

**Institute of Contemporary Psychoanalysis, Los Angeles**

**PSYCHOANALYTIC COMPLEXITY THEORY**

**Weekend Psychoanalytic Training Program, 2020-2021**

**Instructor: Margy Sperry, PsyD, MFT, margysperry@gmail.com**

**Time: Sundays 11:30am-2pm PST**

**Dates: September 13, October 25, December 5, 2020**

**Total Hours: 2.5 x 3 sessions= 7.5 hours**

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This course will provide an introduction to complexity theory, including the context of its development and its application to psychoanalytic theory and practice.

Candidates will read and discuss material from disciplines outside of psychoanalysis as well as from psychoanalytic authors. We will especially focus on understanding the characteristics and properties of complex systems, as well as on how these descriptions inform our understanding of change within psychoanalytic treatment.

**COURSE OBJECTIVES**

The overall objective for this seminar is for candidates to gain an understanding of complex systems theory in general, as well as a deeper awareness of how the central ideas are being applied to contemporary psychoanalytic theory. The focus will be on developing an appreciation of how these concepts apply to and can deepen our appreciation of clinical process. At the conclusion of the seminar, candidates will be able to:

**Session 1:**

1. Candidates will demonstrate an awareness of the multidisciplinary areas of research and findings that constituted Complexity theory and influenced its emergence in contemporary psychoanalysis,
2. Candidates will be able to explain the differences between complex and complicated systems.

### **Session 2:**

3. Candidates will be able to describe central concepts related to complexity theory, including emergence, non-linearity, self-organized criticality, adaptation, looping, etc. as well as how these concepts translate to psychoanalytic treatment.
4. Candidates will be able to explain how to evaluate a system's complexity.

### **Session 3:**

5. Candidates will be able to discuss therapeutic attitudes that emerge from a complexity-informed sensibility.
6. Candidates will demonstrate an understanding of how complexity theory affects our understanding of therapeutic action and the process of change.

## **SCHEDULE & READINGS**

It is expected that you will arrive for class having read the assigned readings, prepared to engage in discussions and to share clinical material where appropriate. Candidates will be evaluated on class participation and, when applicable, the presentation of specific assigned readings.

**Please purchase the following books for this course:**

Coburn, WJ (2014) *Psychoanalytic Complexity: Clinical Attitudes for Therapeutic Change*, Routledge.

Holland, J. (2014) *Complexity: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford Press.

### **September 13, 2020: Theoretical Background**

*This session will provide an interdisciplinary overview of complexity theory. We'll read an overview written by John Holland, one of the major theorists associated with the Santa Fe Institute, as well as a couple of other authors. Don't worry about understanding these articles in depth, rather use them generally to get a feel for theory and allow your mind to play with how the concepts expand your understanding of the psychoanalytic process.*

Mitchell, M. (2009). What is Complexity? *Complexity: A Guided Tour*, New York: Oxford, p. 3-14.

Holland, J. (2014) *Complexity: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford. Chapters 1-6.

Cilliers, P. (1998). Approaching Complexity. *Complexity and Postmodernism*, New York: Routledge, p. 1-24.

Cilliers, P. (1998). Self-organization in complex systems. *Complexity and Postmodernism: Understanding Complex Systems*. Routledge, p. 89-111.

### **October 25, 2020: Complexity and psychoanalysis**

*This session will focus more generally on how complexity theory is being applied to psychoanalytic theory. How do some of the concepts that we discussed in our previous session change our understanding of the therapeutic process?*

Coburn, W. J. (2002). A world of systems: The role of systemic patterns of experience in the therapeutic process. *Psychoanalytic Inquiry*, Vol. 22, No. 5, p. 655-677.

Seligman, S. (2005). "Dynamic systems theories as a metaframework for psychoanalysis", *Psychoanalytic Dialogues* 15, 2: 285-319.

Sperry, M. (2016) "From theory to clinical practice: Psychoanalytic complexity theory and the lived experience of complexity", *International Journal of Psychoanalytic Self Psychology*, 11(4): 349-362.

Coburn, W. (2014). *Psychoanalytic Complexity: Clinical Attitudes for Therapeutic Change*. Routledge. Read intro p. 1-7, Chapters 1 and 2.

### **December 5, 2020: Complexity, Attitudes and Therapeutic Action**

*This session will focus on further implications and applications of complexity theory to psychoanalytic process and issues. We'll discuss therapeutic action as well as how complexity theory changes and widens the field of inquiry.*

Coburn, W. (2014). *Psychoanalytic Complexity: Clinical Attitudes for Therapeutic Change*. Routledge. Read Chapters 4, 5, 6

Galatzer-Levy, R. M. (2016). The edge of chaos: a nonlinear view of psychoanalytic technique. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 97:409-427.

Sucharov, M.S. (2013). Thoughts on Wholeness, Connection, and Healing: Moving Toward Complexity in the Analytic Space. *Int. J. Psychoanal. Self Psychol.*, 8(4):379-397.

Trop, G. (2019) A Dynamic Systems view of selfhood, affect, and political context. Paper presented at the 43<sup>rd</sup> Annual Conference of the International Association of Psychoanalytic Self Psychology, Vancouver, Canada.

Sperry, M. (pre-published paper) Living History: Responsibility and Blindness in the Therapeutic Process. Accepted for publication in *Psychoanalysis, Self and Context*.

Harris, A. (2000) Gender as soft assembly: Tomboy's stories. *Studies in Gender and Sexuality*, 1(3): 223-233 (required), 233-247 (optional)