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0521831458 - Jung and the Making of Modern Psychology: The Dream of a Science

Sonu Shamdasani

Excerpt

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Prologue: “The most cursed dilettante”

“Don’t make a legend of me.”

C. G. Jung, 1930.¹

Occultist, Scientist, Prophet, Charlatan, Philosopher, Racist, Guru, Anti-Semite, Liberator of Women, Misogynist, Freudian Apostate, Gnostic, Post-Modernist, Polygamist, Healer, Poet, Con-Artist, Psychiatrist and Anti-Psychiatrist – what has C. G. Jung not been called? Mention him to someone, and you are likely to receive one of these images. For Jung is someone that people – informed or not – have opinions about. The swift reaction time indicates that people respond to Jung’s life and work as if they are sufficiently known. Yet the very proliferation of “Jungs” leads one to question whether everyone could possibly be talking about the same figure.

In 1952, Jung responded to the fact that he had been variously described as a theist, an atheist, a mystic, and a materialist by noting: “When opinions over the same subject differ widely, according to my view, there is the well-founded suspicion that none of them is correct, i.e., that there is a misunderstanding.”² Nearly fifty years later, the number of divergent views and interpretations of Jung has prodigiously multiplied. He has become a figure upon whom an endless succession of myths, legends, fantasies, and fictions continues to be draped. Travesties, distortions, and caricatures have become the norm. This process shows no signs of abating.

From early on, Jung was subject to a welter of rumors. In 1916, he wrote to his friend and colleague, Alphonse Maeder,

As to what the rumors about my person concern, I can inform you that I have been married to a female Russian student for six years (Ref. Dr. Ulrich), dressed as Dr. Frank, I have recommended immediate divorce to a woman (Ref. Frau E-Hing), two years ago I broke up the Ruff-Franck marriage, recently I made Mrs. McCormick pregnant, got rid of the child and received 1 million for this

¹ Jung to Margaret Flenniken, June 20, 1930, JP, original in English.

² “Religion and Psychology,” *CW* 18, § 1500, trans. mod.

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(Ref. Dr. F. & Dr. M. In Z.), in the Club house I intern pretty young girls for homosexual use for Mrs. McCormick, I send their young men for mounting in the hotel, therefore great rewards, I am a baldheaded Jew (Ref. Dr. Stier in Rapperswyl), I am having an affair with Mrs. Oczaret, I have become crazy (Ref. Dr. M. In Z.), I am a con-man (Ref. Dr. St. in Z.), and last not least – Dr. Picht is my assistant. What is one to do? How should I behave to make such rumors impossible? I am thankful for your good advice. The auspices for analysis are bad, as you see! One must simply not do such an unattractive enterprise on one's own, if one is not to be damaged.³

After decades of myth making, one question becomes more insistent: who was C. G. Jung?

Once, when asked who he was, Miles Davis replied that he had changed the course of music several times in his life (1990, 371). Something similar could be said of Jung. As a psychiatrist, he played a pivotal role in the formation of the modern concept of schizophrenia, and the idea that the psychoses were of psychological origin and hence amenable to psychotherapy. During his association with Freud, he was the principal architect of the psychoanalytic movement, inaugurating the rite of training analysis, which became the dominant form of instruction in modern psychotherapy. His formulation of psychological types of introverts and extraverts with numerous sub-varieties has spawned countless questionnaires. His views on the continued relevance of myth were the seed bed for the mythic revival. His interest in Eastern thought was the harbinger of the post-colonial Easternization of the West. Intent on reconciling science and religion through psychology, his work has met with endless controversy at every turn. Alongside a professional discipline of Jungian psychology and Institutes, Societies, Clubs, and Associations still bearing his name, there is a massive counterculture that hails him as a founding figure – and the impact of his work on mainstream twentieth-century Western culture has been far wider than has yet been recognized.

The work of Freud and Jung has been taken on by the general public to a remarkable extent. For many, their names are the first which come to mind when one thinks of psychology. They have become iconic images of “the psychologist.” Their names have become proper names for psychology. Like Russian dolls, they conceal many forgotten figures within them. They have come to stand in for long-standing debates in European intellectual history and transformations in Western societies from the end of the nineteenth century to the present. The plethora of positions attributed to Freud and Jung, if collectively assembled, would in both cases cover something approaching the whole spectrum of modern thought.

³ October 9, 1916, Maeder papers.

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The figure of “Jung” stands at the interfaces of academic psychology, psychiatry, psychotherapy, popular psychology, and New Age psychologies. The rise of these disciplines and movements is one of the decisive developments in twentieth-century Western society. It may well be its most curious legacy. The formation of modern psychology and psychotherapy took place at a time of great upheaval in Western thought and culture, in which they were deeply interwoven. Thus their reconstruction is an essential element in the comprehension of the development of modern Western societies and our present.

From psychiatric wards to pulpits, from university lecture halls to chat shows, from law courts to tabloids, from classrooms to prisons, psychology today is firmly installed. It has effected deep-seated transformations in civic life as well as in individuals’ intimate perception of themselves. When so much of social reality and “common sense” have come to be pervaded by psychology, psychological ideas have been naturalized, and have taken on the aspect of immediate indubitable certitudes. They have become standards by which to judge individuals in other times and societies. An historical account of these unprecedented changes is essential if one is to arrive at a reflective distance from the installation of psychology in contemporary life.

Around 1938, Jung himself had this to say about the societal impact of psychology: “A ceaseless and limitless talk about psychology has inundated the world in the last twenty years, but it has not as yet produced a noticeable improvement of the psychological outlook and attitude.”⁴ Both laymen and scientists were “bewildered by the luxuriant growth of theoretical standpoints, and by a maze of unbalanced propositions” (*ibid.*). The history of psychology may offer a way into, and a way out of, this maze of bewilderment.

The advent of the new psychology

“One must be absolutely modern.” (Arthur Rimbaud, *A Season in Hell*, 1873)

“Everyone seems to be publishing a Psychology in these days,” wrote William James in 1893 to his friend and fellow psychologist, Théodore Flournoy.⁵ Textbooks, Principles, Outlines, Introductions, Compendiums, and Almanacs of psychology poured forth. Journals, Laboratories, Professorships, Courses, Societies, Associations, and Institutes of

⁴ Preface to a proposed English edition of Tina Keller’s *L’Ame et les nerfs* [The Soul and Nerves] (JP). Original in English.

⁵ December 31, 1893, ed. Le Clair, 31.

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psychology were set up. A horde of witnesses was called forth and interrogated: the Madman, the Primitive, the Genius, the Degenerate, the Imbecile, the Medium, the Infant and last but not least, the White Rat. New characters entered the social stage: the Schizophrenic, the Narcissist, the Manic-Depressive, the Anal-Retentive, the Oral-Sadistic and all the “verts” – the Invert, Pervert, Introvert and Extravert. But what did all this ferment denote?

At the end of the nineteenth century, many figures in the West sought to establish a scientific psychology that would be independent of philosophy, theology, biology, anthropology, literature, medicine, and neurology, whilst taking over their traditional subject matters. The very possibility of psychology rested upon the successful negotiation of these disciplinary crossings. The larger share of the questions that psychologists took up had already been posed and elaborated in these prior disciplines. They had to prise their subjects from the preserves of other specialists. Through becoming a science, it was hoped that psychology would be able to solve questions that had vexed thinkers for centuries, and to replace superstition, folk wisdom, and metaphysical speculation with the rule of universal law.

In 1892, Flournoy was given a chair in psychology at the University of Geneva. This was the first chair of psychology in a science, as opposed to a philosophy faculty. In 1896, reflecting back on the significance of this event, Flournoy stated:

the Genevan government has implicitly recognized (perhaps without knowing it) the existence of psychology as a particular science, independent of all philosophical systems, with the same claim as physics, botany or astronomy . . . One is thus right to consider as historically accomplished, with the same authorization and the high consecration of political power, the long procession by which the study of the soul little by little detached itself, in its own fashion, from the general trunk of philosophy to constitute itself at the level of a positive science. As for knowing up to what point contemporary psychology does justice to this declaration of the majority, and has truly succeeded in freeing itself from all metaphysical tutelage of any colour, that is another question. For here not less than elsewhere the ideal should not be confounded with reality. (1)

This study unfolds within the space of Flournoy’s final qualification. Proponents of the new psychology proclaimed a radical break with all prior forms of human understanding. The foundation of modern psychology was held to be nothing less than the final and most decisive act in the completion of the scientific revolution. Not only did this inform its rhetoric, but also its sense of purpose and mission. Whether it was actually ever achieved or not, this conception of an absolute break with the past

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became a vital element in the self-conception of psychologists, and in how they styled their works.

Flournoy’s celebratory claim expresses a sentiment that was widely felt by psychologists in the 1890s. In 1892, reflecting on the “progress” of psychology, William James wrote:

When, then, we talk of ‘psychology as a natural science’ we must not assume that means a sort of psychology that stands at last on solid ground. It means just the reverse; it means a psychology particularly fragile, and into which the waters of metaphysical criticism leak at every joint . . . it is indeed strange to hear people talk triumphantly of ‘the New Psychology’, and write ‘Histories of Psychology’, when into the real elements and forces which the word covers not the first glimpse of clear insight exists. A string of raw facts, a little gossip and wrangle about opinions, a little classification and generalization on the mere descriptive level; a strong prejudice that we have states of mind, and that our brain conditions them: but not a single law in the sense in which physics shows us laws, not a single proposition from which any consequence can causally be deduced. We don’t even know the terms between which the elementary laws would obtain if we had them. This is no science, it is only the hope of science . . . But at present psychology is in the condition of physics before Galileo and the laws of motion, of chemistry before Lavoisier and the notion that mass is preserved in all reactions. The Galileo and the Lavoisier of psychology will be famous men indeed when they come, as come they some day surely will. (468)

It is a moot point whether in the ensuing decades any such progress had indeed occurred – whether, in Flournoy’s terms, the gap between the ideal and the real had lessened, or that the founding separations of psychology from theology, philosophy, literature, anthropology, biology, medicine, and neurology had successfully taken place – or whether psychology today is in any better shape than James’ estimation of its standing in the 1890s (gossip, wrangle, prejudices, and so on). Nevertheless, the frequency with which psychologists were likened (or likened themselves) to Galileo, Lavoisier, and Darwin increased dramatically.⁶

Flournoy’s and James’ statements indicate the prospects and problems of the “new” psychology. At the outset, psychologists sought to emulate the form and formation of established prestigious sciences, such as physics and chemistry. This emulation – or simulation – took different forms. Central to it was the conception that psychology should also be a unitary discipline. Yet very quickly, the proliferation of variously styled psychologies demonstrated that there was little consensus as to what could be considered the aims and methods of psychology.

⁶ In 1958, Alasdair McIntyre noted that “Pre-Newtonian physicists had however the advantage over contemporary experimental psychologists that they did not know that they were waiting for Newton.” He likened the situation in psychology to “waiting for a theoretical Godot,” 2.

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In 1900, the Berlin psychologist William Stern surveyed the new psychology. Aside from an empirical tendency and the use of experimental methods, he saw little in the way of common features. There were many laboratories with researchers working on special problems, together with many textbooks, but they were all characterized by a pervasive particularism. He said that the psychological map of the day was as colorful and checkered as that of Germany in the epoch of small states, and that psychologists

often speak different languages, and the portraits that they draw up of the psyche are painted with so many different colours and with so many differently accented special strokes that it often becomes difficult to recognize the identity of the represented object. (Stern, 1900b, 415)

Psychology was faced with a welter of unresolved fundamental questions. Stern concluded: "In short: there are many new psychologies, but not yet the new psychology" (*ibid.*). The disunity of psychology increased exponentially by year. One wonders what images Stern would choose to illustrate the situation today.

The profusion of competing definitions of psychology was such that by 1905, the French psychologist Alfred Binet produced a typology of definitions of psychology (175). The varieties of psychologies had already become a subject for reflection for psychologists. He argued that the multiplicity of definitions which had been proffered pointed to their insufficiency. The only element of commonality underlying the different definitions was that they all happened to designate what they took to be a new field by the same name – psychology. The multiplicity of definitions of psychology also entailed a corresponding multiplicity of conceptions of why psychology was a science. Ultimately, the one common denominator was the general assumption that in the field of psychology, it was up to psychologists themselves to determine the criteria for the scientific status of their discipline.

The glaring disjunction between the disunity of psychology and its would-be status as a unitary science led to one major attempt at rectification, through an attempt to establish a common language for psychology. This took place at the international congress for experimental psychology in Geneva in 1909, under the presidency of Flournoy. In their preliminary circular, the organizers proposed that psychology had now arrived at a point of a development common to all sciences, when common unifying conceptions in terminology and technical procedures were necessary (ed. Claparède, 1910, 6). A session was devoted to this issue. The Swiss psychologist Edouard Claparède opened it by noting that there reigned a great confusion in psychology concerning the use of terms. Part of this

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was due to disagreements concerning the existence, nature and origin of particular processes. But he claimed that the greater part was due to the absence of a precise nomenclature. Thus, many divergences considered to be doctrinal came down to divergences of words. To rectify this situation, Claparède and the American psychologist James Mark Baldwin put forward suggestions as to how psychologists could come to agree on a common language, through agreeing upon a set of rules and procedures for the adoption of new technical terms (ed. Claparède, 1910, 480–1). Following this, René de Saussure argued that this process of unification would ultimately lead to the creation of an international language. A form of this, however, already existed, in the language of Esperanto, which was admitted at the congress as an official language (ed. Claparède, 1910, 484). In the later half of the nineteenth century, numerous international auxiliary languages were created. Esperanto had first been developed in 1887 by the Russian Ledger Ludwik Zamenhof, and attracted a great deal of attention. Auguste Forel, Rudolf Carnap, and Bertrand Russell were among figures greatly interested in it. Esperanto associations sprang up in major cities, numerous conferences were dedicated to it, and major works of literature were translated into it. De Saussure argued that Esperanto could serve in all sciences as an international language, and that in psychology in particular, it could form the basis for comparison and unification. He quickly added that he did not foresee the replacement of individual languages, but simply the creation of a supplementary means of inter-comprehension. Simply by knowing one’s mother tongue and Esperanto, one would be able to communicate with everybody. Claparède, Baldwin and de Saussure were proposing a reformation of psychology based on a rectification of its language.

A heated debate followed, in which some of the congress participants spoke in Esperanto. The critical disagreements were how this unification was to be achieved. These discussions reveal the deeply felt conviction that psychology, as a science, should function as psychologists imagined other sciences to function. Like chemistry, it should have its own periodic table. The project was a total failure. Reference was already made in the discussion to the tower of Babel. Far from a unification of psychological language, a plethora of incommensurable dialects, idioms, idiolects proliferated. The relations between schools and orientations of psychology quickly became so warlike and acrimonious that even to talk about any form of collaborative unification of terminology, let alone the increasing impossibility of the task itself, would have been laughed at. The linkage with Esperanto gives some indication of the hopes that were entertained for psychology – that it would become an international auxiliary language, enabling an unprecedented level of communication and mutual

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understanding between psychologists, and ultimately, the general public. Was the dream of a unitary discipline of psychology, with cooperation and collaboration between coworkers, as utopian as the promotion and adoption of Esperanto? Glossolalia and private languages had come to be the order of the day, amongst psychologists themselves.

The singularity of the term “psychology” should not mislead one into thinking that such a discipline was ever successfully founded. Or that there is an essence to “psychology” that could encompass the various definitions, methodologies, practices, world-views, and institutions that have used this designation.⁷ Rather it indicates the massive significance that psychologists gave to being seen to be talking about the same thing.⁸ As Edmund Husserl noted, “the history of psychology is actually only a history of crises” (1937, 203). The continued reference to psychology in the singular, split up and subdivided into tendencies and schools, is an instance of what Kurt Danziger has aptly called “unification by naming”. As we have just seen, it was what Claparède and Baldwin had explicitly proposed in a programmatic form. While their project was a failure, the operation of unification by naming did play a critical role in twentieth-century psychology – not through providing the ideal of univocal meaning and the possibility of effective translation and communication, but through papering over and covering up the incommensurabilities and cleavages that multiplied. This was not only important at a conceptual level, with the promotion of terms such as stimulus-response learning or the Unconscious, by which psychologists sought to bring all human experience under the rule of one universal master concept, but in the conception of the field itself. One effect of the singular conception of psychology, Danziger suggests, was that it furthered the cause of professionalization, by implying that the practically oriented branches were linked to a scientific discipline. This linkage in turn implied that the more abstruse research had practical significance (1997, 84, 133). Furthermore, by giving a distinct profile to the discipline, however conflict-ridden, unification by naming masked the epistemological anarchy that prevailed within it. The ever-increasing fractionation of

⁷ In what follows, I shall continue to refer to “psychology,” in line with the historical usage of the actors themselves. However, this is not to presuppose a unity or essence to the term.

⁸ In recognition of this situation, the American psychologist Sigmund Koch has proposed that the singular designation “psychology” be dropped, and be replaced with the “psychological studies,” claiming that psychology never was, nor could be, a single coherent discipline (1993). He argues: “The psychological studies must, in principle comprise many language communities speaking parochial and largely incommensurable languages” (1975, 481). I thank Eugene Taylor for drawing this article to my attention.

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psychology was partially a consequence of the fact that psychology never was one thing. Rather, it was an appellation that came to be used to designate a conglomeration of diverse practices and conceptions in different domains.

Already in the 1920s and 1930s, perceptive figures who had participated in the founding of psychology expressed grave doubts as to its progress. In 1921, Stanley Hall noted that there was a growing consensus amongst “the competent” that the condition of psychology was unsatisfactory and that its inaugural promise had not been fulfilled. Moreover, he thought that its state was likely to get worse (9). According to Hall,

Never in the history of the sciences has there been a stage in any of them (with the possible exception of sociology, if that can be called a science) in which along with great activity there has been such diversity of aims, such tension between groups and such persistent ignoring by one circle of workers of what is made cardinal by another (for example, the psychoanalysts and the introspectionists). (477)

For Hall, what the world needed was a “psychological Plato” to solve this situation.

A further aspect of the self-conception of psychology as a science is its evolutionary legend, the axiomatic belief that – unlike the understanding of the human condition embodied for instance in literature – psychology undergoes a process of development. As a consequence, it is widely held that we are better equipped with the theories of today than those of yesteryear through some ill-defined process of natural selection. This evolutionary legend, which passes unexamined, has lent a normative aspect to the use of contemporary Western psychological concepts, and has led to the implicit relegation of forms of psychological understanding in other cultures. Furthermore, this legend obscures the extent to which particular psychologies became dominant through historically contingent events, and, not least, through the rescripting of history.

Here we need to differentiate between various theoretical projects to found a scientific psychology, and psychologies as social formations. The latter designates the resultant disciplines, practices, and effects which arose. The projects to found psychology played an important role in legitimating the social formations. It is clear that the theoretical difficulties which beset projects for psychology did not impede the rise and “success” of psychologies as social formations. Far from it. As Nikolas Rose points out, it was precisely the lack of homogeneity and lack of a single paradigm that enabled the widespread social penetration of psychologies. They lent themselves to a variety of applications in a variety of sites. Whatever one’s

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purposes, from brainwashing to sexual liberation, there was a psychology that offered itself as ideally suited to the task (1996, 60).

The problems posed by psychology's "will to science" are not to be solved, as some have tried to do, by simply dropping the rubric of science and declaring psychology to be an art, or hermeneutics. The critical issue is not whether a particular discipline calls itself a science or not, but the nature of its practices and institutions. Thus in science studies today, one finds that the question of the demarcation between so-called science and so-called pseudoscience has increasingly become a non-issue. This has been a consequence of the increasing realization that science, with a capital "S," never existed – in other words, that there is no atemporal essence to something one could call the scientific method.⁹

The significance of the period between the 1870s and 1930s is that the major disciplinary and theoretical forms of modern psychology and psychotherapy were established at this time. Since then, there has been massive growth in production of psychological literature, in the population of psychologists and of consumers of psychological knowledge. Psychologists have been resourceful in finding ever new markets and audiences for their knowledge. There has been an acceleration in the rate of propagation of new psychologies, which shows no sign of slowing down. One of the most common titles in psychology books this century is "the new psychology of . . ." Whether the amount of actual innovation matches the massive expansion of psychologies is another question altogether.

At the same time, despite this massive growth, there has been little change in the disciplinary forms and methods of psychologies and psychotherapies. Experimentation continues to dominate academic psychology, and the couch still forms the bedrock of psychoanalysis. When confronted with psychology today, there are several options available. One could simply attempt to ignore it, though this becomes increasingly hard to do. Alternatively, one can take up an active interest in it, install oneself into one of the already existing schools of psychology, take up an eclectic position or form a school of one's own. The majority of responses to psychology fall into one of these options. However, there is another possibility, which would be to study the psychology-making process itself. For psychology itself has now become a phenomenon of contemporary life that pressingly calls for explication.

A major difficulty in evaluating twentieth-century psychology and psychotherapy is that their conceptions of the human subject have themselves partially transformed the subject that they set out to explain. Their interpretive categories have been adopted by large-scale communities and subcultures, and have given rise to new forms of life. If there is one thing

⁹ On recent work in science studies, see Golinski, 1998, and Latour, 1993.