

The following autobiographical note, written by one of our Founding Members, describes the events surrounding the formation of ICP.

AN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

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The ICP is a success. Our success grows from a combination of two factors: a commitment to evolving psychoanalytic theory, and the reasonableness and progressivism of our members. These two factors combine to provide simple and compelling results – advancing psychoanalysis and providing better therapy for patients.

While teaching a first year seminar, the candidates asked me to talk about my involvement in the formation of the ICP. I was surprised by their lack of knowledge about the history of the ICP. They encouraged me to write about my experiences and I decided to put them in the form of this brief memoir.

These memories are important not only to convey the ICP's history, but also to document the struggle we faced against the almost cultic embrace of stagnant theory within the anti-democratic hierarchies of the old institutes and organized psychoanalysis. I do not intend to repeat here the well-known evolution of psychoanalytic theory and practice in America, but would like to tell our members, especially our younger members; about this evolution in light of the petty, even puerile attacks we suffered while trying to improve our profession. I hope this account will help younger members and candidates appreciate the obstacles we older analysts encountered.

Let me start with a few facts about myself. I was born in Detroit in 1934. My parents were immigrants, and my father worked as a truck driver. Both of my parents were active in the labor union movement and, as a child, I observed many organizational meetings in my own home. I did not understand all that I heard. My brother, who is now a Professor of Psychology at the University of Florida, followed the family tradition by organizing the employees in the State of Florida university system.

I attended Wayne State University for my undergraduate and medical studies. During those years I worked in several automobile factories. I became interested in psychiatry during my first year of medical school. Psychiatry at that time best combined my medical interests within a liberal, open-minded professional tradition. After a two year stint in the Air Force, I moved to Los Angeles. I joined the Southern California Psychoanalytic Institute which, at that time, seemed the most progressive institute in the area. Little did I then know that I would follow in my family tradition and later become involved in a revolution within psychoanalysis.

Two issues plagued my conscience. One was the pessimism that I and others felt about the effectiveness of our theories and techniques as applied to most of our patients. For example, the inappropriateness of structural theory for patients with narcissistic issues. Secondly, I encountered the authoritarian, exclusionary and self-serving nature of the organization I belonged to. An example of this was the certification process wherein graduates of institutes were excluded from membership in the American Psychoanalytic Association if their written case reports deviated in the slightest way from rigid, arbitrary classical guidelines of technique. Of course, if you were not a member of the American you could not be a training analyst in your local institute. Michael Basch has described in detail the constricting effects of being trained in this atmosphere:

“... students were regularly subjected to the equivalent of an examination

of conscience by teachers and supervisors, and any deviation in their thinking from the accepted instinct theory of development was an indication that the student needed more analysis... to say or do anything other than interpret the genesis of the patient's problems would destroy our therapeutic, neutral stance... many in this group were further united by a disdain for all other attempts to investigate the human condition, including experimental, learning, cognitive, and other aspects of academic psychology, as well as all other forms of therapy. Because all these forms of treatment were obviously no more than a resistance to psychoanalysis, their protagonists were to be pitied, not studied. The result of this kind of training was that we learned both a theory and a method that were not applicable to our patient population." (Basch, M. [1983] "The Significance of Self Psychology for a Theory of Psychotherapy." In Reflections on Self Psychology, Lichtenberg and Kaplan, eds. Hillsdale, N.J.: Analytic Press, pps. 223-228)

There were many ways in which a tension grew between my earlier values and my experiences with psychoanalysis. For example, I was strongly influenced by Kohut's early work. (Kohut, H. [1968] "The Psychoanalytic Treatment of Narcissistic Personality Disorders." In The Psychoanalytic Study of the Child, Vol.23, pps. 86-113). This demonstrated to me that there were alternative and new ways to look at clinical transference. Later on, I realized how ossified psychoanalysis and its bureaucracies had become as repressive measures were applied against Kohut and his ideas. For example, an edict came down at SCPI that write-ups of supervised cases could only describe narcissism according to classical theory.

Some years later I joined a study group of members from SCPI who wanted to consider the emerging new ideas. At that time, self psychology was for us the main escape route from a drive-oriented metapsychology. Recent years have brought a confluence of relational theories. In any case, we all experienced an expansion of our psychoanalytic abilities in an unrestricted ambience. I believe this study group and another smaller clinical study group, were the precursors of the Institute of Contemporary Psychoanalysis.

Many bureaucratically powerful persons in the SCPI and other institutes connected with the American (i.e., the old guard) reacted furiously to these groups and the ideas we explored. The impetus to create a new institute was accelerated by the intolerable atmosphere created by years of petty political machinations against those open to new ideas. Looking back, these attempts to prevent change directed by the old guard seem comedic as well as tragic: comedic because their fear for the loss of their bureaucratic power and prestige was openly evident and tragic since members of a therapeutic profession were impeding the progress of their healing art.

Within the SCPI the eclectic members became the most popular teachers, supervisors and training analysts. They also handled much of the administrative institute business. In reaction, a movement arose among those who had been the controlling powers to minimize the success of this progressive group. A group highly antagonistic to this progress arose with vengeance including some from retirement. They committed personal attacks. For example, at a meeting we had with the old guard to resolve our differences, they accused us of being under some nefarious influence of John Lindon, who they said wanted to disrupt the institute.

Another way progress was circumvented was through a new rule that restricted candidates' free choice in selecting supervisors. Those in power rationalized this rule as "theoretical balance." If a candidate chose the wrong sort of supervisors, she or he was forced to select a "classical supervisor, who to often was a person not only opposed, but hostile to any independent new thinking. This maneuver was an obvious abridgement of the democratic principles so many of us valued.

Further insulting was how the old guard defined themselves and their coterie as "classical" and arbitrarily lumped all the other members under a theoretical umbrella of "self psychologist" in a derogatory manner. For example, Doryann Lebe and Lou Breger were not self psychologists, but were labeled such for training

approaches that were ignored. This ensured the old guard an even larger piece of the “Theoretical balance” pie, meaning more guaranteed referrals.

A concurrent crisis emerged over the training of non-medical candidates. Non-medical therapists had been historically excluded from training. In 1988, a lawsuit forced this policy to change. Nevertheless, non-medical applicants were still subjected to a series of obstacles. Our local choices of non-medical candidates were being vetoed by the American. We felt this was because these candidates and their mentors were of “non-classical” theoretical orientation. An election during this crisis led to the selection of Richard Rosenstein as Dean of Training with the mandate to liberalize procedures. Other changes to help the aggrieved candidates were supported by majority vote. Yet the old guard outrageously circumvented the vote through subsequent procedural maneuvers in collaboration with the leaders of the American. For example while trying to work out some differences on a local level; the old guard felt it was not getting its way, so they asked the American to intercede. National representatives were sent to Los Angeles who acted in an authoritarian way and threatened to dis-accredit the institute because of our activities.

These examples are a tiny sampling of the outrageous behavior engaged in by the local old guard in secret collaboration with the American. In my clinical study group, there was much talk about freeing ourselves from the arbitrary and regressive strictures of the SCPI. Lou Breger was the first to articulate the idea of creating a new separate institute. He spoke with other analysts and approached Robert Stolorow, and Morton and Estelle Shane with the idea. The Shanes were our first contacts outside SCPI. We all agreed that a new institute should be a broad-based, inclusive, democratic and open to new ideas.

A particularly egregious event personally pushed me over the edge from thinking to doing. Lou Breger and I attended an Executive Committee meeting at SCPI. The meeting was set to consider the plight of a deserving non-medical candidate who was rejected by the national organization. I sat and watched as some of the old guard unreasonably discredited her training analysis with inappropriate vehemence. I believe the old guard acted so because her training analyst was Richard Rosenstein. Lou and I turned to each other and decided right there that a new institute had to be created.

The process started by gathering 12 sympathetic analysts in one place to discuss the creation of a new institute. There was an obvious need for a new authentic place of learning, but there were risks to consider too. I wanted our first meeting to take place in my home. I found it very compelling to have my home be part of the creation of an organization devoted to democracy and helping people like my parents’ home was.

Nine members of the Southern California institute and three members from the Los Angeles institute attended the first meeting in October of 1990. Perhaps I should say eight full members of the Southern California were present. Bob Stolorow was only an “affiliate” member and barred from full membership by the rules of the national organization. This was the sort of game-playing we gathered together to eliminate.

Judith Vida joined us from the LAPSI, as did Estelle and Morton Shane. The members from the SCPI, all of whom played important roles throughout the earlier struggles, were Louis Breger, Doryann Lebe, Herbert Linden, John London, Richard Rosenstein, Robert Stolorow, Norman Tabachnick, Arnold Wilson, and myself.

Each of us spoke for five minutes about our feelings on the need and purpose of a new institute. The prominent issues involved the existing arbitrary and stultifying rules in the old institutes involving every aspect of training, membership and the advancement of psychoanalysis. Needless to say, each of us could have lectured at length about past injustices and our hopes for the future. But five minutes each was all we needed to understand we had no option. We had to create a new institute.

We had more meetings at my house, each rife with excitement, as we put forth new idea after new idea regarding curriculum, training analyst status, candidate status and other aspects that would create an innovative psychoanalytic institute and allow progress in psychoanalytic theory and practice. On January 1, 1991, we proudly issued the following statement.

Dear Colleague:

We wish to announce the formation of a new, free-standing psychoanalytic institute, the ICP, whose training program will be developed independently of institutionalized psychoanalysis, national and international. Admission to the ICP will be open to highly qualified mental health professionals and selected individuals whose research intersects with psychoanalysis. We are looking for applicants with those special personal, intellectual, and ethical qualities that make a good psychoanalyst, regardless of their original field.

Two principles guide our organization:

Contemporary Psychoanalysis: Psychoanalysis at present contains a rich mixture of theories, observations, and treatment methods. Active controversy exists at all levels; it is a time of opportunity and excitement. Our program will stress academic excellence and innovation; the curriculum will expose candidates to the different approaches that characterize the field today. There will be flexibility in the interpretation of training requirements. We hope to graduate open-minded analysts, professionals who will be able to think critically about a range of ideas and methods.

Academic Freedom: The ICP will be organized as a participatory democracy in which all groups – from candidates to senior members – have a say. All active members who are immersed in psychoanalytic work can become training analysts with a specified amount of post-graduate experience, thus avoiding unnecessary hierarchical structures.