of benzene is a closed carbon ring, a discovery that revolutionized modern chemistry. This is a very tidy example; most of us have dozens of dreams a night that produce no such clear insight, no such incontrovertible knowledge. As such, depth psychology is a suspicious epistemology; just as Freud was suspicious of dreams and separated the manifest content from the latent meaning when researching the psyche, so depth psychology offers us a language for the gap between the manifest content of our research and the latent meaning we subscribe, or fail to subscribe to it.

This raises an important ethical consideration in a depth psychological approach to research; the notion of the unconscious undermines fundamentalism and absolutism in the researcher’s conclusions. As one of my colleagues says, ‘I’m right about half of what I say, but I don’t know which half it is.’ This makes depth psychology an epistemology of *not knowing* as much as knowing, of *unknowing* as much as the unknown. And, it makes depth psychology a *tiring epistemology*.

By the time we finish the Foundations for Research in Depth Psychology course, my students are exhausted by everything they won’t know and can’t know about their own research. I give them an example. One of my dissertation students was researching the topic of home; in particular, how women in transitional housing projects make a house a home. He visited each participant in her home and asked her to talk about what was important to her there. He described one woman who spent a great deal of time making things for her home, making it ‘homely’ with various craft projects. He interpreted this as the way the woman ‘played,’ that it was ‘play’ for her.

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I was struck by the word ‘play,’ the way it seemed to diminish what the woman was doing, making it childlike somehow. I asked him if she used that word during the interview; no, he said, it was his word. Did you ask her, ‘Is this the way you play?’ I asked him. He flushed instantly, and realized what he had done. We discussed other alternatives; that it was the way she made art, the way she expressed her creativity, the way she connected with her cultural heritage, the way she expressed her gender. We discussed his gender, and how the collective unconscious of *men* has devalued women’s contributions to art, to literature, and yes, to home-making. We discussed his mother, and his judgments of her sewing projects, and how he thought of her sewing room as her ‘play’ room. We discussed his positive associations with the word ‘play,’ and how he wished he could express himself more, could be more playful, instead of the serious graduate student he was.

‘All that over one word in a two hundred page dissertation?’ my students ask. Exactly.

This special issue of the *International Journal of Multiple Research Approaches* dedicated to depth psychological approaches to research is a unique and very initial foray into the field, a modest contribution exploring the trouble stirred up for researchers by the (il)logic of the psyche. First of all, Suzanne and I as editors want to acknowledge along with Coppin and Nelson

(2005) that ‘psyche is a perspective’ (p. 47). It is not *the* perspective, but we offer it as a valuable perspective by which to approach research, and by which to understand the research that approaches us.

The essays in this journal are probably best read ‘with soul in mind,’ to quote the subtitle of my colleague Robert D. Romanyshyn’s book *The Wounded Researcher: Research With Soul in Mind* (2007). If read purely with the logical mind, in a positivist or even post-positivist framework, there is much to guffaw and snark about in these essays. Reading this issue from the mainstream definition of psychology as ‘the science or study of the mind’ (*Merriam–Webster Dictionary* online²) simply won’t do. It needs to be read in its own terms, where psyche is not translated as *mind*, but returned to its original etymological roots as *soul* (*Etymological Dictionary* online³). Keep that in mind as you read this volume!

² <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/psychology>

³ <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=psyche>

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