

Response to Soren Ekstrom

By Mark Kuras

Dr. Ekstrom's paper is directed at how the "memory" of the analyst is a presence in analytic work. Relying on the findings of cognitive science, Soren shows us the variety of ways that memory is neither a simple nor an innocent process, that subjectivity is forcefully involved in remembering—a fact that would seem to weaken claims about analysis being a "scientific" technique and strengthen claims that it is more of an art form. As Soren explains: it is the analyst and not the technique that matters most for analytic outcome. And this leads to Soren's more specific conclusion that it is how aware a given analyst is about their *remembering* that is the prime clinical factor in analytic outcomes.

Memory is a process shot through with complexities: it comprises encoding, storage, and retrieval, all of which are influenced by subjective factors. Encoding is affected by contextual factors, storage is "open" to influence by subsequent events (meaning that a memory doesn't just sit in some mental space waiting but is transforming relative to the new experiences arriving that are near to it on some dimension of meaning), and retrieval is the most complex: how is it we know what to

remember? Some recognition must precede retrieval, but this process of recognition would seem to depend upon the retrieval it is there to explain. Yet despite all of this, memory works incredibly well. It works at the level of realism—I remember this is a tree, this is my uncle, that is my old baseball field, etc.—as well as at a dynamic level—"my" memory being canted, I remember certain things in a certain style, presumably as a means to hold a certain identity. My memory process is wholly modified by an individualized narrative construct.

Soren wishes to focus attention on how this construct effects analytic process. As he points out, this narrative can have rigidity, even to the point that the rigidity becomes symptomatic, countertransfereential, even characterological. Or, on a different side, this "rigidity" can become the basis for theory, a means to expose structural principles that are seen as existing across analytic contexts.

One of Soren's main points is that depth psychology is relying on outdated theories of how the mind works, and does so because of allegiances to theories that are, from his point of view, symptomatic. And this is not just a general point, but one that passes down directly into analytic work as countertransference. It is clear that aspects of analytic theory still rely on the contextual features (the cultural moment) that necessitated the creation of depth psychology, and it is important, as Soren notes, that depth psychology respond to the changes these features inevitably

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undergo. For example, the idea about the bias in remembering followed (appeared) from the insight that the observer and the observed cannot be authentically separated. This provoked “Critical Theory,” the idea that science, and the rational enlightenment that it claimed to be the means toward, was itself an institution, that is, a product of sociocultural process; in the end everything is an ideological stance—the arrival of postmodernity, and the enshrining of subjectivity.

The response to this, in analytic circles, is to become thrilled by the awareness that the analytic work can be conceived as a process of construction, a mutual and intersubjective event. This comprises all of the operations, the narrative truth, the affective influence, the encoding factors that Soren details in his paper, which joins a contemporary interrogation, asking (anxiously) if there is (was there ever?) a valid attitudinal place from which to practice analysis. Was there ever something akin to analytic neutrality? Holding the view that there isn’t such a position seems, in current times, to stand as the therapeutic achievement.

My concern is that jettisoning theory, and the “neutrality” from which it is written, because it is somewhere somehow biased and ideologically tainted, “lifts” and limits analysis to a more superficial level of consciousness. I mean that when I read Luborsky’s or Strupp’s distillation of what makes therapy effective I recognize only a most general gloss on the process. There is no mention, because presumably they have no means to measure, the effect (and necessity) of regression, free association, suspended attention. I mean they efface those features that “drop” consciousness into that clearing where

the data that supports a depth psychology resides. It is crucial to maintain the recognition that depth psychology has been the modern means to contact internal structures of mind or psyche that preexist the individual. Freud’s primal fantasies, Klein’s positions, Jung’s archetypes—all are draped in subjective significance, but are also cross-references to unwavering mnemonic structures built into mind.

These structures are accessed through techniques that alter consciousness—again, what an analyst would call analytic neutrality—which accomplishes two things. First, consciousness confronts dynamic processes that function autonomously, even at cross-purposes to ego-consciousness (in fact, it was depth psychology, not cognitive science that initiated awareness of these distorting processes); and second, it is through this confrontation, upon this background, that the individual can be found.

These structures are enduring associative patterns, more similar to Kantian categories than to social constructions. It is consciousness’s engagement with the limiting conditions of these “fantasies” that can be what holds consciousness in neurotic fixations *and* what secures the ground for its creativity.

In analytical psychology, Jung’s approach to alchemy represents this process. Recall that Jung worked with a number of alchemical texts, many of which were written independently of each other. Imagine these texts as a number of analysands, or as a series of sessions of one analysand, and see that Jung, by comparative analysis, is able to find the grammar, the common, deep structure, pointed toward an inchoate but particularized mental state, a partic-

ular psychological attitude. The alchemists called it immortality; Jung (1954) calls it the absence of epistemological criticism: the mental posture that allows “symbol formation [to go on] unimpeded, that is, when there [is]...no epistemological criticism” (p. 274)—a freedom from the intersubjective influence, the ideological inputs, that current analysis makes so focal. It was through this perspective that Jung perceived the dynamics of individuation, that “centering” action that analytical psychology presumes to arouse, which is its version of that experience in any functioning analysis that refuses quantification; it is because of this fugitive quality that it isn’t flighty, but on the contrary, it is the experience that prevents capriciousness, suggestibility, group-think, ideological indoctrination, theoretical rigidity.

We go into “depth” for that effect, and in this depth the “analyst” cannot be split from technique: techniques are not rigid, analysts applying them are.

Technique, hopefully forged through reiterative initiations, is the means to hold our discipline, our perceptual frame, our mnemonic grammar, from where we acquire the stability to be “free,” to be surprised. The “rigidity” that looms over these facts about memory is usefully critiqued, but it questionably equates the consistencies that allow for theory with the rigidity. I think the theory of depth psychology, though constantly in dynamic transition, is not becoming obsolete; it isn’t being enfolded in cognitive science because it is obsolete but because it is being abandoned. The current concerns about deconstructing analytic authority, though often appropriate, can also be defensive, a means to avoid the rigors of technique and the limits depth has always clamped on personality.

References

Jung, C. G. (1954). The philosophical tree. *CW* 13.

