
Introduction

During my analytic training, I often wrestled with the question, “What distinguishes Jungian analysis from forms of therapy?” In many respects, when not engaged in dream work, it seemed that I was unable to clearly differentiate the Jungian model of therapy from other models of therapy. As I wrestled with this issue during my training, I noticed a few of my teachers and supervisors seemed to approach analytic intervention in a distinctly different manner than the other analysts to whom I was exposed. Most notable among these was Mel Marshak, who had received her analytic training in London through the Society of Analytical Psychology. Early in my training, as she would read from the process notes of her cases, I would be astonished at the clarity, emotional engagement, and specificity of her interventions. At the time, I did not yet realize that she was providing examples of interpretation. My idealizing fantasy was that her ability to intervene in this manner reflected a unique gift that only she possessed. Eventually, I found my way into the psychoanalytic literature and discovered that there was an underlying method to what Marshak was doing. More importantly, I came to recognize that analytic interpretation was a process that could be learned and taught. By incorporating a focus on the technique of analysis, in particular interpretation, I began to see how analytic work truly differs from other therapeutic modalities; not just when interpreting dreams but throughout the analytic interaction. Of equal significance, my study of interpretive processes awakened me to the creative, artistic elements of the analytic process.

The subject of interpretation is fundamental to the process of analysis or analytic psychotherapy. In analysis, many factors contribute to the cultivation of transformative experience, for example, a deep sense of engagement, the analyst’s capacity to listen in depth, and the capacity to tolerate long periods of ambiguity. However, the analytic interpretation remains the most salient medium by which the analytic art form is communicated. If the analytic vessel is thought of as the canvas, then interpretations are the paints the depth psychologist uses, along with the patient,¹ to create the analytic painting. What the analyst chooses to say in analysis, why the analyst chooses that particular thing to say, how the analyst says it, and when the analyst says it – these are the fundamental building blocks of the interpretive process.²

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At times, when first hearing about interpretation and technique,³ there can be a perception that interpretation and technique are somehow dry and mechanical. However, the interpretive process is where the creative aspect of analysis truly comes alive; when the analyst becomes the poet—carefully weighing words, sensing into the feeling of those words, imagining how the words will fit with the emotional context of what has come before and what will come after. Ultimately, an interpretation is an attempt to capture in language and tone the essence of something only partially seen, still dancing behind a veil. As Loewald (1980) puts it, “Language in its most specific function in analysis, as interpretation, is thus a creative act similar to that in poetry where language is found for phenomena, contexts, connections, and experiences not previously known and speakable” (p. 242). According to Hillman (1983, p. 108), a fundamental shift occurs when we begin seeing therapy as an artistic process, that is, to allow an “art fantasy” to exist outside of the existing fantasy of therapy. This is a shift that allows therapy to be de-literalized and that guards against the overvaluation of either therapy or art.

However, interpretation is like other creative processes; developing fluidity and spontaneity requires effort and practice. The artist, whether poet, dancer, musician, painter, sculptor, or composer, spends thousands of hours practicing the techniques of their craft. Before they can improvise fluidly, jazz musicians spend years learning scales, chord structure, modes, standard progressions, and the technique of their particular instrument. Aspiring novelists practice the effective use of literary techniques such as character development, back story, plot twists, foreshadowing, and narrative hooks. Poets develop proficiency with techniques such as rhythm, form, rhyme, metaphor, allusion, and alliteration. Interpretation is an essential skill for the analytic therapist, but it can be used effectively only if fluency and comfort with interpretation have been cultivated. Engaging in analysis without learning the art and craft of interpretation is somewhat like a painter desiring to paint only with one brush and one color. Yes, a painting can be created with those materials, but the possibilities are greatly constricted.

Technique addresses the process of the analytic work rather than the content that emerges during the work. When combined with an analytic attitude, it is a set of tools that facilitates the engagement of the unconscious while minimizing factors that interfere with the emergence of unconscious material. Technique provides an underlying structure to the analytic process—the unseen but necessary support for the art of analysis. An understanding of technique provides a bird’s-eye view of the analytic process. As Lear (2009) emphasizes, understanding the structure of analysis informs the analyst’s awareness of the overall arc of analysis during the moment-to-moment shifts in the analytic session:

If one is to have a clear sense of why one is doing what one is doing in an analytic moment, one needs to have a sense of what psychoanalysis is for; conversely, one cannot have a textured sense of what psychoanalysis is all about unless one also understands how that overall conception of its value filters down and informs the analytic moment.

(p. 1299)

Yet, within this common set of underlying patterns, designed to maximize the emergence and engagement of unconscious processes, each analysis also unfolds in its own unique way, still ultimately shaped by the personalities of the patient and the analyst. As Jung (1953b), citing an alchemical dictum, reminds us, “*Ars totum requirit hominem*” – that is, the art requires the whole person (para. 6).

For most psychoanalytic institutes,⁴ the study of technique is foundational to their training programs, and they have developed a model of analytic technique in which the concept of interpretation is central (Levy, 1990; Rubovits-Seitz, 1998, 2001a,b). Freud laid out the fundamental principles of technique in psychoanalysis in a series ten papers published between 1910 and 1919 (Freud, 1959). While these guidelines have been re-examined and modified (Fenichel, 1941; Greenson, 1967; Etchegoyen, 2005), Freud’s primary guidelines on technique remain intact in most schools of contemporary psychoanalysis, even though many of Freud’s theories regarding the nature of unconscious processes and development of the personality have been modified or discarded (Rubovits-Seitz, 2002). Levy (1990) highlights the centrality of technique and interpretation to the analytic process, “Certain principles of technique and especially systematic interpretative inventions remain at the core of all clinical psychotherapeutic and psychoanalytic work” (p. viii).

Jungians, however, have a more ambivalent attitude about guidelines regarding technique in general and interpretation in particular (Zinkin, 1969; Charlton, 1986). As Dieckmann (1991) points out, Jungians generally have an aversion to addressing technical guidelines for undertaking an analysis, with the exception of dream interpretation and active imagination. Numerous volumes have been written detailing guidelines for Jungian dream interpretation and active imagination, yet there are fewer than a handful of books that address the interpretation of the analytic interaction from a Jungian perspective.⁵ However, as anyone practicing analytic therapy quickly becomes aware, there are often significant stretches of time in analytic sessions that are not focused on dream work or active imagination. In fact, some patients do not engage in dream work or active imagination throughout the course of their analytic process. As Bovensiepen (2002) puts it:

Even today, several of my Jungian colleagues and I frequently experience a certain gap between Jung’s topical theoretical conceptions of the unconscious and transformability of the psyche and his lack of theory for analytic technique. . . Or perhaps, to express it more poetically, Jungians like ourselves too often have our heads in the clouds, and we can learn from psychoanalytical treatment technique to bring us back down to earth. (p. 242)

Historically, the primary exception to the Jungian ambivalence toward the technical aspects of analysis has been Michael Fordham and the Society of Analytical Psychology (SAP) in London (Astor, 1995; Samuels, 1986). Fordham and other analysts of the SAP began incorporating elements of psychoanalytic technique

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and theory in areas where they felt there was inadequate development of the Jungian model. This group became known as the London School, in distinction from the Zurich School – that is, those analysts who were trained by Jung and his close colleagues in Zurich. As time has gone on, this emphasis on blending psychoanalytic approaches with the classical Jungian approach is no longer exclusive to London, and analysts practicing from this perspective are often referred to as “developmental Jungians” (Samuels, 1986).

Apart from the developmental perspective, for reasons to be discussed more fully later on, Jungian analytic training tends to underemphasize technique. As a result, an important tool for working analytically is not well developed. In my experience as a teacher and supervisor, most Jungian analytic candidates feel rather uncertain about how to proceed in the analytic situation when not involved with dream interpretation or active imagination. They often have difficulty recognizing and engaging the patient’s emerging unconscious material when the symbolism is not readily identified as such within the analytic context.

The analytic activity of interpretation is an area where the rich reservoir of archetypal images and narratives cultivated during Jungian training can be brought to life. The immersion in mythology, religion, fairy tales, and alchemy during Jungian training serves to develop a strong facility in working metaphorically with analytic patients. The underlying metaphorical patterns observed in these archetypal motifs are also present in the implicit or unconscious patterning of the patient’s verbalizations, fantasies, and behaviors. However, without developing the necessary facility with interpretation, it is difficult for students in Jungian training to effectively incorporate these rich archetypal-metaphorical resources in their analytic interactions. In my experience, blending the deep understanding of archetype, symbol, and metaphor from the Jungian tradition with competency in psychoanalytic interpretative technique creates a powerful therapeutic amalgam.

Many in the Jungian community are more comfortable operating primarily from intuition and inquiry; tending to overemphasize the passive, receptive, holding aspects of clinical interaction while neglecting to develop a balance in their analytic activity by engaging the active, penetrating, engaging end of the intervention continuum. Working from the metaphor of the mother–infant dyad, a clear, coherent, empathic interpretation is like the mother’s firm, milk-engorged nipple that provides the infant something to attach to and be nourished by, whereas the passive-receptive stance can sometimes be experienced by the patient as being like the flaccid nipple that is difficult to grasp and receive nourishment from.

The following chapters will examine in more depth the historical, philosophical, and theoretical origins of interpretation, definitions of interpretation, research on interpretation, and the role of interpretation in various schools of analytic thought. Specific focus will be given to the place of interpretation in Jungian analysis and the unique contribution the Jungian perspective can bring to the interpretive process, particularly the use of interpretation in the transformation

of complexes. Attention will also be given to the role of metaphor in interpretation, the differentiation between interpretive and non-interpretive interventions in analytic therapy, and the identification of different types of interpretation. Much of the focus involves a functional delineation of the process of interpretation in the analytic setting – including the structure, timing, wording, and style of interpretation. The poetic and musical bases of interpretation, as well as the analyst's use of reverie in the interpretive process, are also examined. Finally, the arc of interpretation, as an ongoing process that shifts and evolves throughout the analytic process, is addressed. Suggestions for learning to interpret fluidly are furnished, and clinical examples of interpretation are provided throughout. In most instances, the examples selected for this volume were chosen because they reflect the vicissitudes of everyday work in the analytic consulting room. Extensive patient histories are not provided; in fact, only minimal context is provided for each example, and in each instance all identifying information is intentionally altered in order to protect the identities of the patients involved. In a few instances, clinical montages using elements from similar cases have been created to illustrate scenarios commonly encountered in the analytic setting.

Without sacrificing the philosophical heart of Jung's approach to the psyche, Analytical Psychology has much to gain by incorporating the technique of interpretation. In fact, knowledge of interpretation expands one's sense of the symbolic by developing a greater awareness of, appreciation for, and understanding of the symbolic aspects of the analytic interaction. My hope is that the readers of this book will become excited about the therapeutic and creative possibilities associated with analytic interpretation. Hopefully, this volume will dispel old stereotypes that portray interpretation as distant, dry, mechanical, and overly intellectualized, and will help to close the lingering divide between the Jungian and psychoanalytic communities. Said another way, my intention is to re-narrate the normative perception of interpretation. Ultimately, my goal is to provide less experienced analytic therapists and analysts-in-training with an in-depth exposure to the art and technique of analytic interpretation, as well as providing more experienced practitioners with opportunities to re-evaluate their relationship with analytic technique and deepen their capacity to utilize interpretation as a tool for facilitating transformation.

Notes

- 1 Throughout this book, I utilize the terms "patient" and "analysand" interchangeably to refer to any individual engaged in an analytic process, regardless of the frequency or duration of that process. I intentionally avoid the use of the term "client," which, for me, evokes connotations of commercial or business transactions focused primarily on the exchange of money for services rather than a mutually created process that emerges out of relationship.
- 2 In this book, I will often refer to the role of the analytic clinician as "analyst," but I use the terms analyst, therapist, psychotherapist, psychoanalyst, depth psychologist, or analytic clinician interchangeably throughout. These roles share, as common denominators, the engagement with the unconscious, the coalescence of experience, and the creation of meaning.

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- 3 Technique refers to the mechanics by which the analytic interaction takes place – for example, how the analyst: begins and ends an analysis, creates a secure analytic setting, works within the transference–countertransference matrix, engages the patient’s defenses and resistance, and interprets the analytic interaction.
- 4 By “psychoanalytic institute,” I am referring to institutes whose lineage is traced back to Freud rather than Jung – for example, object relations, intersubjective, Lacanian, self psychology, relational, or interpersonal. Very few contemporary psychoanalysts identify with or refer to themselves as “Freudian” or as “Freudian psychoanalysts.” Hence I will use the term “psychoanalytic” when referring to psychoanalysts and institutes that practice a contemporary version of psychoanalysis that descends from Freud rather than Jung.
- 5 The interpretation of dreams and the facilitation of active imagination are also components of Jungian technique; however, since these aspects of technique are covered at length elsewhere, this volume will focus on interpreting the explicit and implicit aspects of the analytic interaction.

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