

## Secret Agonies in Analytic Communities: Irresolvable, Unspeakable, and Unbearable Co-Transferences, and the Black Sun

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### Abstract

Against the background of the author's personal experience, this paper explores the difficulty of finding an analysis, or providing an analysis, within an institute community, when the complexes the analysis must address are constellated in relationships within the institute community. The difficulty lies in providing a sufficiently protected space that the analysand can sink into the darkness of and grieve his experience involving colleagues, who are known to and liked or disliked by the analyst.

### Keywords

Analytic institute communities, analyzing candidates and analysts, Sol Niger, *lumen naturae*, metabolizing grief.

When Claire Allphin suggested that I join this panel, I was reading Stanton Marlan's (2005) remarkable new book, *The Black Sun: The Alchemy and Art of Darkness*, which immediately provided a framework within which to apprehend my experience of unspeakable and unbearable co-transferences—to borrow a word that Kay Bradway (1997) may have coined that I think especially fits the subject of the panel as I want to address it. So, without citing specifics, the influence of this book will become evident in my presentation.

It has always seemed to me that our institute—I'm going to limit myself to the San Francisco Institute, though I presume that at least some of what I have to say would apply in all institutes—our institute provides an arena, if not a container, for our individual development and its accompanying pleasure and pain. The arena includes our personal analyses, our control analyses, our relationships with the various training committees, both as candidates and analysts, and the many analysts these involve, and our relationships with training-group mates. It includes the institute's governance structure and the various roles we may carry

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over time, its prestige structure and our place in that as imagined by ourselves and others, and its ancestral structure. And it includes our many general collegial and social relationships within the institute, including the ghosts of those who didn't get in, those who've left, and those who've died. The co-transferences are vast and various, some speakable, some unspeakable, some bearable, and some unbearable. Of all of these, many are irresolvable.

You can see that I'm using "transference" in the broadest possible sense, the transferences of everyday life in the institute, the ways in which our histories of experience, our wounds, our characterological make-ups determine, or overdetermine, our affective responses in the many roles and relationships we have within the institute community. And, a remarkable community it is, insofar as everyone in it is devoted to consciousness, to taking responsibility for the personal shadow, for withdrawing projections, for bringing wisdom of the Self to bear as much as possible, and we operate, on one level, in a comfortable atmosphere of shared assumptions. On another level, individual diversity rules. And, on other levels, we suffer from all the afflictions of organizational life everywhere: power politics, rivalries, social strata, cliques, and affiliations based on mutual attraction as well as splitting of one kind or another. At any given time, there are disaffected individuals out there suffering in one way or another, but, as the late Lou Stewart once observed to me, the organization always seems welcoming when one is ready to return. Remarkably, so far in the San Francisco professional society we have avoided a formal organizational schism.

In fact, at a collective level, I think our development as an organization has been remarkable. For example, early on, in our regular dinner meetings, we hid in seemingly endless arguing over petty business matters. For some years now, however, the leadership has worked to create an atmosphere in which it is safe to share one's clinical work, and discussions are thoughtful and deep as well as cordial and collegial. I suppose what is not said in these discussions is often as significant as what is said, but now one seldom hears what once was often testified to: that speaking up was so vulnerable a thing to do that a sleepless night was sure to follow.

At a collective level, too, the training program has been evolving into a more benign place for candidates and analysts. For example, candidates are treated with greater respect with regard to such simple things as scheduling and punctuality of meetings. Training committees have attended more to their own internal processes, and with the advent of the Training Coordinating Committee and its interactions with candidate representatives, there has been an effort to anticipate and to solve problems. The membership seems to have vested the training committees with considerable trust to manage the evaluation and promotion of candidates, so there appears to have been a minimum of politicization of this process in the larger group. This makes serving on these committees a far safer, more pleasant, and meaningful thing to do. In all of these endeavors, we strive to brighten the light of consciousness.

However richly deserved this paean to our collective life may be, the fate of the individual within it can be quite another matter. And, of course, for each of us, the institute is our fate, and each of us has stories, some tellable and others not. Presumably, we can tell our personal analyst all our stories, but when one's analyst is a member of the same community, this can get complicated. When I was in train-

ing in the early seventies, my major analyst, now dead, imbued the institute with the wisdom of the Self, apparently imbuing the members and the committees with an enlightened, Olympian kind of consciousness, so that whatever came out of their processes for the individual was, in her view, for the best. She may have modified this position when she herself felt “crucified” by the membership for her efforts on a training committee. In the meantime, however, she had little interest in one’s actual experience, which she appeared to deem unimportant. One had only to be in the right reverential relation to the institute. If one slipped into the shadow of her animus by complaining, she was well-known for giving one an impatient, “snap out of it” kind of response. She shone her particular light of consciousness on the matter, without any awareness of the violence this light was doing to the reality of one’s experience, that perhaps one needed to go into that darkness.

When I became a member, I entered into membership with some zeal, and I was entirely unprepared for the political life of the institute as it was then in the late seventies and early eighties. I became chair of the Publications Committee, which undertook some successful publishing projects, but in my relationships with a couple of people I felt profoundly betrayed. In the meantime, I very prematurely accepted election to the first-ever Reviewing Committee, which was created when the workload of the Certifying Committee had become overwhelming. The committee was chaired by an analyst who later was the subject of one of our more egregious cases of clinical boundary violations, and, perhaps not surprisingly, the committee itself soon got into trouble in its handling of boundary issues of several different kinds. Though officially created and authorized by the membership, the committee did not yet enjoy the confidence of the membership, and its processes became highly politicized. When I look back, my example is testimony to the wisdom of requiring five years of membership before serving on a training committee, insofar as I was newer member than that and found trying to manage the political fallout truly traumatizing. On the other hand, I am aware that, in the circumstances, more experience may not have made the difference.

By then, I had ended with the analyst I spoke of earlier and sought a new analysis in which to address the overwhelming pain and confusion I now felt in my relationship to the institute and, very particularly, to a number of individuals in it, candidates, members, and staff. My new analyst, with whom I had actually worked many years before being admitted to the institute, responded to me in a new version of the pattern I described earlier. When I shared my perceptions of and complained about the various antagonists in my drama, he would respond with a kindly kind of “tut tut,” and give me benefit of his own perception of the person involved. When I complained, his rationale was that he was providing an “objective” check against my projections and distortions. Again, a violent light denied me a much needed acceptance of my experience, however dark, primitive, and overdetermined it was, so that it could be grieved and metabolized. I already felt misunderstood, and his response was very exacerbating. I fairly soon ended that analysis and retreated into a protective shell in relation to the institute.

I was so habitually dissociated and superficially adapted at that time that I didn’t have a clue that my experience in the institute had been a reenactment of trauma in my childhood and youth. In all the years of Jungian analysis I had had in that classical and pre-Kalsched (1996) era, my early trauma had not been direct-

ly identified or addressed, though there had been important healing dimensions to the analytic relationships. A few years later, I read Judith Herman's (1992) *Trauma and Recovery*, and found myself having intense abreactions with virtually every page. Further analysis was now an undeniable necessity, but with whom? Privacy had become compellingly important, and privacy was not possible for me with any analyst member I could think of. So, I sought analysis with a contemporary Freudian, and though in eight years of work I often felt his limitations in relation to the archetypal psyche, this analyst did accompany me into the darkest reaches of my experience, and I was fortunate to find much transformation.

Many of our transferences and countertransferences, the co-transferences of everyday life in the institute remain unresolved or irresolvable because of a variety of conditions. Certainly, not the least of the necessary conditions for resolution is a sufficiency of real relationship and a commitment to working through it, whatever it is. Those that can't be resolved live on within us, and we retreat into a more or less successful persona adaptation to the fact that these people will remain in our lives pretty much forever. Or we take these transferences to analysis. Or both.

In our work with patients from outside the institute, most of us are entirely clear about accompanying our patients into the dark reaches of their transferences to us and to others in their lives. If my experience is any indicator, this is much more difficult to do when the material involves our colleagues whom we like or dislike. It surely takes a unique discipline to hold, whether in personal analysis or control analysis, an entirely open heart and neutral stance toward candidate—and analyst—analysands who are suffering intense transferences within the institute arena. If we share the analysand's perception and experience of our colleague and even subtly confirm it, we participate in freezing it as a concrete "fact" rather than a symbolic experience. Or, if we seek to correct the analysand's perception in the interest of objectivity and the withdrawal of projections, either way we foreclose a deeper journey into the *Sol Niger* or black sun, the darkness of the person's real and essential suffering (Marlan, 2005).

In spite of the instructive nature of my own experience, I find this an ongoing challenge in my work with members of the institute community. It's so easily gratifying to confirm shared experiences, and the impulse to compensate discordant perceptions and experiences of others close to oneself is so natural that it slips out unless one is very vigilant. I struggle to remember my own history—that it was only in the acknowledgment and grieving of my darkest experience that the transforming light of the black sun could be found. This is not the solar light at the end of the tunnel or the night sea journey, the light into which we enthusiastically welcome our patients in a shared experience of joy in life. Rather, the light of the black sun is the mysterious light we find when we are accompanied into the darkest darkness, when we surrender to suffering without promise of relief, the light that the alchemists called the *lumen naturae*, which penetrates the solar plexus in a realization of the Self as an ineffable gnosis (Marlan, 2005).

My major thesis is that to be able to accompany another member of the institute community into the darkness as witness to that person's suffering within the institute requires that we have grieved and metabolized our own negative experiences in the institute arena, for, otherwise, it feels unbearable, and we impulsive-

ly concretize the so-called “reality” or “unreality” of the person’s experience as a protection against having to go there. With the many developments in our understanding of the analytic container, some of which have come through the integration of modern psychoanalysis into our thinking, most of us would not treat members of the institute community in analysis as I was treated, but I think working analytically with our colleagues remains a very special challenge and, for some individuals, may not be possible.

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