

A Home-In-The-Mind

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THE TASK WHICH THE SOCIETY'S PROGRAM Committee set before us has given me the opportunity to make an attempt at articulating the ways in which my training at the White informs my clinical and professional practice.

As I thought about what I might pull out of my many experiences at the White, it became clear to me that what I cherish most dearly, and what I am careful to pass on, are the lessons I learned in my struggle to internalize this institution as the home of the final phases of my adult development.

I would like to describe this to you and to think with you about what relevance this has had on the development of working propositions in my professional practice.

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My interest in psychoanalysis evolved as my adulthood evolved. I came to the field of psychoanalysis from a professional career in social work, and from an internal inclination towards activist social-change politics. In the 60's and early 70's, there were opportunities for an easy confluence between my intellectual and political interests. Because of these opportunities, and because of the work of a good-enough analysis, I could use my skills in direct application to the concerns of our lives in those times. My career was political, my social life was political, and my love shared my concerns. However, with the assassinations of Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, Kennedy and Kennedy; with the devastation of the Black Power Movement, and the Women's Movement; and with the insanity of Viet Nam, the easy confluence was shattered. I became politically and emotionally dispirited. The two parts of myself—the intellectual and the political—became alienated. For many years, I couldn't bear to read the newspapers.

I couldn't remember the names of the attorneys-general or the secretaries-of-state. I couldn't maintain awareness of the formation and re-formation of new political systems—repressive or otherwise. Nor could I maintain awareness about our country's clandestine involvements, neither those I agreed with, nor those I abhorred. My political self went to cover, bruised, defeated, helpless; my sense of political efficacy was obliterated.

Psychic cover took the form of a return to the student role, a return to a good-mother-institution-of-learning, under whose care and attention I could become absorbed by conventional concerns. This clinical doctoral mother took me in, challenged me, and rewarded me with a ticket into a safer, less exposed, less risky, less heartbreaking way of taking care of myself while making a contribution.

This was a period of regression for me, where the "taking care of myself" motivation prevailed. I was a little old for the "me generation", but none the less, I came first. It was only after my political wounds began to heal some that the "while making a contribution" motivation re-emerged. During my doctoral studies, I developed, the nascent idea that a most revolutionary locus of social-political relevance for any individual is to be at the boundary of working on being whole self.

Psychotherapy, to my way of thinking, was designed to work at that task, and it did so on behalf of the patient, on behalf of the therapist, and on behalf of the larger society. I was somewhat restored and energized by the proposition; I felt that I could put myself to that task, and that the task itself could reawaken the old passions, and it would be served by them.

My doctoral mother institution was delighted by this development and encouraged me to begin analytic training to sharpen my thinking. I was pleased for the opportunity, but I felt that training there would meet only half of my objective. I would get my ticket and the authorization to take care of myself, but I was not quite prepared to go it alone in working at the interface between practice and application, that is, between developing agency in individual awakening and making what I would learn there relevant to the larger understanding of conditions of human experience. I felt that I needed institutional support and specific training for the application of psychoanalysis.

In the recesses of my awareness there was an institution whose foundation and organizational mission seemed to suit my developmental needs. Of course, it was the White Institute. It had a reputation in my mind which was twofold.

First the thrust of the Institute's historic mission was to link psychoanalytic knowledge to social and cultural processes, and to apply this knowledge to social problems and dilemmas in the tradition of Sullivan and Fromm.

Psychoanalysis, as defined at the White, then, was about the business of describing the elephant of human experience, of locating the individual relevance and fit in the "whole", and in so doing, psychoanalysis acted to ameliorate the individual and collective distress of unenlightenment, alienation, disjuncture and social chaos.

From this part of its reputation, I could envision how my bit of the elephant—the matters of racial identity, racism and across race identifications—would have relevance at the White. In working with Black patients, I would have the opportunity to understand the individual effects of receiving and colluding with racist projections. In working with White patients, I would have the opportunity to understand the individual effects of projective nihilism—that is, the effects of having "not-me" self aspects located in a culturally prescribed other. I would have the opportunity to conceptualize the residual psychic effects of dissociation from inevitable across-race identification in both groups. I would have the opportunity to apply what I would learn, in particular, to expand on a proposition which has some currency for me: that racism is a social defense, a cultural security operation, used by blacks and whites against anxieties about joining and belonging to an overwhelming diverse culture, where the threat of identity diffusion is constant. Racism had made the world more comprehensible to the extent that it has prevailed as a "them-and-us" paradigm. While this concept is currently in common usage, the working dynamics are not well understood. My training at the White would help me to elaborate it.

This place, the White Institute, as it took shape in my mind, even before I applied, sounded like home to me. It was an organization-in-the-mind which would help me bind my intellectual-political splits. It would mentor me, guide me, take a direct interest in my development. It would authorize me through direct training in application. If the Institute would take me, it was going to be home with a more highly developed mother.

The second part of the reputation contradicted this bit of irrationality somewhat. I had been told that one of the founding mothers had said of the Institute, "Yes, but, an Institute is not a home". Since this didn't suit the picture of the home I was developing, I worked up a social systems rationalization to explain "an institute is not a home", to force a fit between my perceived needs and the organization's self description, which went something like the following.

The White Institute began as a revolutionary, break-away organization, committed to developing a broadened theory base and to undoing the discriminatory exclusion of non-MD's from classical analytic training. Many formerly disenfranchised people took advantage of the newly created opportunity to train; many people attracted by the value system took the opportunity to affiliate. Membership grew, and ultimately developed beyond the capacity of the organization to provide the majority of its members with institutional roles and institutional functions. Members had to create a satisfying work life in tandem with, but not within the organization, per se; the nest was full. It could provide a good enough hatching environment, but the rest of professional development had to be done in the world and on the wing. Affiliation with the organization had to be made satisfying in some creative way on the members' own personal authority.

Well, OK, I thought, one has to activate one's personal authority when one graduates, but certainly, an institute was a home while one was a candidate.

At the party for new candidates, someone said it again, "You know, Clara Thompson said: 'an institute is not a home'." It made me more than a little anxious. Even so, I entered the Institute with my irrational assumptions blazing: I think that my unconscious plan was to get myself back together through a projective deal where social-political potency would devolve to me from affiliation with the White Institute to the extent that I kept it a highly idealized organization. Despite the warning, it was my home nonetheless.

I made this home a powerful self-growth organization which would inspire, guide and otherwise set me on a new path towards personal integration, self-authorization and potency—potency in the analytic role and potency in the larger social scheme.

My seniors, most of whom I had known only by reputation, became my mentors-in-the-mind, as well as my highly idealized authorities. In my internal world, they were: vital, brilliant, powerful, potent, gifted, competent, and all manner of wonderful and inspiring.

And, in fact, my first experiences supported my assumptions—courses were solid, teachers were smart, my cohort group was passionate, competitive and lively. Attributions to me of social-political potency increased on my network in this field—"Ooh! You got into White!"

Curiously, as my first experiences began to mount, I came to describe myself quite differently from the way I described either the Institution itself or my seniors. I began to feel that I was in trouble. I began to feel: humiliated, incompetent, voiceless or inauthentic in voice, unappreciated, and mostly, disappointed.

It was as if my hopes in joining had been dashed. As though I was not getting what I came for. I take the disjuncture between how I saw who and what I had joined as compared to how I saw myself in relationship them to be a beginning description of the irrationality I brought to the dynamics of joining the organization.

My hypothesis is that I was in an irrational dependency relationship to a highly idealized authority into which I had projected what is vital, powerful, potent, gifted, and competent in myself.

I was unable to internalize the organization because of my relative state of depletion from the projective operations. The projection/depletion dynamic left me in a rage at the Institute; it was not holding up the end of the deal which I had cut for it. I would give it my good stuff, it would give me my life.

The anger I felt coursed along the continuum of fight/flight and basic assumption dependency experiences. I was either abandoning hope of claiming my good stuff or I was making plans to hold onto my good stuff by abandoning the damn organization.

These conditions were very difficult, and this struggle did not go smoothly. I stumbled badly, was quite regressed and depressed. I sorely felt that I needed a return on my projective investment. At the center of my concern was the fact that no one seemed terribly interested in holding my intellectual hand, nor in birthing my nascent ideas about application of psychoanalytic theory to the social realities of race. I was particularly alarmed by the question about how was I going to learn about applications to race if there were so few Black patients, so few Black candidates and so few Black seniors for me to engage with!

In one safe-enough supervision, after listening to me hold forth about this periodically, the supervisor said, "You seem very interested in race. How are you thinking about it?" The heart of my fury at the Institution and the nub of my irrationality became clear in that moment, because I wanted to fire back, "Not, 'How am I thinking about it?', 'but, 'How are you thinking about it?' You're the expert, you're the trained one; you're the representative of the Institute's high ideals! You tell me what the problems are about race!"

Of course, I didn't fire any of that back. But the simple inquiry "How are you thinking about it?", had the effect of an interpretation from the institution to me. The White Institute could not divine the path to social relevance of psychoanalysis that was most suited to my needs, nor could it place my feet upon it. What it could provide was the structure and the opportunities for me to learn to be a psychoanalyst. By so doing, the Institution would be authorizing me to find my own path to the hair follicle of my choosing on that elephant of human experience. I was free and, indeed, encouraged to report whatever world of wonders I might find there; and I was free and, indeed, encouraged to join my findings with the collective effort in this community—to articulate the elusive essence of elephant-ness.

Racial concerns come out of my experience. It would be up to me to figure out what to do about them. It is so obvious. Yet, it was an important bit of learning for me which constitutes an aspect of the work of my mid-adulthood, that is, to take back the projection out of the White Institute, and, indeed, out of White people altogether, to take back the projection of potency and competence in conceptualizing and ameliorating, in my case, the residual effects of racism in me and in our culture. This is my work to do, and of course, it needed to be done in collaboration with any colleagues who were interested.

The supervisory position of "how are you thinking about it" was an offer of collaboration which gave me the opportunity to focus on my analytic work with a deeply distressed, borderline white male from the point of view of racial transference and racial countertransference, and to pursue a more technical question of the operations of countertransference resistance in me. There is not enough time here to give a full description of the case itself, but the supervisory collaboration led to the proposition that I might focus on the reality of primitive racial hatreds in the experience between myself and the patient or as metaphors of earlier relatedness in the treatment as a counter-transference stratagem to save myself from the possibilities of encountering disorganizing anxieties in the here-and-now relatedness with a more overtly disturbed person than myself.

The use of reality as a defense against disorganizing anxiety was not a new concept for me, but in the context of the intimate collaboration in supervision, which was focused at the level of my character operations, the concept took on deeper meaning and opened a window to a small application of psychoanalytic principles to a part of the world which interests me.

I was doing some work with a group of Black Activist lawyers on developing networking and mission strategies. The heart of the group's difficulty was organizational procrastination, which was supported by surprisingly stereotypic rationalizations about the white man's greater resources, access to power, etc.

I didn't exactly tell them that I thought that they might be in countertransference resistance, but I did raise the question as to whether there was organizational concern about whether the group's competence could stand a challenge on issues of substance, since they were certainly quite competent at being the victims of racism, and were they holding on to assumptions of competence and to organizational belongingness by remaining ineffective. My hypothesis was that there was fear of organizational collapse if members had to differentiate among themselves by competence. It was a useful intervention in the system which led to some conceptual re-working which energized their mission. This model for learning: that is, collaboration between the supervisor's psychoanalytic expertise and the supervisee's particular psychoanalytic interests laid the groundwork for my restoring my confidence and sense of worth. The power of my institutional transference abated some, my interest in projective idealization diminished, and I could seek out other collaborative possibilities in the system.

There is one regret remaining: that while in the role of supervisee I had many opportunities to make concrete application from the learning in supervision, but I didn't take the opportunity to bring it back to the supervision and make it explicit. I didn't close the loop, and therefore, I didn't test the outer limits of the collaboration. However, when I think about the primary task of psychoanalytic supervision—to provide the condition for the supervisee to develop in the analytic role—I am left with the idea that "closing the loop" is better done in another forum.

This constellation of experiences from idealization and irrational dependency to readiness to engage in collaborative learning which activated my personal authority to make my learning relevant in my terms are the central dynamics of my struggle to make the necessary transformations to internalize this Institution.

Fortunately, the Institution held steady while I struggled with it. It went on with the primary task of providing educational opportunities, it struggled with fiscal realities, it struggled with its issues of leadership, membership and belonging, grappled with its questions of its generativity. The steady structure, itself, has authorized me to find my psychoanalytic voice, to represent it as an attribute of my training at the White, to practice what I have learned and to teach about it whenever I have the opportunity.

This steady structure has given me a great deal, and yet the Institute is not a home.

It has been important transformative organization, and yet the Institute is not a home.

I have had to face dilemmas of separation-individuation here more explicitly and with more distress than in my original family organization, and yet the Institute is not a home.

The wins and losses, the triumphs and failures, and the opportunities taken and missed constitute the wellspring from which I draw on to inform the course of further development, and yet the Institute is not a home.

In all, it has had salutary effects, and yet the Institute is not a home.

But, the authorization it has given me, does, in fact, constitute the way in which this White Institute is my home-in-the-mind; it is not the home-in-the-mind of my infancy, where it would be emphatically connected to my needs and focused on fixing my place in the world; but it is the home-in-the-mind of my adulthood, where I am authorized to join my interests with yours in pursuit of our mission.

Essentially, I got what I came for. It is the "I" which has gone through a process of transformation. The authorization and the transformation inform my professional practice. There are several aspects in particular:

The Frame

First of all, I have developed a broadened understanding and appreciation of holding the frame of the analysis, and I have an easier time resisting the pulls to gratify immature dependency strivings from the baby selves of my patients. I have come to understand that the frame of the analysis itself is gratifying in its very reliability and

predictability. It is there to be resisted, struggled with, reviled to ignite curiosity, and hopefully to be taken in. As the frame comes to be internalized by the patient, I think that it becomes the primary support for the patient's work. The steadiness of the frame serves to lessen the effects of the chaos people feel when they are shifting from dysfunctional adaptive patterns and are beginning to experience newly emerging self-aspects.

Training and Supervision

Secondly, I make the assumption from my experience that each person who comes for training and supervision potentially has a take on the elephant which is unique to his/her experience, and which can be elucidated to our collective benefit. To my way of thinking, the supervisory role has an authorizing function in this regard. I take it from the work of my supervisors that the tool of authorizing process is the supervisor's willingness to bear not knowing, or to bear seeming not to know, until the supervisee can make the uniqueness manifest.

As a general proposition, it seems to me that the work of supervision is right on that boundary of providing expertise while authorizing the supervisee to collaborate from the position of lesser and developing expertise.

Institution of the Analysis-in-the-Mind

Finally, in trying to think through the overall effects of my training on clinical practice, I realized that there is a work in progress for me, which is the direct result of the transformation of the White Institute in my mind, and the transformation of myself in relation to it. The developmental work has raised the question for me of whether there is an institution of the analysis-in-the-mind of patients, which is distinct from transference and the real relationship, and which would be a fruitful place for a broadened analytic inquiry.

Since the analysis is a small social system with a primary task, structure, fees and a membership, the questions would be:

What is the patient joining when he begins an analysis?

What is the authority relationship between the two people in the patient's mind?

What is the person's notion of the task?

What is the picture of his authorization in the patient role, and how does he authorize the analyst?

How might the picture in the mind of the analysis be a metaphor and analog of early relationships, unresolved dynamic conflicts, traumatic antecedents to personality dilemmas, etc.?

How is the picture of the analysis-in-the-mind transformed over the course of the developments in the analysis?

And, what relevance would such a picture have in understanding analytic developments?

I have a vignette from a current analysis as an example of how I am beginning to think about this:

This is a case of a middle aged, married white woman who came to treatment because of manifest interest in career change which was being stymied by work inhibitions related to fears around the expression of her aggression. She had chosen an occupation to which she had made uneasy and partial commitments, and which was unsuited to her ambitions to shape, to manage to help create, to influence her surroundings. She felt stuck in mediocre working circumstances; she floated the hypothesis that gender bias and ageism were the agents of her dilemma.

Early in the treatment, she presented this dream:

This was in my home when I was a child. These two derelicts were breaking in the back door with resolute determination. They didn't seem violent just very determined.

We were paralyzed with fear. We didn't know how to protect ourselves. I certainly felt unsafe; my parents were no comfort.

Anyway, it was the Black derelict who was most persistent and when he couldn't pick the lock, he smashed a pane of glass and simply undid the latch.

He came in and went straight to the telephone; can't imagine why. The white derelict, the sidekick went to the fridge. They had some plan, and they worked in consort.

They were surprisingly well-dressed for derelicts.

At first glance this woman's association with me in the playful maneuver of breaking through the back door of her unconscious life, feels corrupt, degraded, illicit, and criminal. Her associations are to herself as the stereotypic "nigger lover" who is in consort with the single-minded violator of the social norm. "Something must be wrong with me for being in therapy with a black".

She is identified with me as a degraded object. The work I do, and the work which she has joined me in is potent, threatening to her internal objects and perverse.

This dream is also a transference metaphor which describe her family relations. In particular, her associations go to a mother who methodically intruded into the boundaries of her personal space and did so with such relentless authority that she, the patient, and others in the family were paralyzed, helpless and impotent.

The dream also describes her picture of the authority relations between us and the extent of her capacity to enter into a collaboration at the beginning of the treatment. Her unconscious picture was that, in our work, perverse or not, I was in charge; she would be dragged around into whatever analytic activities suited my interests. If I used my authority injudiciously, which she anticipated I would, she would simply be a victim of it. In her picture of the work, I had been set up to treat her, and what she seemed to know about me was that the hook for a collusion with her design, would not be "blacks as degraded objects fight", but would be an interest in running out fancy-dressed interpretations.

I took my cue from the dream to be disinclined to make inclusive interpretations and to take pains to search out her hypotheses about her experiences from the direction of her associations, etc. The effect of my taking directional cues from her has been a protracted period of rageful assaults on my competence. "You're the Doctor, you're supposed to make the interpretations!"

As yet, we have not been able to establish a collaborative exchange where an association of mine can generate further elaborative work on her part. My interventions still generate defensive acceptance of my description of her experience as reality.

She continues to try to maneuver me into a re-enactment of her mother's authoritative intrusions, and to maintain her victimization. While this feels like standard practice, and may take an interminable amount of time, her life situation is coming along. She has moved out of the role of Office Manager; she has secured training and a partnership in a firm. She has her eye on the role of Managing Partner.

In the transference relationship, the patient is maintaining the illusion of my greater authority in understanding her inner experiences. But she seems to be in quite a different relationship to men in the analysis-in-the-mind. She seems both identified with me and in competition with me. Not differently from her own ambitions, I do love my work, I run my shop, and, to the extent that I manage and hold the frame of the analysis, I am the managing partner in our social system. Her competition with me seems to have mobilized her aggression to benefit around the very issue for which she came into treatment.

I haven't, as yet, authorized myself to pursue this in analysis-in-the-mind terms explicitly, mainly because I am unsure of my motivations. I am finding her insistence on the victimization hard to bear, and would like to stop it short. Nonetheless, I do think that the analysis-in-the-mind structure is there, and I think that it is quite potent.

I am looking forward to reporting my progress in conceptualizing this in my home organization.

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