

Constraints Encountered in the Conduct of Psycho-social Analysis

These reflections are grounded in the often painful interactions and personal responses experienced during more than a decade of consultancy-research. They were penned as part of a reflexive process in an attempt to break through some of the collusional patterns of behaviour which were crippling the author's ability to sustain effective work. They are offered here in the hope that others, encountering similar constraints, may be encouraged to press forward in a task which is at once utterly demanding yet vitally important for the survival and qualitative enhancement of the species' future within the fragile environment of Island Earth.

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In 'Totem and Taboo', Freud noted "many and great pressures upon me" inhibiting his analysis of contemporary social phenomena. The understanding and withstanding of such constraints are essential prolegomena in the complex task of psycho-social analysis.

Unlike his therapeutic colleagues, the social analyst is concerned not with sickness and deviance but with health and normality. The pathology of the social system consists in the commonality of unconscious resonance - the highest common factor of the group behaviour. There is no 'normative' model against which to measure system health or in distance from which to determine system deviance. The medical and therapeutic paradigms of his predecessors are therefore inadequate in the new discipline.

The movement from individual to social analysis encounters the constraint of mass. Working with an individual client, the analyst is at worst in a one-to-one balance, supported by his training, competence, and professional contacts. In social analysis, the balance of power is reversed. The analyst is by definition in a minority of one to many. Persistent maintenance of perception, insight and interpretation requires a very special level of resilience when faced by repressive denial and collusional defence reinforcement of the body corporate. Engaging with the repressed unconscious of the total social environment exposes the social analyst to massive pressure to re-match to the system, to join the collusional process or to be treated to the same oppressive and repressive dynamics as the unwanted unconscious content to which he has drawn attention. Such pressures to collude with and join in to the client's defences and world view are, of course, encountered in individual analysis. The intensity of collusional pressure against insight is, however, far more complex and massive when mobilised by a social system.

In dealing with the deviant material of a therapeutic analysis, a certain level of objective distance can be maintained between analyst and client. This is a luxury unobtainable in the existential involvement of social analysis. As human being the analyst shares at his greatest depth the common core unconscious processes of the system of which he is a part. Pioneer social analysis therefore inevitably involves an iterative process of engagement. Insight into common social

process triggers resonance in depth from the core of the analyst's own unconscious which in turn must be resolved if collusional re-repression or destructive counter-transference are to be avoided. The process of social analysis unavoidably involves progress in the process of self-development.

The closer the psycho-social analyst approaches the core of the common unconscious the more profound becomes the experience of social transference. As the analyst identifies the common split-off parts of the social psyche and integrates them within his own being, so he becomes identified with those same parts within the social process. Unless there is significant progress in social integration he is subjected to projective identification. Attitudes, emotions, judgements, relationships and dynamic defensive reactions are mobilised around the malignant node. The analyst becomes 'the enemy' though also 'the saviour'; 'the destroyer' while also 'the creator'; 'the subversive' but also 'the reformer'. He is to be anathematised for daring to transgress the demarcation line of social taboo, treated as a cancerous element to be excised, or as demonic to be exorcised. He becomes the receptor of negative idealisation, the betrayer, the blasphemer to be excommunicated or burnt alive. In one memorable phrase he is designated 'a little less loveable than the AIDS virus'.

To touch the untouchable, accept the unacceptable, name the unmentionable, accept the denied and embrace the rejected, is to become in turn untouchable, unacceptable, unmentionable, denied and rejected. The process of social transference is persistent, pervasive and persecutory. Its task is the repair of the breach in social defences occasioned by the analytic breakthrough. As such the social response is a defence maintenance mechanism, mobilising against the analytic intervention the same responses by which the precipitating content of the social psyche is removed from consciousness. Relationships and linkages are broken and distanced. Information is subjected to selective reception and the communication process is damped, diverted into neutral content or silenced. Attempts are made to take out the institutional base of the analyst, to split team-working and mirror all energy into internal struggle. Resources are made available only in so far as the institution engages in acceptable areas of activity. The love-hate polarity of ambivalence provides a 'schizophrenogenic' matrix in which the analyst is submerged. Dependency and counter-dependency, responsibility and rejection of trustworthiness generate expectations of omnipotence and impotence. Above all, the social transference is guilt-inducing. "You have done something lethal" - too awful for words. In projective phantasy the analyst is identified with the repressed precipitating traumata which generated the psychotic levels of anxiety, against which the social defences were subsequently reified. In displacement the originating events are repressed and denied and the analyst is held responsible for the resulting terror, rage, and grief released as the defences are disturbed. As such he is deemed to be the causal agent of the disturbance and responsible for the distress. At last the primary guilty party, the anti-Christ, is identified.

The defence-restorative social agenda is supremely served by counter-transference on the part of the analyst and his supporting institution. Precisely because the core of the repressed social unconscious also resonates with the core levels of the analyst's own psyche, he is vulnerable to the insidious and cumulative long-term effects of the social transference. The collusional process will seek out and exploit every chink in the analyst's integration, every weak point in the interpersonal dynamics of the supporting team. If collusional counter-transference can be mobilised then the social agenda is served, the defences restored, the breach is plugged. If the

analyst can be silenced, diverted into non-threatening 'fund raising' activity, or seduced into acting out the social guilt, then the environment has succeeded in defending itself from insight, and preserving its naïveté at the expense of perpetuating its dysfunctional behaviour. If the analyst internalises the social verdict as a statement about his own personal worth and identity rather than reading it as a projection of the denied elements of the common unconscious, then his own self image implodes into badness and madness. Regressing in ambivalence he may abdicate from his primary task into either an internally conflicted passivity of uncreative paralysis or become hyperactive in some displacement activity which in its peripheralising of energy leaves the core agenda unaddressed. If the collusional counter-transference gains ascendancy he may also engage in activity which has the dynamic effect of reinforcing social defences while apparently articulating and affirming processes of integration.

During the pioneering action-research phase of social analysis and at its continuing growing edge, the collusional pressures are massive, the internal resonance powerful and the counter-transference a constant battle-field. There is as yet no training-analysis available with more experienced colleagues who have trodden the path before. Progress, like trail-blazing up an ice-fall, is slow, painstaking and exhausting. It is an iterative process as quarrying into the social unconscious attracts transference which in turn triggers intrapersonal and team matrix response on the part of the analyst. Only in so far as the collusional counter-transference can be identified and its sources resolved, can the next step be taken with integrity.

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