Jungian Studies: Lost and Found in Cyberspace

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IAJS is still young, having come into existence about a dozen years ago: according to the history posted on our website, its first steering committee was formed in 2002 and its Constitution came into effect on May 1, 2004. The current voting members of the Executive Committee are mostly new to the job, having been elected or appointed in the latter half of 2014. In these first months we have been wrestling with the practical requirements of an international, interdisciplinary association which has no fixed location or home base, and also with the psychological ramifications of being able to meet each other, for the most part, only online rather than face to face.

With those concerns making substantial demands on our time, I was hesitant for us to try to mount an online seminar this season; however, the theme of Jung and organizations was proposed, and I felt that a seminar on implications of Jungian thought for groups and organizations might actually further our work within the Committee and draw the membership into a conversation about IAJS itself, an experiment in which we are all taking part. Peter Dunlap was willing to contribute his paper on “Renewing our faith in groups”. Perhaps I could add some reflections from a different angle on the problems and possibilities of IAJS as a “frontier organization” and a laboratory for individuation in titanic times. The following is an essay rather than a scholarly study; its purpose is to provoke reflection and conversation on the aims and possibilities of IAJS.

Jung, Jungians and groups

Based on my reading of Jungian theory and my personal and professional experience over the past 40 years, I understand individuation to mean not just coming into one’s own as a distinct individual but growing into a sense of oneness and interdependency with the whole human family and

the created world. A sense of individual selfhood rooted in the greater self fosters an appreciation for the uniqueness of others and respect for their integrity. Individuation as an ongoing process continually deepens the desire for participation in community life and the commitment to care for the world. John Dourley highlights this dimension of Jung’s thought:

> It is rarely recognized that an extended compassion is endemic to Jung’s understanding of individuation. This is so because individuation moves toward a consciousness of unity with a universal substrate as the native ground enlivening the individual’s psyche and relating it to all that exists beyond the individual. . . . Greater resonance with the source of the all within the psyche can only generate a compassion with all that participates in the same source.\(^2\)

Of course, how this compassion expresses itself will vary tremendously from one person to another and over the course of an individual’s life. Some people as they individuate will take an increasingly visible and confident role in social and political affairs; others will participate in community life in a more secluded, but no less committed, style. A cloistered nun praying for the world, a painter in his studio struggling to give shape to the new images needed by the collective, a mother with an infant at the breast are each contributing no less than the politician and the community organizer. Individuation means discovering one’s specific calling, the unique contribution one can offer to one’s family, society, and cultural tradition. To differentiate oneself in this way is not to become socially indifferent or individualistic.

For those whose vocation draws us outward into group participation, leadership in organizations, or political action, there are a couple of immediate difficulties. The first is that having a deep and refined sense of community and the motivation to serve the greater whole does not in and of itself supply the competency to participate effectively in the political realm. The second problem is that even if one has cultivated such competency, it may be rendered obsolete or irrelevant by altered

circumstances, and particularly by rapid social and technological change. My aim in this essay is to reflect on the conditions that have, in other settings, supported community participation and to stimulate thinking about what new skills, habits, and cultural and institutional forms we may need to develop as members of a global, internet-based community dedicated to Jungian studies.

There are no doubt lessons from Jungian theory and clinical experience which can expand our understanding of groups of all kinds and perhaps help us participate in them more effectively. If one has developed an eye for the archetypal, a sensitivity to personal and collective complexes, a familiarity with shadow, anima and animus, and typological differences, one is better prepared for deep engagement with others at many levels. At the same time, it is evident that Jungian organizations, and Jungians participating in groups of all sorts, could learn a lot from non-Jungian specialists on group behavior. Prior to studying Jung and undergoing analysis I worked in group dynamics and organization development. As I began taking part in Jungian groups I found that many Jungians had a relatively poor grasp of group process and organizational behavior. Whatever skill I have as a member or a leader of groups probably owes more to that early work experience, and to my having been a member of the Girl Scouts, high school clubs and college societies, political action groups, and churches, than to my Jungian studies and my personal analysis. This is not, however, to discount the implications of Jungian theory for political and social life.

Could there be a specifically Jungian charism or approach to groups, a Jungian style of organization? Probably there would not be a single model to fit all circumstances. Any voluntary association should be in some sense unique (individuated, perhaps!). It should reflect the physical and psychic particularity of the place in which it is located, the individual personalities involved, the aims or ideals it is meant to serve, and the archetypal patterns or cultural complexes dominant at the time (which could be reflected astrologically and discerned in other ways such as through dreams or group imagination exercises).

The problem we face is that our group lacks the possibility of “physical and psychic particularity of the place in which it is located,” since its location is in cyberspace, and its individual members have only very limited physical contact with each other. Cyberspace is a “place” that
displaces us from place in the normal sense, and also from time and embodiment, and thus radically disrupts our processes of creating social order, civility and culture using skills that have been honed over aeons.

Frontier organizations

In our first months of working together the present IAJS Executive Committee members have observed that some features and functions of organizational life which in pre-internet days would have been taken for granted (basic record-keeping, for example) have not proven all that easy for this organization to establish or maintain. The conundrum facing us is that this is a worldwide internet-based association, a 21st century phenomenon which requires new things of us. We are in a frontier situation.

That being the case, I’ve been thinking about the history of my ancestors in North America, wondering whether I could draw inspiration or insight from the way they coped with frontier conditions. They were all farmers and homesteaders of European descent who moved further west generation by generation and helped to establish towns, community associations and social clubs, public institutions (schools, libraries), and governmental structures. Recently I have been learning more about a group that was important in the life of my maternal grandmother, Clara Ellen Gilchrist, who was born in North Dakota, not far from the Canadian border, in 1892. Her parents had homesteaded in Dakota Territory in the 1880s, before it became the two full-fledged states of North and South Dakota. She remembered vividly the cold winters on the farm with the growing family in a flimsy wooden shack, far from neighbors and further still from town. Amidst these primitive conditions, however, the fundamentals of culture and civic order were evidently transmitted from parents to children. The farm prospered, and in due course they built a proper house and became active in the growing local community. My great-grandfather eventually served in the state legislature and held

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3 Edward S. Casey has explored the vicissitudes of the idea and the experience of place; see for example The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History (University of California, 1998/2013); Getting Back Into Place (Indiana University Press, 2nd edition, 2009). In a sense, cyberspace may represent the ultimate in the loss of place; however, Casey recognizes “virtual place” not as nowhere, but as “a genuine, if still not fully understood, phenomenon of place” (The Fate of Place, xiv).
appointive office. The children all grew up to be good citizens and community-builders.

Grandmother Clara, having married and moved to Colorado with her husband, joined a women’s organization called the Royal Neighbors of America which had been founded in the midwestern US around the time she was born. This was one of many fraternal lodges for men and women established during that era which spread rapidly, planting local chapters across the country. They served several vital purposes, sometimes including mutual aid and financial security (life insurance policies were part of the RNA package – important for women who had to consider the possibility of dying in childbirth or succumbing to disease and leaving their children and husbands in need); friendship and social life; cultural enrichment (musical and theatrical performances); public service (volunteer work, charitable assistance, scholarships); and spiritual fellowship. It was only at my grandmother’s funeral that I came to understand how important the last aspect had been to her. At the graveside, following the Methodist funeral service, her sisters from the local RNA chapter came forward, surrounded the casket, and recited the organization’s own burial litany. It was Christian in spirit and form but different from the conventional church ritual, and it was very beautiful and consoling to all present. I realized then that this group had been her real spiritual home all those years – the church was secondary.

I made a mental note at the time to try to get a copy of that ritual, and recently I was able to do so by purchasing an old RNA handbook on ebay. What amazed me about the book was not only the richness of the group’s ceremonial and spiritual life, but the sophistication of its operating principles and organizational structure. These farm women who had grown up in tarpaper shacks on the prairie knew their Robert’s Rules of Order! The duties of each officer, the order for the conduct of business meetings, rules for the keeping of minutes and financial records, election and installation of officers, reporting requirements, on and on—everything was wonderfully spelled out. The relationship of the local chapter to the national headquarters was precisely articulated.

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Against the backdrop of our present challenges in IAJS, I find this little book inspiring. It shows how people of limited education and limited means, barely past the dangers of the open wilderness, could bring much-needed order and meaning into incipient communities and continue building up cultural, social and civic life as these towns became more established.

What these lodge members had going for them that we haven’t got is clusters of warm bodies in close proximity to each other! The strength of the organization lay in the combination of local focus (allowing for deep friendships developing over decades, service projects and cultural and social activities tailored precisely to local needs) and linkage to a wider network through the prescribed rituals and regional and national conventions. This network had political aims and political impact: one thing the RNA did at the national level was to advocate for women’s suffrage.

The emphasis on both performing the rituals correctly and adhering to the organization’s rules and by-laws must have been very important, not only in keeping the chapters functioning well, but in supporting psychic and cultural order in the members and the wider community. A well-run organization has a ripple effect.

This brief excursion into the history of my forebears on the American frontier has given me some encouragement regarding the human capacity for creating new cultural forms to suit new circumstances, but also leaves me discouraged at the difficulty of building community in the absence of locality, boundaries, and embodied, face-to-face connection.

**A contemporary academic model**

As an independent, part-time scholar, I am quite isolated and thus look to IAJS to meet some of my needs for intellectual stimulation and companionship. Fortunately I also live near several universities in Baltimore and have had the privilege over the years of sitting in on departmental and interdepartmental seminars and conferences related to my interests. My particular favorite is the weekly colloquium in the history of science, technology and medicine at the Johns Hopkins University. I am always impressed with the high quality, not only of the ideas under discussion, but of the human interactions in these meetings. Johns
Hopkins is a very competitive research-oriented institution, and since my husband worked there in three different departments, I know that behind the scenes some faculty members are capable of being self-important, arrogant, aggressive, and uncivil. In meetings, however, there is a remarkable degree of discipline. Usually there is a pre-circulated paper which people come prepared to discuss. After a short introductory talk by the presenter, people offer questions and comments. Commenters usually begin by saying, “Thank you for your paper,” and then perhaps mention what they found particularly interesting in the text; then they ask questions or make suggestions. The approach is to first establish what the writer was trying to achieve, why he or she was gripped by this topic. Questions and suggestions then follow, always respecting not just the writer’s disciplinary stance and research aims, but even the inner motives, the passion that launched the study. Comments are invariably constructive, seeking to help the author clarify, balance, polish, or augment the argument and the larger project of which it is a part. There is no showing off or grandstanding, no effort to hijack the proceedings in favor of some other agenda. The chair makes sure that everyone who wants to speak gets recognized and gently restrains anyone from running on too long. The meeting starts and ends on time, concluding with applause for the speaker and an informal reception or drinks at the pub. The colloquia take place around a large table where everyone can see everyone else; there are perhaps 25 to 40 people in the room. Usually there are plates of cookies circulating and a good deal of courteous effort to pass them to those sitting in corners.

This colloquium may be outstanding of its kind, but I do not think it is aberrant. Over the past four decades I have attended a great many seminars, conferences, colloquia and lectures in various schools and departments at Johns Hopkins. I can honestly say that in all that time I have never seen an instance of rudeness. The academic ethos simply does not encourage expression of the coarser aspects of individual personalities. People get a sense of importance and validation, not from being able to dominate a meeting or put someone else down, but from living up to a high standard of disciplined thought and discourse. The senior faculty, many of them internationally known in their fields, take obvious pride in setting a good example for the graduate students and junior faculty. They show up prepared every week even if the topic is of no intrinsic interest to them, knowing that there is always something to be learned from the way a particular person articulates a question,
develops a research design, invents or adapts a methodology to fit the question, queries prior assumptions, and deploys theory to interpret the findings.

While the thinking function is obviously very strong in these settings, I am also impressed with the quality of feeling. Respect for introverted feeling shows up in the way space is made for the presenter’s individual motivation in pursuing a line of research. Extraverted feeling is seen in the attention to ritual, form, and courtesy, in people’s body language, the meeting of eyes across the table, making jokes and laughing together, the passing of the cookies and adjourning for drinks afterwards.

I would go further and say that extraverted feeling plays an important role in scholarly presentations and publications in general. Before announcing his or her own brilliant discovery or hypothesis, the author or speaker acknowledges relevant work that has already been done on the matter under investigation. In thus bowing politely to fellow researchers, one affirms membership in a community of scholarship and commits oneself to its standards and ideals. This careful review of previous work, followed by the systematic development of the author’s thesis, is also a courtesy to the reader or listener. Extraverted feeling is not just a matter of responding to people in the moment but of observing cultural norms (manners, conventions, rituals) so as to strengthen the whole social fabric and enable groups to function smoothly and efficiently. Feeling, let us recall, is in Jungian terms a rational function and not an emotion. Extraverted feeling enables us to acknowledge the objective situation and adapt to it.⁵

When I leave these meetings I notice that I feel not only intellectually stimulated and informed, but mentally and psychologically “in order”. My thoughts about my own work flow better. My sense of being a “citizen” in the community of scholarship is strengthened. The feeling of responsibility toward my own research is amplified.

**IAJS: Lost in space?**

This is obviously a very different experience from that of participating in the IAJS discussion list. Our listserv is a much larger, more variegated and

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⁵ C. G. Jung, *Psychological Types*, CW6 para. 595ff.
informal group than a departmental or interdepartmental colloquium, lacking the latter’s selectivity, clearly-defined boundaries, and internal authority structure. Yet I think most of us joined the Association because we hoped to enter into a high-quality conversation that would not only stimulate and inform but give us at least a modest sense of belonging to an ordered community of scholars.

The joy of IAJS is that despite enormous geographical distances, disciplinary backgrounds, and linguistic and cultural differences, we are able to find each other and communicate in ways that further our individual research and the field(s) we all care about. Having found each other, we can help each other find things (sources of quotations, contact information for people). The sadness of IAJS is that there remain enormous geographical distances and disciplinary, language and cultural gaps. Our “common ground” is detached from the earth. As an organization, we are to a significant extent “lost in space” (to borrow the title of one of my daughter’s favorite TV shows back in the 1970s) – in cyberspace, to be exact. Unlike my grandmother’s lodge or a university department, we have no locality, no geographical boundaries, no shared time zone, not much structure, and little or no physical access to each other. Membership is open to pretty much anyone willing to pay dues, but it doesn’t require putting oneself on the line as an embodied, vulnerable human being in relation to a particular set of other such beings. We cannot regularly gather in a room, see and hear and touch each other, respond to each other’s body language, smile or laugh or cry together, or perform songs and rituals to reinforce our core values and weave ourselves into a body.

In the absence of these normal, body-based means of building community, and given the diversity and fluidity of our membership, to what extent can we hope to develop a group ethos and disciplined style of discourse such as I have described in the university setting, in which individual creativity and commonality (both vital to academic work) can be held in balance? We do have our fine tradition of online seminars, which have featured some outstanding presenters and discussants and evoked very thoughtful and stimulating responses from list members. Our conferences allow a precious few of us to meet occasionally in person, adding a bit of grounding to our ongoing participation. Over the years there has been much effort devoted to cultivating civility in IAJS (evidenced in the discussion list rules), but the situation is too disembodied and too
unbounded for our discourse to be brought entirely up to the level that would be possible in a smaller, bounded, face-to-face group. We have to rely on our members to bring to this group the academic acculturation and good manners they have acquired elsewhere (and, where that is lacking, on the vigilance of our patient and discerning discussion list moderator).

We Executive Committee members meanwhile are so far apart in time and space (spread out from Japan to North America to Europe to South Africa) that it isn’t practical for us to hold face-to-face meetings (even online). Unlike a community association board or parish council, we can’t set up a regular (weekly or monthly) meeting time and conduct business according to a finite agenda within a specific time frame, then adjourn until the next meeting. In effect, the meeting (conducted via e-mail) never begins and never ends; it is always in progress. This elasticity makes it difficult for EC members (speaking for myself, at least) to schedule our participation and budget our time. It also makes it hard to create a record of EC decisions (though Peter Dunlap, as Honorary Secretary, is making heroic efforts to do so), and thus works against accountability and institutional memory. There is no office, no file cabinet, no physical location in which to store essential records. (It would seem that in principle they could be stored online, but as yet we have not devised a means of doing so.)

Our challenge, then, is to come to grips with both the logistical and the psychological aspects of our unbounded and ungrounded cyberspace condition which makes global communication absurdly easy but subverts or complicates traditional kinds of community-building, organizational order, and accountability. This condition may also limit the Association’s capacity to exert an ordering effect on the world around us (that ripple effect I mentioned earlier), including the oft-expressed aim of getting Jungian thought better articulated and appreciated in universities.

**Finding ourselves in myth**

IAJS is not a professional organization, participation in which is required for career advancement; however, several hundred individuals have joined the Association over the course of its short life. Many have thrown themselves into organization-building, conference planning, and discussion list participation with an intensity that suggests that what we might call
“individuation energy” is at work: that is, some of us have something at stake psychologically in this effort. If we were to take seriously Jung’s view that individuation involves heightened empathy and deeper desire for participation in community, we might see IAJS as a laboratory for such participation, a “place” (though without place) in which members could submit themselves and their work to alchemical transformation and assist the transformation of the world. These two processes are of course one and the same: the fate of the individual psyche and that of the *anima mundi* are not separate. If we took an alchemical view of our present organizational difficulties and the frustration and alienation expressed from time to time on the listserv, we might see these phenomena as *prima materia*, the foundation of the work which also contains its goal and fulfillment.

In struggling to understand what is at play in our organization I sometimes think of the Titans, the first generation of the Greek gods, born from the coupling of the sky-father Ouranos (Heaven) and the earth, Gaia. According to Hesiod’s *Theogony*, Gaia “first gave birth to starry Ouranos, her match in size, to encompass all of her, and be the firm seat of all the blessed gods.”6 He then fathered the twelve Titans, the three Kyklopes, and the three Hundred-Handed Ones (Hekatonkheires), all of whom “hated their father from the day they were born, for as soon as each one came from the womb, Ouranos, with joy in his wicked work, hid it in Gaia’s womb and did not let it return to the light.”7 Gaia in her agony finally gives Kronos, the last-born of her sons, a sharp instrument, and with it he carries out her instructions to reach up from his imprisonment in the mother’s womb and castrate the father when he next visits. The severed genitals of Ouranos are flung far out over the sea, where at length they are transformed into the “form-born goddess,” Aphrodite, who steps ashore on the island of Cyprus.8

This story is a classic creation myth, depicting the difficulty of sorting out the relationship between Heaven and Earth, spirit and body, idea and reality. Earth projects her spirit upward into Heaven and thus has a partner who is a match for her. They are a fruitful pair, but Heaven’s

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perfectionism blocks the potential of their offspring to populate and shape the world. The castration of Heaven liberates the Titans and gives rise to a prolonged and dreadful battle, ultimately won by Kronos’s son Zeus and his fellow Olympians (the next generation of gods). The Titans are banished to the depths of Tartaros. Further tales of the Titans include that of Prometheus, who evoked the rage of Zeus when he stole fire from the gods and gave it to humankind, and who was punished by being chained to a rock and having his liver eaten out by an eagle every night.

The Titans who had revolted against their father’s control were denounced by him as “Overreachers” (one explanation of the meaning of their name), but of course Ouranos himself is the original overreacher, demanding more of his spouse and his children than they could do or be. The world of the internet seems to me to have a titanic or Ouranian dimension; it represents humans striving to reach beyond their capacities, possibly achieving great things, but also suffering painful consequences. The internet was created by us Earthlings, and we love its “fertility,” its seemingly inexhaustible capacity to make things happen magically and instantaneously. Yet its grandiosity, excess, abstraction and heedlessness, like that of the old Sky-God, split us off from Mother Earth, the body, and sensuous reality. It tends to stir up what is inflated and ungrounded in us, what Rafael López-Pedraza characterized as the titanic elements in the psyche. To live in Titanic times – in which rapid change is taking place and the old containers no longer hold – requires us to accept the coarseness and raggedness of our situation and try to reflect upon it psychologically even as it resists such reflection (according to López a cardinal feature of Titanism, which takes itself and its ideas literally).

Crucially, the birth of Aphrodite lifts the curse of perfectionism from earthly existence. Beauty and proportion, love, taste, and sensuous

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10 López’s view of psychological Titanism, on which I draw heavily here, and which is in turn indebted to classical scholars such as Kerényi, Nilsson, and Dodds, is elaborated in Cultural Anxiety (Daimon, 1990); Dionysus in Exile: On the Repression of the Body and Emotion (Chiron, 2000), and “Sectarian and Titanic Madness in Psychotherapy”, in Murray Stein, ed., Mad Parts of Sane People in Analysis (Chiron, 1993), pp. 73-85. A more positive view of the Titans is offered by Ann Shearer in “Unlocking the Titans: unravelling a psychological Olympianism?” International Journal of Jungian Studies I, 1 (2009), pp. 2-11.
awareness (rather than abstractions or heavenly ideals), can now take their place among the ruling principles of the cosmos (indeed, ‘cosmos’ as an ordered world, a fitting arrangement, now becomes possible\(^{11}\)). Aphrodite enables the articulation of the middle realm of psyche in which body and spirit meet, and in which the healing image can be encountered. Here, I suggest, is the basis for a psychological attitude which could support group and community work of all kinds: not so much (as Joseph Henderson, according to Peter Dunlap, proposed\(^{12}\)) a desire to intervene and make things better, but a reflective attention to what is actually moving in the psyche.

**Over to you, then...**

My hope is that members will take this portion of the seminar as an opportunity to reflect on their own experiences with IAJS (and perhaps other groups) and consider both the practical issues I have raised and the psychological underpinnings of our situation. What archetypal fantasies do you see driving participation in this group? How might we imagine them forward? What alchemical processes, gross or subtle, do you notice underway? Are there ways of compensating for the inherent limitations of the internet-based group and giving “body” to our connections through cyberspace? How might IAJS be shaped and nourished so as to evoke people’s best energies and gifts, enabling them to flourish individually through their contribution to the field of Jungian studies?

Many thanks to all for participating!

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