

Embryology of the
Los Angeles Psychoanalytic Society and Institute

by David Brunswick, Ph.D.

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A funny thing happened to me on the way to the Reminiscences. I seemed to have been the victim of the megalomaniac delusion that I was the sole or main cause of the development of our Society and Institute. Now that couldn't be: that I was the main cause (I'm not that powerful or able) or that I had suffered a delusion (I'm not that crazy!) So let's see first how it was, in what way I was bound up with said development.

On my way back in 1930 from my three years in a quandary, I mean in Vienna, I had a fantasy that I would settle in Los Angeles and together with our friend, John Benjamin (now unfortunately deceased) would start a Psychoanalytic Institute there. (John had been analyzed in Zurich, had studied medicine there and had some analytic training.)

Well, in reality I did not intend to practice psychoanalysis out here. However, when my wife Dorothea and I settled here (we had really planned to), we soon looked up our friends Richard and Ruth Tolman (quite a number of you may have known her. He was a Cal Tech physicist and she a psychologist). They got us to accompany them to a Study Group on psychoanalysis which met about once a month at the house of Thomas and Margrit Libbin (now Margrit Munk), who were practicing psychoanalysis, having received some training in Vienna. This was pleasant and interesting for us. The members included besides Richard Tolman and his wife,

another Cal Tech physicist, Paul Epstein, who knew quite a lot about psychoanalysis and had been analyzed in Zurich, two or three psychiatrists, one or two social workers, psychologists, teachers.

I could understand psychoanalysis and the papers and cases which were discussed, and felt that I could certainly do as well as Tom Libbin, and that is also how Ruth Tolman saw it. She thought it a shame that I didn't practice analysis with the background that I had, when the need for it was so great and so very few were doing it here (probably only the Libbins, with any Freudian background or training). And so, I not having found anything else I really liked to do, Ruth Tolman persuaded me to start, and referred me my first patient, through a physician in Hollywood; and I began my practice in his office in mid-January 1931. A month later I had my own office at the California Medical Building, 1401 South Hope Street, encouraged also by my good friend Dr. James H. Cryst, whose office was there.

Right now I remind myself of the ancient cartoon in the New Yorker: Patient on the couch; analyst sitting behind him with hands folded behind his head, obviously speaking: "and then I decided to go to medical school". That is not what I was saying; but it's time I get on with it and get away some from the self-centeredness.

Soon a few more analysts arrived from their European training: Estelle Levy from Vienna, Marjorie Rosenfeld (later M. Leonard) from Berlin (both originally from New York, also my city of origin). We slowly built our practices (with referrals from physicians) and continued the meetings of the Study Group at the Libbins', taking an increasing part in the discussion.

And then in the spring of 1933 we actively took our decisive step. I think I was the leader in it, and Miss Levy and Marjorie Rosenfeld thoroughly agreed. The proposal was to invite an experienced medical psychoanalytic teacher from Europe to lead our group and help us young analysts to learn more, even afford us opportunity for more personal analysis. Only Mr. Libbin was against the idea, feeling that the medical analysts would eventually "put us lay analysts out of business", as he termed it. Margrit herself favored the plan, sensible as always; and the psychiatrists and Cal Tech scientists favored it and backed us with promised support and aiding, through letters and affidavits, the immigration of our invitee.

I favored as the invitee Dr. Ernst Simmel, whom I had met at his Tegel Sanatorium near Berlin, and the choice was enthusiastically supported by Franz Alexander (then in Chicago) and by Hanns Sachs (then in Boston). I wrote to Dr. Simmel -- in German; I can't believe it! And he accepted. We had known of course that the tragic threat from the Nazis would aid us in our attempt to get a suitable leader.

So Simmel arrived with his family in April 1934, and soon by the summer he had things organized (as was his wont): The Psychoanalytic Study Group of L.A., with by-laws, membership, dues, library, teaching, seminars, analysis of a few of us, some supervision, and active contact with physicians, social workers, psychiatrists, educators, including appropriate seminars.

In New York (on Simmel's way to us) Dr. A. A. Brill, the perennial pioneer leader of American psychoanalysis, warned Dr. Simmel "not to

have anything to do with those lay analysts out there on the West Coast". Simmel did not remind him that it was just these lay analysts who had invited him; but he was prudent enough not to accept any new lay people for training; and we all knew the dangers which would be in that, with the way the wind was blowing in America. (I, for one, knew that the only worth-while organizational growth would be eventually to an out-and-out medical organization.)

However, Dr. Simmel was not quite careful enough, and this led to some complications, a few of which I will mention later.

In 1935 Simmel invited Mrs. Frances Deri to come here from Prague, where she had gone as soon as the Nazis came to power in Berlin. And in turn Mrs. Deri had (with Simmel's concurrence) invited Otto Fenichel, who arrived in 1938 after his refuge first in Oslo, then also in Prague. So by then we had three teaching analysts instead of only one. The embryo of an Institute was beginning to take shape, with some of us younger Study Group members helping with the related fields as extension division.

Mrs. Deri was a fine teacher, as a number of you know -- now recently and sadly taken from us by death at the advanced age of 90, after a long disabling illness. Fenichel you all know of from his writings as a great teacher of psychoanalysis even though only a few of you knew him personally, since he died so suddenly twenty-five years ago, in January 1946 at the young age of 48, before the Society and the Institute were firmly founded. That was a grievous loss, and all of us who knew him as a friend and some who knew him also as a teacher missed him sorely.

My wife and I, also some of the other Study Group members, especially Margrit Libbin, took pleasure in welcoming and entertaining the newcomers from Europe, including Hanna Heilborn too in 1938, who soon became Hanna Fenichel, now well known too and loved by so many of us; and we were glad to transport them about till they became settled and independent. We all, including myself, should know gratefully how much we owe to the helpful friendliness of Dorie Brunswick in the pleasant beginnings of our developing psychoanalytic organization here, before official politics, conflicts and in some way regrettable splitting. For each of the invited immigrant analysts, I always provided the necessary affidavits of responsibility. So Dr. Simmel called me Affi-Davit Brunswick.

I think that at this point I can recognize what kind of a role I have filled in this development. It was largely as a catalyst for the work and reactions of the others who built so much. I believe it was to a good extent also thus with John Benjamin (another too early lost by death) in the more recent organization of the Denver Society and Institute. In this way perhaps my early fantasy has been fulfilled in reality. In San Francisco too, I think a similar role was played by Bernfeld; in each case it has been in accordance with the particular personality of each of us. Lord knows we were different from each other, in quality and quantity. The common factor may have been that we were all three men of good will, with a minimum of hostility.

Now toward the end of my reminiscing (I hope the end can be soon) I must bring up the mistakes Dr. Simmel made, only one of which perhaps led to serious consequences, and that one was a reaction formation to a previous one. For Ernst Simmel was also particularly a man of good

will. But also he had power and enjoyed it, so that his good will not tempered enough by skepticism led him to misjudge personalities, with unfortunate results.

The first one was a young man, an American with a recent Ph. D. in psychology in Vienna, arriving with a letter of strong recommendation from Bernfeld who had had him in analysis there. Simmel accepted him at once and had him elected to membership in the Study Group. But there was a weakness in his character which caused him to plagiarize in presenting a case study to the group. Dr. Simmel recognized the plagiarism and the young lay analyst confessed it and was demoted to Associate Membership!

Later Simmel referred this then unfortunate fellow to his second mistake, one of a married couple, psychiatrists and analysts, whom Simmel had invited from Europe to settle here. The couple broke with Simmel for some reason I do not know, and the Ph.D.'s analyst became mortally ill physically and mentally. Maybe this was really just bad luck and not a misjudgment of Simmel's, though the survivor of the couple never made peace with Dr. Simmel or the group. The Ph.D. survived, made a recovery from the debacles, visited me once and was practicing apparently successfully in another city.

The third mistake was more serious, especially since it led by reaction formation to the last mistake which perhaps did have a permanent effect on our organization, probably deleterious.

Back in the early days, Simmel had accepted a real crook into the organization, Dr. Louis Montgomery, so called, also from New York.

This man claimed to be a trained psychoanalyst and presented an interesting case discussion. He was elected a member of the Study Group. Simmel did not write to New York to inquire about this man, who had presented to Simmel his certificate of membership in the New York County Medical Association which on investigation later turned out to be a forgery. The man had forged his own first name on some other Montgomery's certificate. Louis Montgomery began to act up in a somewhat manic way. One day in a bantering mood he said to Mrs. Deri, "I am the best analyst in Los Angeles." She replied, "Well, you may think that, but I think I am the best analyst on Plymouth Boulevard." Mrs. Deri and Montgomery were the ones who had their offices on Plymouth Boulevard, a few blocks apart. But the "pay-off" came when Montgomery started to train someone to do psychoanalysis by hiding this person in a closet to listen in on the analysis of a patient whom Dr. Simmel had referred. The patient somehow found out about this; and it was reported to Simmel, who then made his inquiries to New York. He turned up quite an unsavory story, including proof of forgery of the certificate. It had been discovered that he had worked as a beautician in downtown Los Angeles. Montgomery escaped on a plane with his "wife" who wasn't his wife. Apparently he then practiced analysis in New York, died there, with a laudatory obituary letter published in the Psychoanalytic Quarterly.

Not a long time after this, Dr. May Romm arrived in Los Angeles to settle and work out here. She duly came to see Dr. Simmel and to join the Study Group. But Simmel remembered painfully l'affaire Montgomery. Again, however, he did not simply communicate quietly with New York to assuage his new found doubts. Instead he bluntly asked Dr. Romm for

her credentials! She was quite offended, told him he could of course find out about her by writing to the New York Society. I'm sure he apologized, and also wrote the inquiry. But I have always entertained the impression that this occurrence was a seed for the later development of the rebellion against Simmel in the second year of our Institute, and later the split.

I was glad that May Romm was not so angry and insulted at Dr. Simmel as to be apart from the Study Group and to withhold her friendship. She told such wonderful jokes! For example, the story of the poor optician and the rich optician - the latter of course quoting his prices for glasses: \$30---(then if the lady customer showed no reaction) for the frames, and for the lenses \$40---(then if she didn't wince) apiece! And the man buying a brassiere for his wife: "Has my Becky got big breasts! Hitler should have such tonsils!" And there was the one about---. Oh, I better get on to the conclusion of my serious reminiscences.

Despite Simmel's mistakes of one kind or another, which certainly have left some influences on the psychoanalytic situation and training of today in Los Angeles, he built vigorously and in the main well; and he was responsible for the coming of Mrs. Deri and Otto Fenichel, whose influence was certainly of the best.

Conclusion

So Dr. Ernst Simmel from Berlin, invited here by us as a refugee from Hitler's Nazi Germany, was our first chosen leader in the earliest formative period of development of psychoanalytic organization in Southern California. He was leader in 1946 in the formation of official

Society and Institute. He died in November 1947; I, among others, cherish his memory. And he was followed by a long list of other leaders who have presided over further development, some disorganization, and later development. What will follow in the future is hard to tell. We know there are some strains now. At any rate we can be sure it will be interesting and can only hope it will be salutary.

And now we shall hear from a number of other members who will reminisce about the later years, the twenty-five of organized development.