

## 4 The dynamics of the interactive field

### IMAGINAL FIELD EXPERIENCES

The affects of the mad parts of the personality have so strong an inductive effect that the individual ego of the analyst often cannot attend to these affects without dissociating and fading in and out of focus. Allowing the process between analyst and analysand to exist in a 'third area' is an imaginal act, creating in fact an imaginal vessel, that contains and allows for experiencing fragmenting parts of a personality without distorting their mystery through an analysis of ownership of contents and historical origin. The notion of an objectivity of process does not minimize the mystery of subjectivity. Nor does it minimize the danger of unrelatedness and loss of particularity that can accompany attempts to set out laws or objective patterns of the psyche's behavior. But I am not assuming an objectivity of process in the sense of scientific approaches to nature, for the objectivity of the collective unconscious cannot be known except as it is experienced by an individual consciousness. Nevertheless, that experience can itself be informed and deepened by an awareness of patterns that the collective unconscious appears to manifest within the context of any subjective intersection with its processes.

According to Jung and von Franz, the key to understanding the deeper dynamics of the 'third area' as a field lies in a qualitative view of 'number.' 'Natural numbers appear to represent the typical, universally recurring, common motion patterns of both psychic and physical energy,' writes von Franz (1974, 166). Jung employed a qualitative view of number in conjunction with alchemical symbolism to illuminate the deeper complexity of transference and counter-transference. In so doing, he essentially laid the groundwork for the notion of a third area as a field between people and for the use of alchemical symbolism as representative of the transformation of energy patterns within the field. Implicitly, Jung recognized that alchemical symbolism is an excellent source of information about processes of transformation in the third area. More specifically, Jung and von Franz discovered what the ancient alchemists had recognized hundreds and perhaps thousands of years before them—that processes of transformation in the third area, or subtle body as the alchemists referred to it, can be seen as energy patterns which involve the interplay of qualitative numbers one through four.

The alchemical numerical proposition which especially pertains to field dynamics is called 'The Axiom of Maria.' Jung (1954, 1963, 1968) and von Franz (1974) have dealt with it, and I have also discussed it with special reference to the clinical issue of protective identification (Schwartz-Salant 1988, 1989). The axiom, an example of the qualitative logic of pre-scientific cultures, runs as follows:

Out of the One comes the Two, out of the Two comes the Three, and from the Three comes the Fourth as the One.

The 'One' signifies a state prior to an established order, for example the Chaos of alchemy, or the way an analytic session is experienced in its opening phase. The alchemists speak of states of mind that are 'prior to the second day,' meaning before opposites have separated. This state of Oneness is experienced as disorderly and confusing. Only through the work of imaginally perceiving currents and tensions within it can opposites be apprehended.

The 'Two' is the beginning of making 'sense' of the phenomenon, the emerging of a pair of opposites. At this stage which most forms of analysis accomplish, the analyst becomes aware of thoughts or feelings, body states, or perhaps a tendency to wander mentally and to lose focus. Such states of mind can reflect the same states in the analysand. The analyst, depending upon the extent of his or her own self-knowledge, could then become aware of the induced quality, and could employ this quality for understanding the analysand's process. Another possibility is that the analyst's states of mind or body represent an opposite, or complementary state to the analysand's (Racker 1968, 135–37; Fordham 1969). In both instances, however, the analyst follows a movement of One becoming Two. In the case of induced projective identification, the analyst has achieved an awareness of syntonic opposites: the same quality exists in the analyst's and the analysand's psyches. In the case of opposite or complementary identification, the analyst experiences his or her psyche as containing one quality while the analysand's psyche contains the opposite. For example, the analyst may experience a tendency to talk without much restraint, and the analysand may feel gripped by a silence; or the analyst may feel depressed, while a manic quality dominates the analysand; the analyst may feel disgust or hatred, and the analysand may be filled with feelings of love and attraction. Generally, any pair of opposites may register in this way.

For example, the field's dynamics in a syntonic-like counter-transference reaction may focus on anxiety. Whose anxiety is it—mine or the analysand's? I can wonder whether it is an introject, part of a process of projective identification, or my own. Does the anxiety stem from my psyche or from that of the analysand? The simple positing of this set of questions leads me to wonder if I am dealing with a pair of opposites of the same quality, manifested as anxiety. This pair of opposites would be experienced as consecutive aspects of a process in which the anxiety is alternately felt as my own subjective state and then as the analysand's condition. The differentiation of opposites into successive aspects of a process, on the one hand, and as two different 'things' on the other, dates back to the preSocratic philosopher Heraclitus (Kirk and Raven 1969, 189–90).

The 'Three' is the creation of the third thing, the field. Normally, in the analytic tradition, an analyst who has gone through such a process of reflection will come to a conclusion about whose anxiety is essentially at issue, as in the processing of projective identification. But the analyst has the option to suspend judgment and, as Jung describes, to have 'the opposites become a vessel in which what was previously now one thing and now another floats vibrantly, so that the painful suspension between opposites gradually changes into the bilateral activity of the point in the centre' (1963, 14: paragraph 296). To enter into this kind of process, the analyst must be willing to sacrifice the power of knowing 'whose content' he or she is dealing with and to imagine that the content (in this case, anxiety) exists in the field itself and does not necessarily belong to either person. The content, therefore, can be imaginally thrust into the field which analyst

and analysand occupy together so that it becomes a 'third thing.' Jung (1988, 1495–96) has discussed such a process of 'conscious projection,' and Henri Corbin (1969, 220) has described it in the Sufi notion of *himma*.

As a result of this imaginal thrust and the conscious sacrifice of interpretation, the quality of the field perceptibly and palpably changes: the analyst can become aware of the texture of the surrounding space. It is difficult to describe more exactly both the quality of the change in the field and the feeling of inspiration that is present at such moments. The senses are enlivened as colors and detail become more vivid, and even the taste in the mouth can change. Analyst and analysand sense a feeling of an adrenalin rush or, in spiritual terms, perhaps the presence of divinity. So, the 'Three comes out of the Two,' not as an interpretation, but as a field quality. At such moments, analyst and analysand are both in the analytic crucible. Entering the analytic crucible and attaining the Three comes from the analyst's sacrifice of 'knowing,' that is, sacrificing the interpretation that one has achieved and continuing, instead, to focus upon the field itself.

The 'Four' is the experience of the Third as it now links to a state of Oneness of existence. After the field has become a 'presence' for both people, then each person, paradoxically, comes to be both inside this presence and simultaneously an observer of it. Continued intensity of concentration allows for something to change in the oscillating movement of the field. If the dominant affect defining the field were anxiety, one would have been feeling inside the anxiety and, alternatively, as if the anxiety were inside of oneself. Both analyst and analysand could feel this effect. When the sense of space or atmosphere changes, that part of the oscillation in which both people feel 'inside' the anxiety—that is, the experience of feeling inside the emotion itself—becomes a container pervaded by a sense of 'Oneness.'

In the movement to the Fourth, the alchemical idea that all substances (such as sulphur, lead, and water) have two forms—one 'ordinary' and the other 'philosophical'—can be experienced. In essence, affects cease to be experienced as 'ordinary,' as 'things,' and instead become something more—states of wholeness. While the question, 'Whose anxiety?' may be sorted out in this way, the answer is never the end result, but rather the answer is the Third on the way to the Fourth in which the mystery of containment comes to be known. Within this crucible, the analysand can experience, with the analyst, his or her anxiety concerning engulfment and identity loss. The attainment of this state makes it possible to recognize and feel how this experience might be a repetition of such fusion fears with the analysand's mother. In this way, the container enables the analyst and analysand to become both objective observers and participants in the affect which is present and enlivened, to experience the dynamics of the states, thereby providing the possibility to test the ways in which one has previously experienced the affect in one's life and the behavior patterns it elicits, and to explore a host of associative material which may have been stimulated. We thus seek the 'vessel' and the paradox of process, for the vessel alone can contain the mysterious, mad aspects of our being, indeed allow us to discover their mystery, and allow for a felt experience of the relation between the world known through 'parts' and their link to a larger sphere of oneness (Jung 1963, 14: paragraph 662).

The experience of the enlivened field as it unites the participants in the Three stage and opens to the transcendent in the Four stage was called the 'sacred marriage' by the

ancients in general and the *coniunctio* by alchemists in particular. Experiencing it opens one to the sense of mystery that can be transformative, much as a vision or 'Big' dream can be fateful. The resultant mutuality of shared process represents a departure somewhat from Ogden's caution: 'Analyst and analysand are not engaged in a democratic process of mutual analysis' (1994, 93–94). While the asymmetry of the analytic process must never be forgotten, important times of a shared experience—such as when experiencing the transference is more essential than interpreting it—give the analysand more courage to experience fusion desires and fears. In this 'vessel,' the analysand can begin to see that a union process exists beyond death through fusion, that this process has an archetypal dimension, and that the experience of its *numinosum* has a great deal to do with healing.

At times, the analyst and the analysand experience totally opposite states. In alchemical terms, this experience can be understood as that aspect of the process in which 'the One becomes the Two.' To begin with, either or both of the participants in this interaction must consciously separate from the fused state (the One) and recognize the pair of opposites at work (the Two). Once recognized, however, the analyst can use this dyadic level of opposites to interpret the interaction.

For example, in the case of a woman who had great difficulty respecting her own artistic creativity, the Third was an awareness that she was re-experiencing, in the transference, her father's manic usurpation of her creative ideas. Since early childhood, whenever she would share with him any insights or ideas about which she was excited, he would not receive them, acknowledge them, or react to them as one would expect in a normal interaction. Instead, he would be triggered to free associate his own creative ideas, demanding her to mirror and idealize him and his creativity. In the interactive field, I would feel an impulse to perform, to demonstrate my knowledge, while she would sit feeling withheld and reluctant to reveal anything of value to her soul. We became aware that we were re-enacting the relationship between her and her father. And she became aware of her susceptibility to register such a dynamic as an actual re-experiencing of her father's desires to rob her of her creativity and the very fabric of her sense of self. This awareness was of great value, for it brought to life a terrible interactive process that the analysand had been repressing, but which had been affecting her whole life in significant ways. She either avoided creativity, or else became gripped by a mania whenever she attempted to allow her creativity to be expressed.

At another time, the analyst may, however, choose to forego such knowledge and to sacrifice it to the state of 'unknowing,' allowing the 'unknown' to become the focus. The analyst may then wonder: what is the nature of the field between us or what is the nature of our unconscious dyad? In this manner, the analyst and analysand can both open to the field as the object of their attention. In the process, the opposites, manic speech/silence, can shift, with the analyst now feeling in the grip of silence, and the analysand having one new thought after another. The awareness of opposites can oscillate, until a new center is felt, Jung's 'bilateral point'; and from this focus the field itself begins to enliven. The opposites, in turn, may show themselves to have been only separable fragments of a far deeper and often very archaic fantasy. The analyst and analysand may discover primal scene fantasies in which the manic speech is a sublimated form of a dangerous phallus, and the opposite, the silence, is a putrefied corpse, the remains of a body killed by envy. While such images may be historical in the sense of what the analysand unconsciously

experienced through her father's fantasies and her reaction to them, the field itself has archetypal processes that are different from such historical levels, as important as these may be. For example, when the analyst and analysand 'see and experience' the affects and imagery of the unconscious dyad (each person in his or her own way), archaic and destructive forms of the dyad can change into more positive forms. This new dyad could be seen as having also been present in the father-daughter relationship. Instead of being merely a historically based interpretation, the move from Two to Three can become a new experience of the field.

As in the previous example, analyst and analysand can become subject to the field in the sense that giving up the power or knowledge about another person leaves one in the position of focusing upon, and being affected by, the field itself. This focus can involve experience of less archaic forms which can lead to liberating insights. One's subjectivity enhances the field, and its objectivity interacts with the analyst and the analysand. A different kind of Three then emerges in which the opposites are transcended. In effect, Three can be a union state, the alchemical *coniunctio*. At this stage, analyst and analysand often feel a current inherent in the field in which they feel alternately pulled towards, then separated from, the other person. This dynamic is the rhythm of the *coniunctio* as a Three quality of the field becomes the Oneness of the Four. 'The number four,' von Franz suggests, 'constitutes a "field" with an internal closed rhythmic movement that proceeds to fan out from the center [and] contracts back to the center' (1974, 124). Furthermore, the move from Three to Four is one in which a sense of finiteness is felt (von Franz 1974, 122). The level of Threeness does not have the felt boundaries of the Four. In a sense, the level of the Three calls out for interpretation as an expansive act, but perhaps also as an act that defends the analyst against the kind of intimacy that can evolve into the movement to Fourness. For in the movement to Four, the observer's 'wholeness' (von Franz 1974, 122) becomes involved, leading to the paradoxical sense of a subjective objectivity, and to a felt sense of Oneness.

However, in the case of the creative young woman's experience with her intrusive father, the analysand's psyche still contains the previous image of an actual or imaginal violation. How does this psychic condition change? Surely not by overlaying a new image or by recalling remnants of some positive fantasy life that also existed, for the negative, destructive fusion state is too powerful to be affected by historical recall of other states. Does a process exist that actually extracts, dissolves, or transforms the prior image, be it an engram of an actual, abusive history or an introjected primal scene trauma? In response to this question, field dynamics play a role in ways that especially differ from field ideas based upon subjectivity alone. Experiencing the field with its own objective dynamics, and being affected by this experience, is a way of transforming internal structures. New forms that create order in otherwise overwhelming and fragmenting psychic parts can then emerge.

Field dynamics also play a central role in the process of incarnating archetypal experience into an internal, felt reality. One may take the view that every child knows levels of the *numinosum* at birth and then loses this awareness to one degree or another, depending on how the mother-child dyad is able to contain its sacred presence. The mother is the first carrier, in projection, of the child's spiritual energy; but the child may know this energy even before the projection process occurs. Or, one may take the view

that spiritual levels that have never been conscious to an individual in any manner can, nevertheless, break in from the collective unconscious. In either approach, one is often left with the dilemma of an awareness of the *numinosum* that is then lost to trauma and to the demands of life in space and time and to the inertia of matter. Yet this awareness continues to live in the unconscious, either as a level of 'paradise lost,' or as a spiritual potential that the soul innately knows to exist, with the age-old problem of its incarnation into a felt center of psyche still remaining. Experiencing the interactive field constellates the capacity to facilitate this incarnating process which, as Adam McLean explains, was the focus of the *Splendor Soils* (1981, 83).

In addition, it is also possible to perceive briefly an imaginal reality which seems to be a property of the field itself, which is like experiencing the time-quality of the moment. Analyst and analysand may become conscious of an image that is felt to emerge out of the field and to reflect the state of both people. Each person may offer his or her sense of the imagery of the field as each focuses upon it, as in Jung's conception of active imagination. The result may be like a 'dialogue drawing' in which a sense of the field is constructed from the imagery each person creates. Interpretation in the classical sense of relating imagery and affect to early developmental issues blocks this awareness of the field. Rather than interpretation, one experiences the quality of the moment in the field, sometimes verbalizing the experience and sometimes remaining silent. The active, conscious experiencing of the energies and patterns that can be perceived in the field, experiencing them in the here-and-now, appears to affect the field and to enliven it as if it were a living organism. Sometimes, the affects of the field are nearly overwhelming, and at other moments, to attend to the field is nearly impossible. Extremely chaotic states of mind (in either person) can make it very difficult to allow the field to be the object, let alone to perceive the field's imagery.

If we engage the field, we can become aware of a deep, organizing process of which we were previously unconscious. Analyst and/or analysand may sense or intuit this organizing process as ongoing, but not necessarily known in the space-time realm the ego usually occupies. The field has the paradoxical nature of being created through the act of submission to it, while also being an everpresent *increatedum*, a process out of time. To enter the imaginal world of the field, one must give up ego control to a high degree, but not to the extent of fusing with another person and not in the sense of splitting one's ego into an irrational, experiencing-fusing part and a rational observing part. Something more is needed, a desire to experience the field in ways that may surely reveal the limitation of any conception one had of the state of meaning of a particular interaction, be it analytic or personal. Through faith in a larger process, one can often discover that the particular form of the field is actually far more archaic and powerful than anything one had imagined. This experience of the existing form, and the creation/ discovery of new forms, can have a transformative effect on internal structure and can allow new structures to incarnate.

### **THE DANGERS OF THE INTERACTIVE FIELD EXPERIENCE**

The alchemists often said that their 'elixir' or 'stone' was both a cure and a poison.

Likewise, the field as a ‘third thing’ with its own objectivity can be a blessing or a curse. We should be aware of four specific dangers inherent in applying this interactive field approach to relationships.

### **Avoidance of the *nigredo***

The interactive field creates a wide spectrum of states that can range from experiences of an intense erotic current and desire for literalization to states of emotional and mental deadness and a total lack of connection. Since these latter states are so problematic for the pain they create and the wounding they inflict—especially upon the analyst’s narcissism—their opposite, in which erotic currents can appear to create intense fields of union and a deep knowing of the other, become extremely seductive. The analyst can choose to focus upon these highly charged states in avoidance of the emotionally dead ones by, for example, recalling pleasantly connected past experiences and/or unconsciously imagining such experiences. Such acts have a strong, inductive affect, and they may be used to avoid feeling the dark states of mind that generally follow the *coniunctio*.

### **Failing to assess the structural quality of the unconscious couple**

The *coniunctio* that forms from the unconscious psyches of both people can possess either a positive or negative nature. Jung recognized that the experience of the *coniunctio* can lead to the creation of kinship libido (1954, 16: paragraph 445) which goes beyond the transference illusion. The problem is that many forms of the *coniunctio* exist, and while a field of desire may accompany a number of them, the erotics of the field cannot be properly assessed without an awareness of the structural quality of the unconscious couple comprising and defining the *coniunctio*. For example, the *Rosarium Philosophorum* depicts a couple—the ‘King’ and the ‘Queen’—participating in the act of coitus. But an earlier alchemical text, the *Turba Philosophorum*, depicts a couple—a dragon and a woman—intertwined in a violent fusion state leading to death. The passion accompanying this image does not have the modulation and control of the passion represented in the *Rosarium*. In both cases, the erotic quality of the *coniunctio* must be seen as a field quality and not as something to own or identify with. In clinical practice, as in relationship in general, one often finds that more conscious, loving connections, while genuine, are also ways of covering up a far more dangerous fusion field. Just as sexuality can hide anxiety in the transference, sexuality can hide the monstrous nature of an unconscious couple.

In this connection, I have been consulted occasionally by analysts about cases years after their completion. The analysts reported that, although the treatment ended in a seemingly good manner, they were intermittently contacted by their previous analysand who reported feeling tormented by tenacious desires connected to the analyst for years afterwards. It became clear that these analysands were suffering the pain of not having actually lived out the erotic energies of the *coniunctio*, which would have resulted in a far worse situation. But it was crucial to these analysands that the analysts involved recognize and express that they, too, suffered the sacrifice involved in maintaining the

focus on the higher good in the necessity of maintaining boundaries. The analysts had done a good job as far as boundaries were concerned, but their countertransference resistance to feeling the pain of losing the erotic connection that they also had felt left the analysands in a terrible quandary. The analysts had split off these feelings, and in reality, the analysands were left holding all the pain, rage and despair of a union that could not be consummated. These analysands were only freed from this torment when they again had analytic sessions, and the analysts could acknowledge their own suffering over the same issue.

### **Mistaking the *coniunctio* as the goal of the work**

The greatest danger of working within a shared field arises if the analyst believes that the *coniunctio*, the state of the union of opposites such as fusion and distance into a transcendent Third, is the focal point of the analytic process. In fact, the analyst's focus must also equally be upon the *nigredo*, the dark, disordering state that follows all *coniunctio* states. Alchemical literature is a mine of information on this point. All transformation, insist the alchemists, happens through the death and putrefaction which follow a union state. If an analyst knows this sequence and is willing to seek out and work with the affects of withdrawal, absence, confusion, deadness, and emptiness after a session that has achieved the I-Thou connection of a union state, he or she will usually be on a safe path.

One cannot emphasize enough that the *nigredo*, the death of structure and terrifying affects that are usually associated with the mad parts that surface, is the prized substance of analysis, as it was for the alchemists. Although a strong negative transference or counter-transference accompanies the *nigredo*, the analyst could use the previous experiences of union as a way of avoiding experiencing intense negative affects and associated painful states of mind. For he or she may either attempt to recreate a union state or else to act out an anger at its absence by passively identifying with the dissociative nature of the field quality of the *nigredo*. Instead, its affects must be sought out amidst their mildest currents, which is not an easy task when the far more pleasant and even blissful state of union has just preceded them. This respect for the dynamics of the field, in which union states and the death of structure are encountered in succession, is the best guide to employing the field concept and to respecting its archetypal dimension. Countertransference resistance is the problem in analysis in general, but it is especially heightened in a mutual field experience. If the analyst will seek out his or her negative feelings after an experience of union with the analysand, or inversely, if the analyst will register such negative feelings and reflect that some level of *coniunctio* may have unconsciously occurred, then the *nigredo* may become the focus of the work.

In the special case when one is working with people who have been victims of incest, the *coniunctio* is especially problematic because it holds out so much promise for healing. As in the adage, 'the god who wounds is the god who heals,' the *coniunctio* experience can help heal the abuse resulting from incest, but only if the resulting *nigredo* is carefully managed. For victims of incest are particularly sensitive and allergic to feelings of betrayal and abandonment which are inevitably present in the *nigredo* phase. If the analyst is unable or unwilling to deal honestly with his or her inability to relate to the



*nigredo* in its denial of empathy, especially with analysands who have been violated as a result of rape or incest, the analysand will feel terribly unsafe, and the *coniunctio* will have been experienced as no more than a tantalizing object, resulting in re-traumatization.

### **Failure to recognize trance states**

A person suffering from a dissociative disorder—which is commonly found in people who have suffered the trauma of abandonment and/or sexual or physical violations—is always, to one degree or another, in a trance state. As the field approach itself tends to constellate a mild, hypnotic state, serious errors can be committed if one is not alert. Serious errors can happen not only through what one does—that is easy enough to proscribe—but through what one says and even through what one imagines. For the analyst's unconscious tends to be acutely experienced by the dissociated analysand, as if by an enhanced capacity for ESP. Generally, the dissociated analysand tends to take the analyst's statements in a very literal way while the analyst believes he or she is speaking in metaphors. This confusion is particularly dangerous when the analyst is sidestepping negative affects and can use the binding power of processes in the 'third area,' the interactive field, to split off these affects by forcing the existence of rapport where, in fact, the main quality of the interaction is a lack of connection. Only if the analyst is alert to the process of dissociation can he or she even begin to consider dealing with processes as an interactive field. Often years of work with an analysand must first transpire in which dissociative states are dealt with, and only then can the field be experienced with any measure of safety.

Once the dangers implicit in field experiences are part of the analyst's consciousness, he or she may more confidently open to the imaginal processes necessary to apprehend field dynamics. These processes within the field lie on a spectrum existing between spiritual and material life, opposites which manifest to the ego through what Jung called the psychic and somatic unconscious (Jung 1988, 1: paragraph 441).

## **THE FIELD KNOWN THROUGH THE PSYCHIC AND SOMATIC UNCONSCIOUS**

A person's unconscious state can express information and experiences through mental, spiritual, and bodily forms. Jung referred to the mental-spiritual forms of expression as the psychic unconscious and to the bodily forms as the somatic unconscious. The psychic and somatic unconscious are complementary in the sense that they experience the same material but through different means. Indeed, in dealing with the psychotic states of otherwise normal people, a great deal of integration of traumatic material can be apprehended through the experience of body states as they affect the nature of the interactive field in ways that cannot be so readily seen through the psychic unconscious alone. When referring to the somatic unconscious, we may temporarily lose the structure and order of our mental gains; but we can restore the sense and truth inherent in the psycho-physical totality of an event or an experience. In this way, one can revive the awareness of the interplay and constant flux between the mind/spirit and the *soma*, which

is essential to the re-establishing of a living experience of the field itself.

At the mental-spiritual level, that is, the level of one's head or mind, the psychic unconscious is experienced as images, patterns, causality, meanings, and history. The psychic unconscious provides us with the imagery of our mental and spiritual processes. These images necessarily bring order and *logos* which, by nature, parcel up the unified whole in order for our consciousness to function. We cannot begin to identify or to understand anything without a thinking process and its concomitant separating and partitioning effects. Through the psychic unconscious, the analyst can perceive disordering parts of the analysand's psyche as they affect the ego, thinking, and the cohesiveness of the analytical process.

At the level of the body, the somatic unconscious is experienced as pains, discomforts, tensions, constrictions, energy, arousal, and other feelings of embodiment. Being embodied means a particular state of mind in which a person experiences his or her body in a particular way. For example, one becomes conscious of one's body in the sense of becoming aware of its size. Along with this awareness, one has a particular experience of living in it, which is to say, one feels confined in the space of the body. This state requires a free flow of breathing that is felt as a wave moving up and down the body; then, one begins to feel that one inhabits the body. In this state, the body is a container, and one feels one's age. The condition of being embodied is an experience of a medium that exists between one's material body and mind. The alchemists called this medium Mercurius; others have referred to it as the astral body, the subtle body, and the Kaballistic Yesod (Jung 1963, 14: paragraph 635); and Jung termed it the somatic unconscious (1988, 1:441). Alchemists and magicians from ancient times to the Renaissance believed that this medium was a substance felt within the human body but also flowing throughout space and forming the pathways along which the imagination and Eros flowed.

To be embodied is to experience the subtle body, and every complex, that is, a group of associations in the unconscious designated by a common feeling-tone and resting upon an archetypal foundation, can be said to have a subtle body. When a complex constellates, its body, to one degree or another, takes over the body of the ego. For example, a male analysand having difficulty feeling his own autonomy was unusually spirited and clear at the outset of a session with me, and he stated metaphorically: 'Today I woke up in my own house.' He went on to explain that usually he awakes 'in his mother's house.' He was using this metaphor to express an experience of losing his own body-awareness; instead he felt engulfed in his mother's body image or that body image constructed by their interactions during his childhood. When he awoke 'in his own house,' in his own body, he felt certain business problems in his life as issues to attend to; when he awoke 'in his mother's house' these same problems were felt as overwhelming and persecutory. His behavior would then take on an 'as if' quality, in sharp distinction to the clarity and strength he manifested when he was 'in his own house.'

The body of the complex has to be dissolved. This idea—which on the level of the psychic unconscious would be one of dealing with negative introjects that distort authenticity—is carried in alchemical literature by the phrase 'destroy the bodies.' For example, the *Turba Philosophorum* says: 'Take the old black spirit and destroy and torture with it the bodies, until they are changed' (Jung 1963, 14: paragraph 494). The

'old black spirit' is often the person's rage, shame, and paranoia that have been split off from awareness in the first year of life, and this split drives the person out of the body. Making contact with such powerful affects, felt as catastrophic to life itself, is often the only way to 'destroy the bodies,' to cease living in body images that carry alien qualities that block life.

Psychotic material impacts upon one's consciousness as if it were attacked by sensations or pieces without meaning and order. Wilfred Bion designated such material as 'beta products,' and he developed a theory of 'embryonic thought which forms a link between sense impressions and consciousness' (1970, 49). The problem of linking these domains was the focus of much pre-scientific speculation in the theory of magic and its philosophical underpinning in Stoic thought. But the theory of magic approaches this linkage differently. Rather than a theory of thinking, the alchemists and magicians focused upon a theory of the imagination. In a grand vision of communication on all levels of reality, they envisioned a subtle body of links through fantasy, linking fibers known as *vincula* or sometimes referred to as *pneuma*, that connected body and mind, people, and (depending upon the author) levels reaching towards planetary realms and beyond. But in all of these approaches, the imagination is the linking agent, for the soul's language is imagery. And most important, an organ—the heart in human beings and the sun in the Cosmos—operates as a central station that orients the process of transmuting sense impressions into consciousness. The heart is a 'cardiac synthesizer,' what Aristotle called the Hegemonic Principle (Couliano 1987, 9).

From the point of view of this approach, one could work on the issues of creating links and images to deal with psychotic states through the somatic unconscious. The analyst's inner, imaginal linking of opposites, which is felt as an element of relation within the field, would interweave with the analysand's less textured and connected fabric, with sets of broken relations. As a consequence, one might be working in this 'animistic' way, which goes back to the ancient tradition of magic, on the same issues that more modern theories such as Bion's attempt to address. But in the ancient tradition, the central organ of thought was the heart rather than the mind. From the embodied connection of the somatic unconscious, one actually feels a linking current between self and other, a current that has its own heart-centered vision.

Working through the psychic unconscious has a spiritual value and generates a capacity to find order and meaning in chaotic states. But working through the somatic unconscious is more concerned with soul, with a sense of life within and between people, and especially with the experience of the energy or life of the space of relations which both people inhabit. The attitudes that evolve out of working through the psychic unconscious are concerned with knowledge and how one achieves it. The attitudes that evolve out of working with the somatic unconscious are concerned not with projections and introjections but with experiencing relations. One must remain mindful, however, that the dissociated areas of someone we may be with or that person's mind-body splitting have an inductive effect which tends to drive us out of our own embodied state.

To the alchemists the linking domain of the subtle body was known as Mercurius. His qualities, enumerated by Jung in his essay 'The Spirit Mercurius' (in Jung 1967) are all qualities of the field of relations. This field is affected by the inner relations each person carries between opposites. Domains within the individual in which opposites have neither

separated nor begun to join strongly affect the nature of the field. Also, the analysand's or analyst's mind-body splitting, often existing in reaction to psychotic areas in the analyst's or analysand's own personality, will affect the field.

In the quaternity model of the transference-countertransference relationship, the analyst's conscious-unconscious connection effects the same link in the analysand. But also, the conscious-unconscious link effects the unconscious-unconscious connection. And either person's resistance to the unconscious or to the experience of linking in a subtle body or relational field has correlated effects on the other person. Thus, the series of pathways Jung describes between the four points created by the conscious and unconscious of both people represent relations that can be activated, for good or ill, by either person, and their mutual linking can have a healing or detrimental effect on the relational field within the individual.

In this way, we can speak of an 'interactive field,' although we are not implying any normal causality by this terminology, any more than Jung is when he speaks of projections as projectiles that lodge in the spinal cord! Rather it is a phenomenological way of dealing with an experience, with the advantage that this terminology allows for a kind of visualization of the relational experience.

The field and perceptions that emerge from the somatic unconscious can be illustrated by a case involving a woman who was to have minor surgery. We had explored our mutual field to a considerable degree, generally from the point of view of the psychic unconscious. I found the way she spoke about her body to be remarkable. No matter what organic condition she was describing, I had a clear sense of contact with her. I experienced no dissociation, and furthermore I had a distinct sense that her body was healthy. This 'goodness' was palpable. I felt like a physician able to talk about any body function and organ with complete openness.

But when she spoke about sexuality in any way, or if sexuality was present in her dream material, this connected body sense totally left. It was as if any reference to or association with sexuality introduced another body image. Then, the sense of the space or field between us radically altered and became diminished in energy, dark and dull in feeling, and devoid of any sense of relatedness. The only connection between this state and the previous one that I had known with her occurred when I felt dull and dead in my own emotional state under the impact of the split-opposites in her psychotic part. But I never found it fruitful to explore my inner states with her in terms of projective identification. She always insisted that these states of dullness and deadness were primarily my own responses to the interaction with her. But when we eventually dealt with her schizoid states and her terror and humiliation at feeling such ego-weakness, it became clear that the deadness she felt in me (which I no longer felt at this stage of our work) was the way she experienced her mother at numerous times in early childhood.

This state of deadness was no longer in me but had become a quality of the field between us, which she could recognize. She felt as if her body had changed and that she had two bodies—one of flesh and another that manifested in dark and disordering ways when any libidinal issues appeared. It felt as if her subtle body were possessed by some dark spirit which could dominate our interactive field.

She then had a remarkable dream that she was wearing a dark, old nightgown and that she had to get up and begin her day's work. But she could not remove the garment, and

no matter how much she tried it stuck to her. She thought of taking a shower, but she knew that would only make it heavier. The only way she could stop what felt like torture was to wake herself up out of the dream.

The terrible state in the dream was gradually clarified. Rather than understanding this image of the nightgown as, for example, the analysand's shadow, an embodied focus upon the field revealed a different view: the garment was her mother's body image, and it carried madness, depression and despair in response to the fact that her mother had been an incest victim. Her mother had consistently forced the analysand to identify with her throughout her life. For example, the analysand remembered how her mother would tell her that the two of them were alike in that they did not like men. While the analysand knew this was not true, fearing her mother's unpredictable violence, she said nothing and even agreed at times. There were numerous examples of such direct and enforced projections to which the analysand was unable to say no, for these projections were the only form of contact she had with her mother, and she also deeply feared her mother's rage if she dared to separate from her. So, the analysand literally wore her mother's madness in order to feel fused with her mother's body. When her mother's body image was enlivened in her, I was unable to contact her in any affective sense.

Because we had worked with the psychic unconscious and had established her psychotic sector and a sense of mental-spiritual self, we were eventually able to access this material. But the analysand could begin to take action to separate from the ego-alien factors that her mother's madness represented only by experiencing the somatic unconscious and by becoming aware of her 'two bodies.' She could recognize how this body state changed the field between us. I could be embodied with her now and feel the death and darkness that pervaded the field we occupied. And so could she. Only the body allows for a direct experience in this way. As Jung noted, we experience the unconscious through the subtle body in more direct ways, far more tangible than through the psychic unconscious.

As a consequence of this work, the analysand eventually was able to reject her mother's projections totally, even while experiencing how frightened she was of daring to accomplish this separation. This rejection was an astonishing act for her, and it was part of her eventual successful labor of taking off her mother's garment of shame and madness. This form of the subtle body also began to diminish in the field between us.

Working with the psychic and somatic unconscious, as the information from these forms of the unconscious manifest through the interactive field, has an inductive effect on each person's psyche. Projective and introjective processes transmit through the interactive field. In this transmission—an activity not bounded by locality or temporal process, and thus not characterized by usual notions of causality—the psychic structures of an individual transform. The alchemists speak of the rhythm of the dissolution and coagulation of their 'matter' as fundamental to transformation. As unconscious processes are perceived through one form of the unconscious, for example the psychic unconscious, this perception is registered as an internal structure, a complex. In turn, this complex implicitly is used to order and understand unconscious processes as they continue to manifest. But as these processes are then apprehended through the somatic unconscious, the unconscious structures of the created complex dissolve, and form again in another structure. Thus, moving between psychic and somatic unconscious is a way of following

the alchemical maxim of *solve et coagula*, and in the process help create new internal forms and structure.

### THE TRANSFORMATION OF FORM IN ALCHEMY

All schools of thought in analytic practice attempt to create new forms of internal structure. This emphasis upon a change in form especially connects psychotherapy to its roots in the work of fifteenth and sixteenth-century alchemists who prefigured the discovery of the psyche (Jung 1963, 14: paragraph 150). Kleinian thought (Segal 1975, 54–81) deals with a movement from the so-called ‘paranoid-schizoid position’ to the ‘depressive position.’ For example, a person dominated by the splitting processes and affects of the paranoid-schizoid position will often react with a rage that distorts reality in a given situation, while someone who has been able to enter the depressive position will experience the same situation with much more tolerance and a capacity to see the reality of another person’s complaint. A Self Psychologist will be interested in, among other changes, the transformation of a sadistic superego into a benevolent, idealized form and the development of self-objects from primitive to more adapted forms. A Freudian will be interested in changes in ego development represented by a movement from an oral to an anal and phallic-genital stage, all of which represent different forms of psychic organization. A Jungian will focus upon individuation and its myriad of changing internal forms. And an Object Relations clinician considers, for instance, the creation of psychic structures acquired by passage through stages of separation and *rapprochement*. These schools of thought all present models which are representations of change in the structural form of the psyche.

The transformation of internal structure is the main result of experiencing the field’s processes. Alchemical thinking about this process is revealed in the *Splendor Solis*. Second in significance only to the *Rosarium Philosophorum* as the centerpiece of Jung’s study of the transference, the *Splendor Solis* deals with issues that complement the *Rosarium*, notably the problem of the embodiment of archetypal processes. The ‘Preface’ of the text is comprised of several treatises. According to ‘The First Treatise,’ which describes the ‘Origin of the Stone of the Ancients and how it is Perfected through Art,’ the form of the thing to be created, the ‘Stone of the Wise,’ can only come from Nature:

Nature serves Art, and then again Art serves Nature... It knows what kind of formation is agreeable to Nature, and how much of it should be done by Art, so that through Art this Stone may attain its form. Still, the form is from Nature: for the actual form of each and every thing that grows, animate or metallic, arises out of the inner power of the material.

(McLean 1981, 10)

By ‘Nature’ we can understand the psyche, and by ‘Art’ the conscious attitudes and techniques of analysis. Then ‘The First Treatise’ offers an especially interesting and unusually clear example of alchemical science:

It should however be noted that the essential form cannot arise in the material. It

comes to pass through the operation of an accidental form: not through the latter's power, but by the power of another active substance such as fire, or some other warmth acting upon it. Hence we use the allegory of a hen's egg, wherein the essential form of the putrefaction arises without the accidental form, which is a mixture of the red and the white, by the power of warmth which works on the egg from the brood hen. And although the egg is the material of the hen, nevertheless no form arises therein, either essential or accidental, except through putrefaction.

(McLean 1981, 12)

From this passage, several key ideas can be extracted. First an 'accidental form' is necessary, and this form is a 'mixture of the red and the white.' This mixture alludes to the *coniunctio* of King and Queen, Sol and Luna, or in analysis, to the unconscious marriage of aspects of each person's unconscious, where one psyche contributes the active 'red substance' and the other a more receptive 'white substance,' with these roles also interchanging. The form is said to be 'accidental,' which means it is 'acausal'; its existence is not caused by any previous operation. The passage further says that the form emerging in the material being worked with does so without the power of the 'accidental form,' and with the power of an active substance, such as fire. By implication, the 'accidental form' that arises from the union of opposites does not necessarily mediate its properties through a phenomenon of energy. A similar idea in the theory of Rupert Sheldrake (1991, 111) concerns the creation and stability of form; and his 'morphic fields' are not transmitted by energy but instead themselves carry information. But how is the 'accidental form' still essential? The text answers that it is the precondition for the creative death of structure, the putrefaction that is the secret of transformation. An active process, expending energy, is also involved, as in the allegory of the brood hen's heat. This process is akin to the energy one puts into dealing with the generally intense negative transference and counter-transference reactions described above, including tendencies to withdrawal and the mental blankness that often follow the *coniunctio* and which may, unfortunately, be ignored.

Alchemical science attempted to engage imaginatively in a process that would encourage the creation of an 'accidental form'—the *coniunctio*. But psychotherapy, in essence, has treated the 'accidental' union state as a 'hidden parameter.' Jung (1954, 16: paragraph 461) notes that the *coniunctio* is usually only known to have occurred in a session from dreams that follow it. But even so, experience of the union state alone will generally not forge a new internal structure. Along with the union state, one must face and integrate some of the chaos to which it leads.

Through the *nigredo*, the alchemists attempted to purify themselves from the ever-present, regressive desires to identify with archetypal processes, such as the *coniunctio*. This purification, called the *mundificatio*, achieved through numerous *coniunctio-nigredo* sequences and thus through much suffering, was symbolically imaged by the death of a dragon, itself representing the drive towards concretization. It must be understood that such drives towards the concretization of instinctual processes are not only located in the subjectivities of either person. They are also aspects of the field itself, especially as it attempts to incarnate into space and time. Thus, not only individuals are changed, but also

the field they occupy takes on new forms.

With an understanding of the properties that the background field manifests, we can engage its dynamics and be changed in the process. Change in the internal structural form of a psyche is created by repeatedly experiencing the quality of a moment in time and its meaning, much as one is affected by a vision.

While two people can experience the *coniunctio*, how they process it will vary as a function of their subjectivity. For example, two people—perhaps an analyst and analysand—may experience a union state. They may experience it directly as a ‘here-and-now’ state. Or while they may not consciously register its existence, the following night one of them, perhaps the analysand, may dream of a wedding. Furthermore, in the next session, the relationship between analyst and analysand may have shifted from one that was filled with a sense of connection to one that is dominated by an absence of relationship and even states of schizoid withdrawal and mental deadness. One analyst may understand this condition as a need to withdraw from the closeness of the previous session, because of the analysand’s attachment disorder and resultant reaction to the prior connection. Another analyst may see the reaction to a felt connection to be a significant measure of an underlying schizoid or borderline quality in the analysand.

But an analyst who is focused upon a field dynamic will also see the state of deadness and withdrawal as a natural concomitant of the previous union state. He or she may recognize, from this point of view, that these dark qualities are not only representative of developmental failures, but would exist for any individual psyche that has felt the union state. Furthermore, the analyst would see this union state and the resulting *nigredo* as being part of the essential rhythm of transformation. In turn, he or she would provide a different relationship to these states, and to their containment, than would be provided by an analyst interpreting in developmental terms.

Rather than seeing the analysand’s problems with the depressive position, with *rapprochement* issues, or with fears of engulfment, the analyst would note and experience the field dynamics involved. This perception can have the same kind of containing quality that exists in many cases of extreme anxiety when the analyst knows, from experience, that these states are part of a larger, potentially positive process. Accepted in this way, the *nigredo* can begin to work towards its purpose of dissolving old structures, especially introjects which do not accord well with the analysand’s essence. In a sense, this is a process in which new forms are created in the analysand, perhaps in the analyst as well, and also within the space they occupy together. In this way forms that can contain and process what had previously been severely disordering affects can come into existence through experiencing the field and its dynamics.

Thus, how we think about fields matters a great deal. As merely a metaphor for a combined subjectivity, fields are useful in reflecting the analysand’s history as it unfolds in the analytic process. But the idea of an interactive field can lead to wholly different ways of conceiving the analytic process when it is archetypally conceptualized through the combined subjectivity of both people and when, at the same time, its dynamics are understood to extend beyond that subjectivity.



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