Internet Discussion Forum Summary

Summarized by David Hewison

‘Symbolic attitude and reverie: problems of symbolization in children and adolescents’ by Gustav Bovensiepen and ‘Response to Gustav Bovensiepen’ by Donald Kalsched

(Journal of Analytical Psychology, 2002, 47, 2, 241–63)

Surprisingly, given that there were two papers to possibly comment on, there were only two responses. The first was from Reid Anderson of Hampton, Virginia, USA. He appreciated Bovensiepen’s mix of Bion and other post-Kleinian writers as well as Winnicott, and the way Bovensiepen had integrated these into complex theory. In addition, he noted the importance of the impact of the analyst and analytic process on the analysand. Referring to Kalsched’s ‘Response’ he commented:

it is the ability to recognize that because we are in the soup of a mercurial or daimonic process, one’s person and one’s interventions are often perceived as divergent from intentions or expectations, which must be understood and worked through in the myriad of analysand ‘distortions’. Typically, it is painful to recognize how we could possibly recapitulate earlier trauma, especially when least expected. It is equally difficult to work creatively through this, often opaque, awareness to find a mutuality that can be metabolized and lead to repair of the symbolic or integrative capacity.

He felt that Bovensiepen’s description of ‘Tom’ was an example of how this could be done well.

The second response was from Mats Winther of Stockholm, Sweden. He took issue with Bovensiepen’s use of the transcendent function and active imagination when talking about symbolization in children, noting that both are more properly associated with mid-life psychological processes and that children could not be said to be sufficiently developed psychologically to make use of these processes. Although this did not affect his appreciation of the author’s general argument, Winther cautioned against being too loose with approximations between concepts of analytical psychology and those of other disciplines, especially psychoanalysis. He cited in particular the idea of a link between transference/countertransference and symbol-formative processes, pointing out how, in Jung’s conception of a child, there is a lack of a capacity to self-reflect and therefore to be able to make use of ‘adult’ developmental processes. He also pointed out that Jung’s notion of the transference is radically different in its implications to that of psychoanalysis: for Jung it was ‘a hindrance to a mature relation’ and was at best neutral, rather than the means by which psychological development comes about in therapy. Winther concluded: ‘This theoretical disparity is possibly the major obstacle to the consortium of analytical psychology and ‘relational’ post-Freudian psychology’.

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