

Response

to David Russell and Brendon Stewart
*Analytical Psychology as a Spiritual Practice
and The Fear of Reality*

The Geometry of a Life's Work

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In his poem *Suicidio*, Federico Garcia Lorca describes in imagistic mode the state of a young man on the edge of his demise. He describes in lines such as this – ‘and on taking off his gloves, ash fell from his hands’ – the youth’s dissolution: the loss of definition of himself. The startling thing about this poem is the very first line which goes (in translation): ‘Perhaps it happened because you did not know your geometry’.

I have been caught by the idea of inherent psychic geometry - the personal symmetry of one’s professional character and, in particular, the progression of the specific points, shapes, pattern of the ideas with which the Analytical Psychology project at the University of Western Sydney (UWS) has been defined by Brendon Stewart and David Russell and those colleagues whose teaching and sense of design helped form it over time (including Anne Noonan, Giles Clark, Glenda Cloughley, Judith Pickering, myself, and others).

It can be said, without being too simplistic, that Jung works to a particular geometry, he consistently organises his ideas and his formulations of the psyche around configurations of square and circle - his mandala geometry. He was also beset with dualities and opposites and the notion of line. That is to say – a telos – or direction implicit in the idea of individuation. I don’t say

that this is all he does, but if you wanted to simplify Jung down to a few basic diagrams you would probably come up with such a list of patterns. Freud would almost certainly have a triangular dynamic at the core of his theoretical conceptualising. I suggest that all of us probably work at different times in our professional task to specific and characteristic design. These inherent working designs which seize and direct may be unconscious, maybe not. We have survived so far, not suicided, because we have learned a geometry.

And so it this notion of geometry which I offer in my response to the papers of both Brendon and David. Both have here today, to some extent, summarised or distilled the geometry inherent in their theoretical approach to spiritual discipline or spiritual activities as well as to their work at UWS teaching Jung's psychology and philosophical orientations.

In brief I will comment on a few elements in their complementary geometry.

TIME

Both are cognisant of time, the lineages and the traditions from which they draw. The teaching at UWS made particular effort to introduce and link students to the lineage and matrices of the historical contextual past. Both work in and with the present moment. This underlies their phenomenological appreciation of the subjectivity of experience. The UWS project was about studying, observing and working in the moment with students' experience of the ideas drawn from the line of the past. I consider this joint complementary occupation of David and Brendon with the relation between time past and time present to be an indication of specific personally tested spiritual perspectives which they know, love and acknowledge.

MATRICES

Both are concerned with the matrices of nature and environment, the person in context. They do not teach Jung or Freud *et al.* as isolates, idea mongers, as singular genius. Always there was a linking back into the matrices of nature, of community, of social and cultural activities and the intellectual history and drama in which 'psychoanalysis' – its character and art as both therapy and philosophy – is an active part.

STORY LINE OR NARRATIVE

Both approached the teaching and indeed the spiritual aspirations of many students with encouragement to find and refine personal narrative, intersected with cultural narrative. Discover and refine the line of one's own being, but do this without cutting down the story lines of your neighbour. Critique and differentiation, formulation and precision in the design and development of your own narrative voice and content. This implies developing a kind of subjective independence. Find your own geometry. Students were always encouraged to find the story line, linking point *a* to point *b*.

This has led, I think, to a primary position of both David and Brendon. A kind of openness, a cultivated 'uncertainty principle' and reluctance to foreclose on students' ideas and investigations. Mindful, of course, of the needs of academic discipline.

THE ONE OR THE MANY

David, in his paper, emphasises, from Spinoza, the metaphor of the lens. He asserts that his lens offers a pluralistic perspective, he accommodates plurality and contradiction and has, over his spiritual and academic life, dissolved

attachment to the absolute, the singular idea, and as such has probably also eschewed, as a teacher, taking up positions which require conflict and adversarial precision as the method. David stands for 'debate' but not a clash of absolutes and opinions. He has cultivated a receptivity which absorbs penetrative oppositions. I am aware that intellectual aggression is a mode upon which many thrive; the binary geometry of opposition? David did not teach aggression.

Brendon in turn values what may be called 'the open and empty place' which David was specific about defining in his paper. Both men teach from a respect for emptiness as both generative and stimulus. Brendon, it would seem, is familiar with doubt and allows doubt to simmer. In this, perhaps, both are imbued with the geometry of the Tao. A pattern and phenomenon to which Jung would appear to have arrived in his maturity.

In describing something of what I call the geometry of the approach and method of these men it is possible to see how they extrapolated this geometry into the implicit and explicit design of their work at UWS. Since I taught there with them, I have experienced the effect of their symmetries and their coordinates and this includes their experiences and confrontations with dualities, opposites and triangulations. I have seen where the method in teaching and in the supervision of theses has been successful and where their geometry has been a cause of consternation or bemusement to those who begged definition, who begged conflict and sharpness.

FINALE

I have suggested that, as an exercise, each of us might consider how our own or colleagues' geometry of being might be drawn: what angles, points, lines, configuration have been the architectural basis of the work which we have built

singly and collectively. (I realise that this is primarily a visual metaphor, there are others, of course, which get at the pattern and structure of a life's work.)

I like the idea of geometry. It is revealing of unconscious and intended formative, fixed patterning in our work, some perhaps compulsive, as in the geometry of a complex; some perhaps creative - as one finds in the bio-geometry of generativity, that duality of the male and the female, or the networking matrices of the perennially fascinating soft geometry of the brain. I think we can profitably apply this idea to the design implicit in the work of all the speakers who have presented their selves, their many selves, to us here at this Conference.

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