

Freud in Cambridge: Relational Geographies of Psychoanalysis¹

By Laura Jean Cameron, Ph.D.²

I want to share with you my experience of working with an extraordinary person. As a geographer, I deeply appreciate the interdisciplinary nature of The International Forum for Psychoanalytic Education (IFPE) and feel warmly embraced by the theme of this year's conference: *Borders*. Geographers work a lot with borders, be they political, physical or conceptual. As a historical geographer of nature, the border between life and death is something I navigate frequently, but, as I begin this paper, I feel a need to rupture that border. To do so, I'd like to begin by invoking a man who cannot be with us, but whose existence directly connects to the honour that IFPE has given me—the 2019 Distinguished Psychoanalytic Educator award.



¹ This paper is a lightly revised version of my address to the 2019 IFPE conference on 18 October 2020. It is based, in part, on my tribute entitled 'On Generosity: The case of John Forrester' delivered at the University of Cambridge for the conference and memorial event 'The John Forrester Case,' on May 18, 2016.

² The author, Laura Cameron, was the recipient of IFPE's Distinguished Psychoanalytic Educator award in 2019, for outstanding contributions to psychoanalytic education in clinical and academic settings—representing the broadest possible array of psychoanalytic knowledge.

Figure 1. Laura Jean Cameron and John Forrester, London, 28 October 2015. LJC photo.

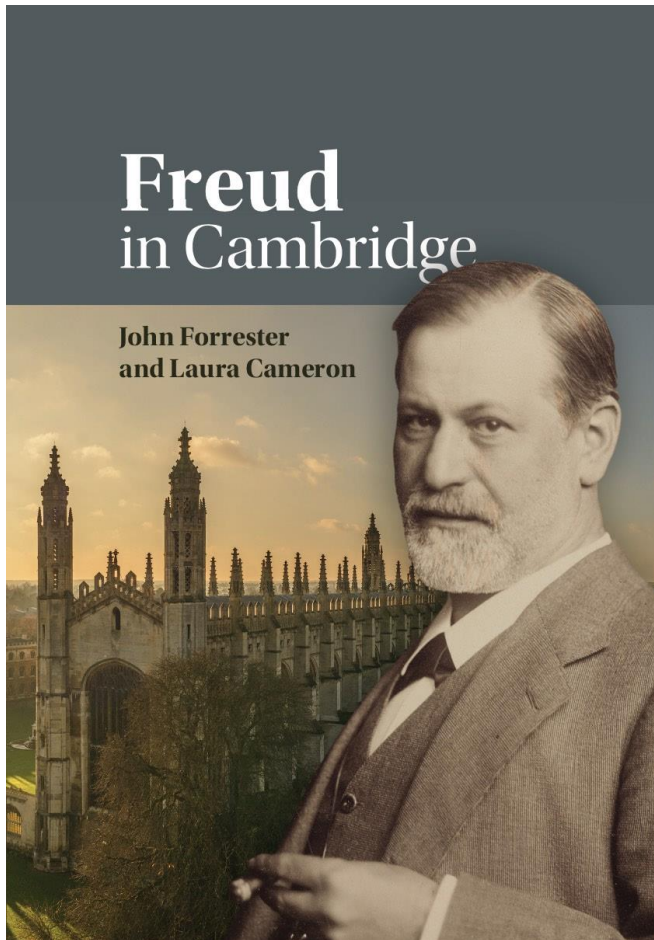


Figure 2. Book cover, *Freud in Cambridge*, Cambridge University Press, 2017. By permission.

John Forrester, my friend and my late co-author, was a brilliant and open-hearted Cambridge historian and philosopher. We created *Freud in Cambridge* (2017) together. And, in addressing this book, I want to remember and celebrate the life and work of this scholar. Our book explores how psychoanalysis, in a particular place and period, was able to cross into a host of disciplines ranging from psychology to anthropology, from biology to education, literature to philosophy. Diverse ideas and practices stemming from this fertile episode—participant observation, the ecosystem concept, Practical Criticism, Therapeutic Positivism, the Malting House experiment in childhood education—bear the stamp of psychoanalytic encounter. The book also considers how, in some instances, psychoanalysis did not travel or take hold in any lasting way.

My focus, for the purposes of this paper, will be less on content and more on the process of researching and writing the book with John. This is because I have a sense that describing our collaboration may offer some ideas on how generative openings in disciplinary borders can be sustained. This involves things like curiosity, surprise, serendipity and enthusiasm. Above all, it has to do with generosity, one of John's most astonishing qualities. I know John's generosity was witnessed or experienced first-hand by numerous people. I expect my own particular experience may resonate with that of others—and at the same time, may go some way to explain the making of *Freud in Cambridge*, the final draft of which we submitted to CUP just six weeks before John died of cancer, on November 24th, 2015. The manuscript was the product of research jointly sustained, mostly over long distances for the last stretch, and drafted, hashed out and discussed for a very long time—in fact, over 18 years.

It was an immense privilege to work with John. Author of many books including *Language and the Origins of Psychoanalysis* (Forrester, 1980), *The Seductions of Psychoanalysis* (Forrester, 1990) and *Dispatches from the Freud Wars* (Forrester, 1997), he was also the editor of the journal *Psychoanalysis and History*. It will be no surprise that his sweeping knowledge of the human and physical sciences, as well as the history of psychoanalysis, was essential to our book's envisioning and final completion. In this project—the sustained hallmarks of which were surprise, tenacity and inexhaustible excitement—it was (as I will explain later in this paper) Arthur Tansley's dream but, above all, John's intellectual generosity, that set things in motion back in the spring of 1997. Before I get to that story, I should note that many of the images that accompany this piece were attachments to emails that I pulled from our vast correspondence. Images from travels, favourite Cambridge places, from his back garden, from mine in Canada, mostly botanical; all images that seem fitting to share.



Figure 3. John’s Wisteria blooming in Kingston, Canada, Spring 2016. LJC photo.

I begin with the image of wisteria because John is, for many people, forever associated with that most Cantabrigian of flowering vines. In the inner courtyard of the Cambridge Department of History and Philosophy on Free School Lane you may visit the wisteria John planted in memory of the scholar Peter Lipton who had preceded him in the role of Department Head and died unexpectedly in 2007. When I learned from a gardener that my neighborhood in southern Ontario had a microclimate that could support wisteria, my family planted one that became “John’s Wisteria,” and, for the very first time came into bloom in the spring following his death, while I worked to bring the book through the final stages of publication. In its purple exuberance I felt vitality, joy and encouragement. In sharing its seeds the last few years, I have the sense I am propagating John’s good energy and relations of trust.³ The botanical metaphor

³ After presenting the talk at IFPE that became this paper, I had the opportunity to pass out seeds from this wisteria plant to IFPE members. However, I didn’t include instructions and I have since had questions. For those inspired to plant wisteria, I will herein share with you that spring is the time to plant and I understand that after nicking the seed’s hard coating, and after soaking it for 24 hours, it is best to start its life in an individual pot.

that begins John's classic "If p, then what?" paper (1996) about his case study project with "large branching structures" that threaten "to get out their author's control" also ran through our own unruly project that continued to proliferate in extraordinary ways and repeatedly outgrow updated outlines, word limits and press deadlines. John had enormous imagination and capacity: to me, John was the big-hearted gardener, truly the generous urban 'Forrester' that delighted to share in the new and unfamiliar, who radiated optimism and made academia for so many a warmer, more open and far less cynical place.

As a postgraduate in historical geography, my studies focused in part on Sir Arthur George Tansley, the British ecologist who introduced the term 'ecosystem' and to whom I alluded earlier. His papers were then housed casually in some drawers at the Department of Plant Sciences, University of Cambridge. Although I knew Tansley had written a best-selling book about psychoanalysis in 1920, *The New Psychology and its Relation to Life*, this aspect of his life was largely unexplored. I began to correspond with Freud scholars such as Michael Molnar, and I was given a lead on additional Tansley material in the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C.. This lead came with a warning that the deposit, which included an interview with Tansley, was held in the notorious 'ZR-Section' of the Sigmund Freud Archives that was restricted—not due for public release for several years, and under the control of Dr. K.R. Eissler, the eminent psychoanalyst, author, and head of the archive. At the time of my interest and correspondence with him, he was nearly 90 years old, and I would need to obtain permission from him.

Although I kept writing, Eissler's eight-word reply "I do not recall an interview with Tansley" (personal correspondence, April 10, 1997; Cameron, 2001) was as close as I got to the Freud Archive until I contacted John, who was at that time Reader in History and Philosophy of Science, about the psychoanalytic papers that I had been examining at Plant Sciences. One document appeared to be a transcribed letter from Freud to Tansley concerning the first patient of psychoanalysis, Anna O. With this 'find' that offered something of fresh interest to Eissler and which we eventually published in the *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* (Forrester & Camerson, 1999), John helped me engage Eissler in further negotiations. Within a few months, I received notice that the material was no longer restricted. I was *in*, thanks to John.

Tansley's contribution to the Freud Archive, as it turned out, was his own dream and self-analysis. It was a jolting reminder of a time and a place when psychoanalysis was recognized as a science, when it was a marker of scientific modernity to be psychoanalysed, and when a

dream, as a matter of course, had the serious potential to change an academic's life. While I had experienced John's actions in terms of validating my ideas—and getting me access—as more like the generosity of an ideal academic supervisor (that is, bracketing his own ideas and pushing mine to their limits), the relationship soon became, miraculously and comfortably, collaborative. Over the next several months, the dream material was augmented by many other finds and much serendipity. John, on a trip to the Freud Museum in Vienna found, by chance, that Tansley's personal collection of psychoanalytic books made up a significant portion of the oldest volumes held on the shelves, while the museum staff had no idea who Tansley was. Besides astonishment and gratitude, what I felt then was John's interdisciplinary generosity. In the late 1990s, the history of science was having its spatial turn, and geography was full of the history of science. Tansley's dream story made a fascinating case study in the significance of dreams in history, enabling an examination of the part they might play in an individual's life. And Tansley's life studied in place—an articulated moment in a network “of social relations and understandings” (Massey, 1993, p. 66)—was productively revealing of several more cases.

In the cohort of scholars from the 1920s and 1930s about whom we were studying, John, so fascinated with the making and remaking of disciplinary boundaries, was also taken with the polymaths resistant to specialism, and the unlikely groupings that resulted. For example, the 1925 Cambridge Psychoanalysis Group was made up of first-class scientists that included James Strachey, John Rickman, Lionel Penrose, Frank Ramsey, and Harold Jeffreys—in other words, a translator, a psychiatrist, a brain and logic scientist, a philosopher of mathematics, and a geophysicist. Along with the ecologist, Tansley, all were eager to explore an area outside their expertise and found no obstacles to common work and discussion, a semi-wild garden full of volunteers and surprise.



Figure 4. Garden of Little St. Mary's, Cambridge, England, undated. LJC photo.

Tansley himself chose an urban metaphor for his ideal: he hoped for psychoanalysis in his time to be “less like a defensively stockaded camp and more like an open city” (Cameron & Earley, 2015, p. 474)—an ideal that resonates so well with the mandate of the IFPE as stated on its website:

“...its function as a forum, a home for thinking, characterized by a willingness to engage with both ideas and experience... This freedom encourages discussions that mutually broaden our dialogue with other perspectives and other disciplines, and that expand the social and cultural understanding and applications of psychoanalysis.”⁴

It makes me think too, of course, of John Forrester and our delight in ‘finding’ so many others, including the unexpected and the marginal, who shared in this vision.

⁴ Retrieved from: <http://www.ifpe.org/aboutifpe>



Figure 5. Blaze Maple, Kingston, Canada. LJC photo sent to JPF: 22 October 2012.

John and I published joint papers on Tansley and his psychoanalytic networks (Cameron & Forrester, 1999, 2000; and Forrester and Cameron, 1999), and our massive research and email files continued to expand as I returned to Canada with my family to take up a position at Queen's University. John and I then planned a book, based on our earlier papers as well as on research we each had been pursuing on related topics. Administrative loads, competing projects and health challenges slowed us down, but we also faced denials of access. The Eissler hurdle was echoed when I was told by the esteemed gatekeeper of a most relevant Cambridge departmental archive that there was nothing there for me to find. John experienced similar obstructions with that individual, and we joked we might dedicate the book to him.

In a couple of other ways, the book almost never got started. At the very beginning of the project, I experienced a break-in at my Cambridge flat while I was at home, an event resulting in no physical injury but requiring some serious care and a temporary return to Canada. I came back soon enough, but interestingly, the psychiatrist who helped me deal with the incident strongly recommended against engaging with psychoanalysis—at least until my PhD was completed.

And perhaps, there were blocks against John then too. I have been asked often, 'Why did this local Cambridge project begin with an outsider—me the colonial—bringing material to someone who *was* Cambridge, steeped in Cambridge's history of science?' Certainly, John had

lots of other projects in progress, but there was also disciplinary prejudice, the traditional suspect status of local history, the taint of parochialism. For me the lowly 'local' was familiar territory: I had just published *Openings*, a book on a local history of lake drainage in British Columbia, telling a story of Indigenous dispossession, erosion of memory, and environmental destruction. The book was set in the same period, the 1920s, during which this lake was being drained with the biggest pumps then in the Dominion, and during which Tansley was on the couch with Freud. No connections I admit, save perhaps Freud's simile: "Where id was, there ego shall be, a work of culture not unlike the drainage of the Zuider Zee" (Freud, 1964, p. 80).

My geography research at Cambridge however was a local history of knowledge, focused on the Cambridge bubble—gentlemen's scientific networks and their power to define nature, a study to which Tansley was central. The spatial turn in history of science and the call in anthropology and science studies to "come home from the tropics"—to appreciate that the field was "here in the institution" not just "over there"—was an aid to local geographers and historians in terms of theoretical context and justification. And for John, somehow, this new unlikely and unfamiliar character of Tansley, and unexpected entrée—through his archived dream and through this outsider Canadian—offered a form of permission and some unexpected energy to turn the lens upon home turf.

John loved the unlikely and the marginal, and repeatedly told me that I had extraordinary and uncanny powers to find things. I thought the same of him. This impossible trust of course gave us super-powers. And as so many others have experienced, working with him was wonderful, and even therapeutic, in some way. Many years before the project was over, he wrote: "The thing about our project, over all these years now, is that it keeps unfolding new vistas and connections. It continually amazes and delights me" (Forrester, personal communication via email of October 14, 2005).

The research continued and the book grew, enhanced most substantively by John in the period following his term as Head of Department. As an oral historian I also interviewed many people over those years, including a former student of the Malting House School, the Cambridge nursery run by Geoffrey Pyke and Susan Isaacs, based on science and psychoanalysis (Cameron, 2007). Of course, life happened all through this, and I need to again acknowledge John's generosity: not intellectual, not academic, just generosity—full stop. My husband and I had a son, Arden, not long after the start of this adventure. One of my most vivid memories of John at that time was his visit to our flat after our son's birth, beaming and bearing armloads of

daffodils. Since then, we've always had daffodils for my son's birthday. And inevitably Arden himself became entangled in the project: amusing Tansley's granddaughter, visiting Wittgenstein's final resting place, testing out a chair formerly used by the children of the Malting House School.



Figure 6: Arden Rogalsky at Ludwig Wittgenstein's resting place, Ascension Parish Burial Ground, Cambridge, England, c. 2001. LJC photo.



Figure 7: Arden Rogalsky in Malting House School chair, c. 2001. LJC photo.

Besides plants and intellectual ferment, John’s emails were full of his own family; he and his wife Lisa Appignanesi, with whom he wrote *Freud’s Women* (1992), cultivated an example of generous living well beyond their garden graced by the “amazing Daphne” and the Camellias. His children and his grandson, little Manny, filled his last years with joy. We had so many people to thank for helping sustain and complete the book project, and of course we were endlessly grateful to the people about whom we were writing, gone though, as most of them were, but who left us so much to think about. In an email exchange about where in the book to place one of these characters—the undergraduate Sebastian Sprott, who traveled to Austria in 1922 to find Freud and invite him to Cambridge—John wrote: “this often happens to me in thinking of these lives. All lives end in dust, I know. But I catch the dust in my throat a lot writing our book...” (Forrester, in a personal communication via email, 28 March 2011). I am catching the dust now too, but more than anything, I am thankful today for the feeling, remembering John with you in this paper.



Figure 8. The Great Oriental Plane Tree in the Emmanuel College Fellow's Garden, May 2013. LC photo.

While the book was growing, we sometimes would meet to discuss the research and writing in a favourite garden or with a special tree, such as the amazing Plane Tree in the Emmanuel College Fellow's Garden. The poet, Amy Levy, wrote:

Green is the plane-tree in the square,
The other trees are brown;
They droop and pine for country air;
The plane-tree loves the town (1889, p. 17).

Under its tangled network of limbs that stretch out over the College walls towards the bus station, I'm reminded of John and our proliferating project that was in some danger of never ending, but also of John himself and his sharing of the finest of archival, intellectual and boundlessly educational adventures. I will be eternally grateful for that and will always think of his generosity entwining with and uplifting our lives, giving courage to follow dreams and curiosity, reaching up and over walls.

Laura Cameron may be contacted at cameron@queensu.ca

References

- Appignanesi, L. and Forrester, J. (1992). *Freud's Women*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson.
- Cameron, L.J. (2001). Oral history in the Freud Archive: incidents, ethics and relations. *Historical Geography*. 29: 38-44.
- Cameron, L.J. (2007). Science, Nature and Hatred: 'Finding out' at the Malting House Garden School, 1924-9. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*. 24(6): 851-872.
- Cameron, L.J. and Earley, S. (2015). The ecosystem—movements, connections, tensions and translations. *Geoforum*. 65: 473-481.
- Cameron, L.J. and Forrester, J. (1999). A nice type of the English scientist: Tansley and Freud. *History Workshop Journal*. 48: 64-100.
- Cameron, L.J. and Forrester, J. (2000). Tansley's psychoanalytic network: An episode out of the early history of psychoanalysis in England. *Psychoanalysis and History*. 2(2): 189-256.
- Forrester, J. (1980). *Language and the Origins of Psychoanalysis*. London: MacMillan.
- Forrester, J. (1996). If p then what? Thinking in cases. *History of the Human Sciences*. 9 (3), 1-25.
- Forrester, J. (1990). *The Seductions of Psychoanalysis: Freud, Lacan and Derrida*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Forrester, J. (1997). *Dispatches from the Freud Wars. Psychoanalysis and its Passions*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Forrester, J. and Cameron, L.J. (1999). 'A cure with a defect': A previously unpublished letter by Freud concerning 'Anna O.' *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*. 80: 929-942.
- Forrester, J. and Cameron, L.J. (2017). *Freud in Cambridge*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Freud, S. (1964). New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis, Lecture 31, *Standard Edition*, 22, pp. 1-182. London: Hogarth Press.
- Levy, A. (1889). *A London Plane-Tree and other Verse*. London: T. Fisher Unwin.
- Massey, D. (1993). Power-geometry and a progressive sense of place, Ch. 4 in Bird et al., Eds. *Mapping the futures: Local Cultures, Global Changes*. Routledge: London and New York, 59-69.

Tansley, A.G. (1920). *The New Psychology in its Relation to Life*. London: George Allen & Unwin.