

CTP Graduation, 2014

Good evening everyone and a special good evening to our guests of honour, our 7 graduands, Ali, Diana, Jenny, Jo-Anne, Kusum, Miriam and Ulyanna.

The College of Registered Psychotherapists of Ontario will be declared, we believe, perhaps, sometime this fall, perhaps October 1st – ish. Proclamation of the Psychotherapy Act, means, among other things, that psychotherapy is being recognized as a ‘profession’. Of course the profession of psychotherapy has existed for over one hundred now. Those in the profession have known this all along. The good news is that everyone else will soon know it.

But it is not the profession of psychotherapy in general that I wish to speak about this evening. I wish to speak about psychodynamic psychotherapy and its place in our society.

Psychodynamic psychotherapy is subversive, it is revolutionary and it is creative. Some of the great thinkers in psychoanalysis who embody this subversive spirit are Sandor Ferenczi, Donald Winnicott, Harold Searles, Robert Lindner and of course Freud himself. Christopher Bollas, in his book, the Infinite Question, reminds us that Freud wrote not only about the repressed unconscious but also about the creative unconscious. Freud saw psychoanalysis as subversive and creative. Both are part of the psychodynamic dialogue.

I’ll begin my description of psychodynamic psychotherapy as subversive by relating to you an incident that is purported to have taken place in 1909 when Freud was invited by Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts, to deliver five introductory lectures on psychoanalysis. Sandor Ferenczi and Carl Jung accompanied Freud on his journey to the United States. During their voyage across the Atlantic the three men would walk the deck of the ship telling each other their dreams and discussing this new thing, this new profession, called psychoanalysis. It is reported that during one of these discussions, Freud said, “They, referring to his American audience, do not know that we bring them the plague.” I can imagine Carl Jung saying to Freud, “Sigmund, this is bad advertizing.” Be that as it may, I believe that Freud was dead serious and knew exactly what he was talking about. Freud was saying that psychoanalysis is going to disturb the universe - it is going to disturb the world of the individual, society and culture.

Freud again emphasized his idea of psychoanalysis disturbing the universe, in his paper, "A Difficulty in the Path of Psycho-Analysis", published in 1917. In that paper, Freud stated that mankind's image of himself and his universe had suffered three severe blows: first was the theory of Copernicus which stated that not the earth but the sun is the centre of the universe, second was Darwin's theory of evolution which stated that mankind evolved from animal ancestors. The third blow, Freud stated, was probably the most wounding and was psychological in nature that is, that man is not master of his own house – meaning that we are continually being influenced by unconscious forces which, by definition, are beyond our conscious awareness.

Disturbing the universe is about being courageous enough to face the truth and to discover the workings of our own minds. Psychodynamic therapy disturbs in order to heal. It requires us to face our troubles honestly and not to hide from them. Bion said that, "the mind grows through exposure to the truth".

Robert Lindner, in his book, "Prescription for Rebellion", said, "The end to which man studies himself cannot be other than to realize his full potential" Robert Lindner also warned us about, "being diverted and forgetful of the high and significant purpose [of psychotherapy]". In other words, he warned against allowing ourselves to be lulled into adjusting to a climate of conformity.

Psychodynamic therapy by its very nature requires time. It has been described as in-depth, long-term, open-ended and the talking and listening cure. It is important and a concern that short-term, quick fix psychotherapy is in ascendency. Hospital psychiatric wards and therapy backed by insurance companies have the same motto that goes something like this: 'get them in and get them out'. Toronto's Mount Sinai Hospital until recently had a psychiatric ward where patients could stay for a substantial amount of time to receive care from psychoanalytically trained psychiatrists. At present, psychotherapy with a psychodynamic focus is no longer in favour at that institution. The procedure being followed is this: short stay, medication, and discharge.

Brain science and psychopharmacology target the relief of symptoms but neglect the mind – the interrelationship between the conscious and the unconscious mind that defines psychodynamic psychotherapy.

With the new college we find ourselves in the position of needing to inform them about psychodynamic therapy. We also find ourselves in the position of having to protect psychodynamic therapy from being watered down by the colleges' rules and regulations – the idea that one size fits all.

Christopher Bollas in his book, "The Infinite Question" made this important point; he said, "The beginning of the 21st century [has seen] a deep cultural contempt in Western societies for the idea, let alone, the expressions of the unconscious mind". The fact is we are engaged with unconscious thinking all the time. Paying attention to unconscious thinking frees up that wonderful human impulse to continually question, to wonder and to discover. This is the creative and the revolutionary aspect of psychodynamic psychotherapy.

Peter Fonagy, in his article in the Psychodynamic Diagnostic Manual, (2006) warns that turning away from psychodynamic psychotherapy could have disastrous results for our society.

I hope our collective efforts result in keeping psychodynamic thinking and clinical practice a living and vital part of our mental health system. People need to talk, we need to listen deeply; it's as simple as that and as complex as that.

A short time ago, I interviewed a person for the CTP program. In the application an interesting comment was made and I quote it here with permission. "The practice of psychotherapy seems subversive as does the CTP program itself in that it uproots or overturns mainstream ways of being". You can imagine my astonishment when I read the comment because this very issue had been on my mind as I was preparing to write my talk for this evening. The applicant's comment reflects the fact that the CTP program challenges old ways of thinking and being and attempts to give the students a unique experience of themselves and others. When we succeed in doing this we are indeed being subversive, disturbing the universe, in the way Freud intended psychoanalysis to disturb the universe.

As we go forward, it is helpful to keep in mind Winnicott's statement of the goal of depth psychotherapy. He stated that "if in the end of therapy the patient is more alive, more real, more creative, and more true to him or herself, I consider

the whole enterprise a grand success.” He added, “But I would not like to give the impression that I think this taskis easy” (Playing and Reality, 1971)

I wish to extend to each of you, seven graduands, Ali, Diana, Jenny, Jo-Anne, Kusum, Miriam and Ulyanna who have made the long journey through personal psychodynamic therapy and psychodynamic training and are still journeying through both in one form or another, my warmest and best wishes, as you enter into a whole new phase of practice as a psychotherapist. You have spent countless hours studying, attending lectures, seminars, concentrations, group, supervision, writing papers and case studies and now find yourselves standing on firmer legs about to enter a new experience and new territory. I have had some involvement with each of you – some to a greater and some to a lesser extent. I know how hard each of you has worked to arrive at this important threshold. I have had the privilege of reading all your case studies and I am impressed. I have been moved by your honesty and your courage. You are truly dedicated to your craft. You have written about your clients with care, sensitivity, insight, thoughtfulness and intelligence. Your case studies also reflect that you are life-long learners.

I am sure that each of you graduands will continue to help your clients journey through creative disturbance in order to find their authentic, creative selves. As you have already experienced, this work is challenging, sometimes frustrating and even maddening. It is, however, creative, rewarding, growth promoting, and as Winnicott says “gives us satisfaction of a deep kind”.