

Bushwhacking Through Narcissism: The Making of a Jungian Analyst

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Four

The Triple Dialogue of Analysis

The three analyses described in the preceding chapters can all be described as successful, although not "complete." In each case, I felt the work had just begun when my analysands turned their lives to new endeavors. Apparently *they* found the work successful enough for their own purposes; and that, I take it, is the bottom line. In none of them, however, have I been able to take the intellectual satisfaction that Freud claims for Dora, Little Hans, or the Wolf Man. Granted, Freud's work was far from "complete" in any of these cases; and they have been subjected to severe criticism from analysts both within and outside of the Freudian tradition. Still, Freud claims to have known what he was about and to have understood what he did.

I cannot make such claims. In every case I felt a process had gotten started that I did not understand, had to run to catch up with, and puzzle over afterward. None of the cases lived up to what I had expected of a Jungian analysis. Mara brought dreams I barely understood; Lisa ignored her dreams altogether; and dreams played a minor role in my work with Ellen. Nevertheless, I have learned from these adventures in analysis. Theorizing, which for me always seems to follow the course of events, is essential to make sense of past analyses; to relate them to the literature of psychoanalysis in its several schools, especially Jungian; and to give me new perspectives on current analyses.

In each case I have had to rely for my understanding on invisible, subjective, and hard to demonstrate facts that belong to what the psychoanalytic tradition calls *countertransference*. With Mara and Lisa I had to stick to the unsettled feeling I had that those women were on shaky psychological ground. I believed they had to be supported and "held" in Winnecott's sense (1986). Although it may be suspected that I needed holding as much as they did, that I was much less conscious of the *participation mystique* I shared with them than I thought I was, the results seem to demonstrate I was not too far off the mark. My identification with Ellen was also fundamental. I recognized indications in her story of issues I believed I had handled more competently than she. My feeling that I knew the territory in which she was lost was also a kind of *participation mystique*, and it guided me no less constantly than did the feeling of unsettlement I had with the other two. The unconscious ground we shared, the soup in which we simmered, conditioned my every move -- especially the moves I was unaware of making.

The need for a theory to understand this situation became acute for me through my blatant inactivity with Karen. In the beginning she brought dreams. I do not recall any of them at present, which probably says a great deal about their importance in the process we coasted through together. We used them to explore the history of her relations with members of her family and her current issues. They seemed to show that she was on some kind of quest that we understood only fragmentarily. Then the dreams stopped, or she stopped reporting them, and we sat in silence together week after week for more than a year. Sometimes she would speak in the last five minutes of her session, but it was clear that what was happening between us -- if anything -- did not have to do with our communication in words.

I worried somewhat that I was failing to engage her and asked from time to time whether she was happy with our silent meetings. She said she was, that it was important to her not to be expected to perform in any way. She had to entertain her friends but had no obligation to do anything for me. Her analytic hour was a kind of respite in which she found herself coasting downhill. Eventually she began to include poems in the envelope with her monthly check, mostly about the atmosphere in the room, the color of the light, the sense that something intangible was present.

It turned out that during the time she was coasting with me, she had discovered she was a poet, a highly valued member of a poetry workshop she attended at the university where she worked as a secretary. Her poems, she said, were mostly autobiographical; and they forced her to review her life in a new way, to find images that revealed essential matters without being too embarrassing to herself personally. This suggested to me that she was doing the work usually considered to be the heart of analysis -- revisioning her life -- *outside* of our sessions. In spite of this she found our meetings to be invaluable, although she could not say why. She appreciated my tolerance, as her previous therapist had seemed to be interested only in making her cry.

I believed I could understand the plight of her previous therapist. I could hardly avoid doubting my own competence as an analyst when so little seemed to be going on. If a discussion could be started that would generate emotions, it would appear that we had "hit" something. It would justify our meetings. But I noticed that the only time I felt unsettled was when she spoke of her shame at crying in the presence of her former therapist. It was clear she felt it as a violation, and I could well imagine that nothing good would be accomplished by my battering away at her resistances. The silence felt comfortable. There was a light tension in the room as though we were there for some purpose but none of the anxiety one usually feels when something needs to be said and the courage to say it has failed. So I accepted the silence, ignorant of its meaning, reasonably confident that the purpose of our coasting would eventually become clear.

Karen was a very shy and timid woman in her mid to late thirties who had had two three-year relationships before she began seeing me. Both of the men had agreed to a humble, non-acquisitive lifestyle without any of the traditional encumbrances of family gatherings or professional advancement. And she had left them both when they had become interested in money, possessions, careers, and family. I wondered if her relationship with me would also last three years and in what way I would disappoint her, but our coasting did not last that long. She terminated her meetings with me after a little more than two years of weekly sessions, always at the same hour, because she had received an offer to work as a secretary in

New York City at a university that provided a much more ambitious array of poetry workshops than she had had in Boston.

In her last two meetings, she detailed the changes that had taken place in her life over the time she had been seeing me. In addition to discovering her talents as a poet, she had become the steward of her union and a very active organizer of political action to change university policy. She had also helped organize student demonstrations. She left Boston a far more confident person than she had been when she first visited my office. Her fine work as a secretary and sometime editor for the professors in her department had earned her the opportunity to go to New York. One of the professors she had worked for in Boston had found her indispensable to his work and wanted her at the more prestigious university where he was going.

Again I found myself on the sidelines of a success story, but this time I truly had no idea what I had done. It is reasonable to think that Karen's "analysis" with me had played an significance role. Surely she seemed to think so. But words and conscious interchanges of all kinds had to have been marginal at most. Thus Karen's process has forced me to take seriously the importance of profoundly unconscious factors in analysis.

As far as countertransference feelings are concerned, I can point only to the uneasiness I felt when she spoke of her former therapist's intrusiveness and the sense of comfort I felt during our many hours of silence. Also there were two impressive images -- not much in two years of meetings. Once I had the image of the two of us sitting in a chamber that was slowly filling with water until only our heads were above the surface. And I had one nocturnal dream that we were gently making love. I knew at the time that I was dreaming and that "sexual acting out" with an analysand was unethical; I therefore hesitated but then allowed myself to go ahead, knowing that this was a symbolic event and hoping that my participation might in some way assist the waking process of analysis. Evidently there was a *participation mystique* between us that escaped my conscious attention; and I was willing to further it, hoping I would someday come to understand it.

It is no doubt a hazardous undertaking to look to the completely unknown to make sense of what is partially known (*obscurum per obscurius*) even if there seems to be no alternative. Jung has done this in his famous diagram of the transference (1946: p. 221) in which the various modes of communication between analyst and analysand are represented by double arrows. One of them connects the unconscious of both parties without any conscious mediation. This would seem to refer to what happened between Karen and me. No doubt it also played an important role in the work I did with Mara, Lisa, and Ellen; but in those analyses I at least noticed frequent vague feelings of deep disturbance or harmony that helped direct my work -- *i.e.*, something emerged into my consciousness. Thus Jung's diagram *hints* at an explanation although it remains a very empty metaphor. It says only that there is a strand of incomprehensible communication going on below the surface of verbal dialogue and recognizable projection. It gives us no hint for how to imagine this crucial dimension of analytic interaction.

For the past several years, therefore, I have been searching for metaphors to fill out Jung's empty intuition of the wholly unconscious dimension in analytic dialogue. One of the most suggestive discoveries is to be found in the well-researched novels of Carlos Castaneda (*e.g.*,

1971, 1972, 1974). Don Juan Matus, the shaman-mentor, describes two orders of reality: the *tonal*, which seems to correspond very closely to what I have called the "persona field," and the *nagual*, called the "inconceivably other," which I understand as the "self field." The experience of ordinary individuals is stuck in the realm of the *tonal*, or "collective consciousness." The shaman, however, is privileged in having been initiated into the realm of the *nagual*. Although it is possible, too, for the shaman to become as stuck in the *nagual* as the majority of humanity is blinded by the overwhelming force of the *tonal*, the successful shaman learns both realities and becomes an expert in moving between them. Because analysts must be able to access both realms (persona and self) without losing ego-identity, they have much in common with the shamans of Castaneda's stories.

A number of metaphors fill out the empty intuition of *nagual*. One of the most suggestive is the description of the human person when seen by *nagual*-informed eyes, *i.e.*, an egg-shaped bundle of luminous fibers. Each strand is an independent functional organ for gathering the lived-world and communicating with other individuals. Average citizens who are familiar only with the world of the *tonal*, the persona field, have learned to use only one of these fibers. The rest are not inoperative, only inaccessible. We are all influenced constantly by the realities of the self field, it is just that our socialization has excluded them from consciousness. It is the shaman's achievement, however, to have gained facility with a number of the luminous fibers comprising his or her totality -- each of which gives access to different dimensions of the *nagual* and of interpersonal dynamics.

The narrative context of Castaneda's revelations makes it clear that the shaman's accomplishments are not easily made. Although the tools are readily available, our habitual reliance on the persona field -- relentlessly reinforced by a ceaseless internal monologue -- banishes them. The apprentice shaman, therefore, has to undergo some very disorienting experiences to relativize the *tonal*, soften habitual defenses, and open up to the diversity of the self field.

Before attempting to describe the realities of the *nagual* or self field, let us consider the implications of this metaphor of the luminous fibers that are in contact with a multitude of realities systematically excluded from consciousness. By analogy, what we learn about one another in a day at the beach is sure to be different from what we will find in the emergency room of a hospital. How people relax and how they respond to crises hint at unseen dimensions of their lived world. Much of our mutual life together is developed and raised to consciousness through the variety of its adventures and contexts which, like laboratory experiments, call forth latent potentials and reveal us to one another. The metaphor of the luminous fibers, however, suggests a rather different approach -- something more immediate but possibly less obvious.

For example, I once spoke with a recently divorced woman in her late forties. Having felt betrayed by her ex-husband, she had separated reluctantly and with great pain. Still she was delighted to find that the single life suited her. She dated and partied with gusto, but never lost sight of the fact that her ultimate goal was remarriage. One man occasioned some concern and perplexity for her. She clearly liked him the best of her suitors; but, aside from his not being able to support her in the style she was used to, his idea of a good time was a quiet day in the country while she preferred concert-going and other cultural pursuits. She had let him know her doubts regarding marriage but was happy to continue dating him. She

felt slightly uneasy about this. What did I think?

What struck me in her account was a detail she hardly noticed. He had installed a private telephone line to her bedroom so that when that phone rang she could have no doubt as to who was trying to reach her. I found this a very intrusive and possessive development and asked her how she felt about it. She dismissed it with the matter-of-fact comment that it had not bothered her since *he* had paid for it. Furthermore, she was not obliged to answer the phone when it rang. I was taken aback by this comment, but had to admire her independent spirit and clever refusal to be manipulated. I said so. But being frustrated at the superficiality of her interpersonal observations, I decided to change the level of our discussion, to deepen it -- rather like calling her attention to an unaccustomed fiber in her luminous egg. I said it sounded as though this man was extremely insecure and that -- as regards his prospects as a future husband -- this was a far more significant issue than the incompatibilities she had noted. Now it was her turn to be taken aback. She wondered how I could have jumped to that conclusion so quickly. Actually several of her friends had said that about him, but she did not know what they were talking about.

The telephone business had told me that he was afraid of losing her and that he had to rely on external manipulations to bind her to himself. He did not trust *her* because he did not trust himself. He was ignoring the most important tool in his armamentarium, his own feelings about their relationship. Very likely he recognized half consciously that her confusion about him was also his opportunity. But in forcing himself upon her with the telephone line, he was driving her to indifference (reserving the right to refuse to answer). What he might have done, had he trusted himself, was to ask himself how their relationship *felt to him*.

Our mutuality is always most immediately accessible to us through our feelings. By consulting how my relationship feels to *me*, I can actually take a reading on how *we* are together. I can tell how deeply involved we are, whether your devotion is equal to mine, whether your loyalty can be counted on. I can also tell by the constancy over time of our mutuality, whether you trust yourself enough to act on the way you feel about the bond between us. In this way I can arrive at general conclusions about the way we jointly live our world. But the prerequisite for this is that I know how I feel and that I trust my feelings. For without confidence about how I feel about myself, I have no point of reference from which to arrive at judgments about us.

These two people have left their feelings of security and insecurity entirely out of the conscious picture they have built of their relationship; and it is the most important piece. Although there is nothing so "inconceivably other" in this story as to merit the designation of *nagual*, it illustrates very well how the habitual categories we learn from our socialization in the persona world prevent us from noticing violent agitation in the unfamiliar fibers of our being. In just the same way, Castaneda implies, I missed the resonating fibers that accomplished Karen's work while the two of us were coasting.

This brings me back to my question: what luminous fibers had I overlooked, and how might I begin searching for them?

As a start, I can eliminate two areas where the effective communication between Karen and myself may *not* be located. Analytic interchanges take place on three levels: conscious dialogue, the persona field, and the self field. These correspond to the three levels of Jung's model of the psyche: consciousness, personal unconscious, and collective unconscious. The silence that ruled our meetings eliminates the first of these.

The second may also be eliminated, although perhaps not so obviously. The persona field is characterized by socially shared metaphors and expectations that we accept and believe in unreflectively. It is the source of belonging to the nation, clan, family, and culture. We need to "fit in" and conform so dearly that we are prone to compromise our individuality to do so. The persona field is therefore the realm of conformity and what Jung calls "mass-mindedness." It is also the source of "internalized" values, that Freud attributes to super-ego. We act upon these values with a sense of righteousness and resist them with a sense of guilt.

At the beginning of her work, Karen was a person with a poor sense of belonging. She felt nearly as much a misfit as had Lisa. But by the time of her termination, she had done a good deal of work in this area. She had the persona of a woman who understood something of the "spirit of the times" and opposed it. Our conscious dialogues at the beginning of the analysis had touched upon these matters, so that they were by no means outside the purview of our joint awareness -- even though much of her work in acquiring a more adequate persona had gone unmentioned. It is reasonable to suppose that our meetings had played some stabilizing or even energizing effect upon Karen's efforts in the realm of social adaptation. Yet the work itself was done in her poetry writing and union activities -- matters that were never discussed except in retrospect, during the last two sessions.

By process of elimination, therefore, I am forced to examine the self field for hints as to how Karen and I must have been communicating in our silence. The self field is characterized by the unconscious unity of all beings. Jung experienced this in a disturbing manner in Africa and India, when he felt overwhelmed by the emotional *participation mystique* of the natives and suffered attacks of dysentery as a response. He also speaks of the fate of white individuals who have "gone black." Mystics, on the other hand, have valued their sense of oneness with the universe, with God, and with their fellow humans. Jung, too, speaks of this when he describes the collective unconscious as having an "absolute knowledge" of everything that is, has been, and is yet to be: the basis for experiences of synchronicity. He provides a metaphysical image for this deep, unconscious unity when he describes the personal life of each individual as growing out of a "rhizome," a root structure we all share in common, the mythic foundations of consciousness. His interest in preliterate cultures was strongly motivated by a need to understand how so-called primitive individuals live their lives in a *participation mystique* which our culture does its best to deny.

A book that enjoyed wide popularity about twenty years ago, *The Secret Life of Plants* (Tompkins and Bird), presents a great deal of evidence suggesting that plants have a demonstrable connection with one another and with the humans that care for them or injure them -- all supported by galvanometric data. What we experience as emotional states are detectable in plants as alterations in the electrical conductivity of their leaves, analogously as we may betray our own emotional states through galvanometric measurements on our skin.

Similarly, if we closely observe and relate to our pets, we find many indications of sympathy and even understanding -- just as parents may learn to read the apparently meaningless gestures and sounds of their infants. What caring mother does not know the difference between a need for a diaper change, a feeding, or simple affection? We accept as well the possibility that mothers know when their children are in distress when far from home. And there are countless stories of mothers who knew the moment when their sons have perished in war or who have rightly disregarded premature reports of their death. I was recently having dinner with a woman who paused between bites, slumped in her chair a moment, and then declared, "Something good has happened to Mark" -- her son who was on a fishing trip with his father. Two hours later she received an excited phone call from Mark. He had caught a prize-winning trout just about the time she had been at dinner with me.

Considerations such as these incline me to believe that we are all connected with one another at a deep level that generally remains unconscious. Communications, I assume, take place even when we are unaware of them -- as between Karen and myself. Consciousness of our self-level emotional interchanges is facilitated by anything that "thins out" or makes more permeable our ego boundaries. For example, psychotic and borderline patients can be so unerringly right about our deepest secrets because they live their everyday lives without boundaries. Lovers, parents and their children, analysts and their analysands, and other archetypally connected pairs of individuals are all intermittently aware of "telepathic" exchanges because something like a deep caring link between them has thinned out their boundaries. Shamans, yogis, and other spiritual masters are experts in this kind of boundary thinning because they have been trained in the skills required to enter the *nagual* or self field without losing the ability to return to ordinary consciousness in the public world.

To return to Karen's silent analysis, it would seem that virtually nothing was happening at the level of conscious dialogue. In the persona field, evidently there was at least the maintenance of our roles as therapist and client. Probably the fact that I respected her silence and the seriousness of her project at having weekly sessions contributed a valuing and holding environment and provided the emotionally accepting and imaginally expectant space for whatever psychological process might fill it. My patient presence as "healer" no doubt allowed her inner healing to take place. The heart of the process, however, must have been transpiring in the self field, in that place where we were one, although we were not able to recognize it.

In an unpublished paper Jung's editors found in his files (Jung 1937/69) there is a case that proceeded just as mysteriously as mine with Karen. Jung confesses that he seriously underestimated his patient, a twenty-five year-old woman, at the beginning of the analysis -- revealed through a dream of his own in which he received a crick in his neck from straining to look up to the top of high tower where she was sitting. Interpreting his dream as a compensation, he confessed to her his former undervaluation. Then began a remarkable series of dreams on her part, recapitulating the imagery of Kundalini Yoga. Jung having no knowledge of this mythology at the time, believed his participation was useless:

The whole case worried me so much that I told the patient there was no sense in her coming to me for treatment, I didn't understand two-thirds of her dreams, to say nothing of her symptoms, and besides this I had no notion of how I could help her. She looked at me in astonishment and said: "But it's going splendidly! It doesn't matter that you don't understand my dreams. I always have the craziest symptoms, but something is happening all the time" (par. 555).

Jung felt useless at the level of discursive dialogue. There had been a problem in the persona field -- namely Jung's undervaluing of her [1] -- which had been satisfactorily resolved as he learned to have a new respect for her. But accommodation at the level of the persona field made possible a deeper collaboration at the archetypal level. For only after the proper respect was accorded her, did the young woman's unconscious bring forth her mythological dreams.

I conclude from all this that analysts *should* be shamans, in the sense that we should be aware of our participation with our analysands in the self field. But even when we are unaware of our self-field *participation mystique*, we may nevertheless be effective. There is little enough to take credit for in such an unconscious process, but it is important for us to know when to coast.

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1. Pamela Donleavy has pointed out to me that the early dreams of this patient of Jung's resembled very closely his dreams of Freud as a custom's official. Very likely his undervaluing of her had much to do with his unresolved complex regarding Freud, and he did not like to be compared to the rigid and limiting figure he had seen his own mentor to have been.