

The Jungians by Thomas Kirsch
A Response by Craig San Roque

The Jungians. A Comparative and Historical Perspective

by Thomas B. Kirsch. San Francisco.

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Jung/Analytical psychology/psychotherapy

1. The Jungians is a profoundly settling work.

Kirsch's reflective history is a survey of the Jungian zeitgeist and its activation in the profession of psychotherapy throughout the world. He gives careful, honest and courteous attention to the range of individuals and zeitgeist carriers whose dedication, eccentricities, aberrations and inspirations made the movement thrive. It is, in a sense, a compendium of origin stories. He tracks people, relationships, the nesting of groups, the formation of societies, the power struggles, the ideological issues, mistakes. It is the work of an international diplomatist.

He gives much attention to the fermentation process (within early 20th Century European culture) which produced the dominant Swiss and British vintages of Jungian viticulture. He describes root, vine, character and composition. He attends to the family. He tracks the European Jewish and refugee diaspora and the insemination of the Americas with the offspring of Zurich, Vienna and Berlin...thanks to the predations of the National Socialist mania. It is an intricate and fascinating exposition of a chain reaction, told in plain language by a fundamentally compassionate and clear minded man. It is the biography, not of Jung but of the people who made 'Jung' and made the art, craft and practice of Jungian psychotherapy work.

Somewhere along this great chain of being there is a little blip which is that of my own country, Australia. I began reading this book in preparation for the 2001 Congress of the Australian and New Zealand Society of Jungian Analysts. It was my task (as past president) to give an opening orienting address, mostly on the theme of our recent history. I drew upon Kirsch's book and want to write a little about how Kirsch's view helped settle a problem of orientation or positioning about what it is to be ' Jungians' in the antipodes.

Despite our relative insignificance on the world stage, Australia and New Zealand hold a shadow of Europe and the Middle East. We hold underbelly secrets about the activities of the European psyche and particularly that of the British. What Australia/New Zealand holds, as an immigrant country, and how the inferior position ' down under' can be used to reflect psychologically upon the behaviours of Europeans and Americans is not the subject of this review but in my response to Tom's book, I do not write as though I were an internationalist, pretending that I exist in globalised 'anywhere' reality. I inhabit a specific Australian mental space, for better for worse, and I look to 'The Jungians' for what it can do to help me work in the reality of here.

The theme of our antipodean Congress was " Culture"- our multi streamed immigrant and indigenous culture - the culture of the Jungian enterprise - the interaction of these forces in our slice of time and place. Some of us thought, perhaps, that such a theme might provoke a re formulation of methodology and a shift in our philosophical base, in direct response to the antipodean existential condition. Others might look to how we may more effectively hang upon the breast of Europe. One element of the local power struggle has been among those who advocate the primacy of European, American or Asian spiritual alliances and those who advocate the primacy of Australian/New Zealand alliances as a step towards re- discovering our psychic reality . This is a position which is now supported politically by the indigenous reconciliation process and the unrolling revelation of the truth of the pre colonial and post colonial history of this region.

Believe it or not some 'Jungians' (and 'Freudians') inhabit an internalised Anglo European cultural space and conduct therapy from a position of displacement and nostalgia. There is also a current of universalist reductionism that would assert that, in the end, all psyches are the same so all therapy can be the same, universal, globalised and internationally, archetypally consistent.

I sometimes wonder, what would happen to Jungian psychotherapy if it surrendered its European environmental and philosophical roots and really honestly went native. Or putting it around the other way, what would happen to Jungian psychotherapy if theory, method and practice was to be held accountable, not only to the cloisters of Zurich, San Francisco and London but to the street wise realities of Caracas, Jo/burg, Sydney and Palestine.

While we are still wearing pyjamas made in Zurich or London, dreaming with Europe, it is hard to arrive at an appreciation of our own diminutive, localised procedures and yet Tom Kirsch's book helps the arrival of that appreciation because, while telling the history of his family system, his downbeat, homely narration liberates us from the grandiose oppression of 'a Jung' as seminal, messianic phallus figure; to revere, incorporate, reject or defend. Kirsch reveals the plurality of ordinary people doing their ordinary confusing things and making a good go of it. That's good enough for me. That is what is 'settling' about the psychological work done through this book.

2. Myths of origin.

To continue this theme of 'ordinary people' I would like to quote a section from Baumann's succinct commentary on Post Modern consciousness referred to by Roman Lesmeister in his paper "The problem of Evil in Post modern Society", given at the Florence IAAP Congress. 1998; and then lead into the use made of Kirsch's book in the opening address to our local ANZSJA Congress.

'Post modern consciousness knows that every localised specialised and concentrated procedure whether effective or not, spoils as much as it cures.... post modern consciousness has reconciled itself with the idea that the confusion of basic human nature will forever remain...' After having noted that we live in a culture of complexity and uncertainty, I said that I see Thomas Kirsch as having pieced together, archeologically, the skeletal bones of our profession. He makes visible underlying and formative structures. He shows how things connect, and there is not one skeletal body but many - not one lineage of connection but many. But in all this connecting detective work and family system description, the fragment which seized my attention first was the Zurich story and particularly the exact composition of the patterns of personal relationship which constituted the origins of the 'Jungian' event. That is, the conception facts and myths of origin. The primal scene.

You can see from Kirsch's tales that the DNA line of our profession is put together from a substance which is not only of the body of Jung. The myth of Jung as 'the father' is not adequate enough to do honour to the actuality of the generation of the Jungian tradition. We never did inherit a mono theistic paternal culture.

The beginnings, in the nexus of Zurich, Vienna and Berlin turn out to be a far more complex and interesting combination of many bodies doing very interesting things with each other, in the midst of a time when the fascist enterprise was doing very horrible things to people. The play of Love, Death and the schism of the European psyche helped to generate a self healing method. It is this which we inherit. (But our contemporary schism is no longer quite the same as that experienced in the modernist world of Europe and America in the mid 20th Century and so our self healing method may want to alter to meet the challenge of a post modern madness.)

But back to the beginnings. As far as I can see, the significant formative conception pattern of the Jungian project was a triangular relationship composed of the beings of Mrs Emma Jung, Ms Toni Woolf, Dr. Carl Gustav and his/their interior 'familiar', plus some interesting influential satellite constellations; Barbara and Marie for instance, as a different couple forming another generative triangle with beloved Carl. And from thence the beehive scents and the ant lines spread, touching, greeting, dancing. (The cover photograph of this book is, significantly, a fancy dress party in the Zurich institute. A portrait of a collective doing funny things with each other. The humour and dissembling is a necessary part of the foundation myth. Thank god.)

Even though 'individuation' is glorified in the Jungian ' canon', what emerges from Tom's analysis is that the founding was not the effort of a single figure as cult individualist, he may even have been only the front man. The pattern is of triangle/s, duos and other geometric groupings of thoughtful, creative and eccentric men and women, bound deeply together by varying forms of death defying love. While Thanatos fascismo was defying eros, eros/ psyche

was binding together, getting the upper hand most of the time. As I see it now, the Jungian enterprise was a kind of psychic phoenix project, a resistance movement.

The 'affairs of the heart' between our founding couples is not a scandal or a matter of failure of boundary control'. It is a generative matrix. This is how humans create; and resist self destruction.

During my period as president of ANZSJA, I wondered what I was to be accountable to within the confines of the Jungian 'project' and what to be responsible for in maintaining our professional Society's development. I see now that it was about moving toward the attainment of authentic 'communitas'. It was not about registration and maintaining the professional security of the job or the Jungian imago. In breaking the bread of ourselves to feed each other, we come upon something creative in our combinations as well as biting into the statutory manageable destructiveness. Being 'Jungian' is not a messianic or evangelical task, it has more to do with nourishing eros and agape; the effort for love being the sustaining vital force in our work. Out of a 'passover' like conception myth of many at a table, sharing wine and food together, on the eve of catastrophe, we might generate a future for ourselves. I like the Passover deal and I like the image Plato sought for in his Symposium as a model for our profession's generativity. Some of us turn up late or drunk but 'the subject for tonight' as Hafez says, 'is love'... and of course, hate and envy, the killing of babies, the throttling of women and the dismemberment of men, but the point is, we can meet and we do try to face the catastrophe together.

3. Beyond Oedipus.

If the drama of Oedipus is wrapped into Freud's conception myth, to some extent we live this through, as trans-generational inheritors of the psychoanalytic lineage. But as Jungians we also inhabit another conception line, another strand of the lineage. In fact, we may not even be psychoanalysts at all, but rather our line begins before or after Freud. It may come in from a different direction and simply happened to pass across the Freud DNA spiral en passant, to pick up a few bits and keep going with a life of it's own.

I sometimes think we have been trapped into believing that the Freud / Jung /Oedipus Rex duel is the most significant totemic creation myth of our tribe. It is, I think, embedded in a greater cultural anxiety matrix which would benefit from an analysis. Kirsch tries to get that analysis going. There is something going on in the subtext of 'The Jungians' about the titanic clash of the Aryan/ Semitic mythologies coming to a head in 1939. Freud and Jung as personifications of the cultural unconscious have been made into totemic figures of that anguished Aryan - Semitic clash.

Kirsch's sanity helps pinpoint this matter as well as demystify the Jung and Freud totems and helps place their work within the ordinary muddle of being human in a time cultural distress. I'd like to hear Kirsch and Lopez Pedraza debate this theme – i.e. Freud and Jung used as (transformative?) icons of the mid 20th century European/American cultural anxiety. This might put them and the lineage of our work into a perspective that would help us deal better with the 21 Century zeitgeist.

In conclusion then, I suggest that it might help us and behoove us if we look closely at the Jungian family system, in the context of it's time, as Kirsch has done, attending to the implications of the various conception myths and consider what the origins imply for our lineage and what it tells us about the trans generational re enactments; which we have to acknowledge as well as resist. Let us look to our relational history, to the actual conception events and the illusory myths which have been created about it. We do not have to be bound by the past but it might help to discover exactly how, metaphorically, the skeletons in the dust of the origin cave in Jung's basement dream were arranged .

And we can also, in this post modern situation invent and insist upon creating our own futuring reality. Kirsch's book helps think about these things and therefore it is a good book. It liberates and it also settles silly fantasies.

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