

The Fractal Self - 'parallel process' as an organising principle for psychotherapy

Introduction:

- in SV: recognised the phenomenon of parallel process since 1950's (Harold Searles), more widely established since 1990 (Peter Hawkins & Robin Shoet)
- SV – rather than being an ethically necessary professional accessory – actually shows us one of the underlying, fundamental principle of our discipline
- parallel process can become an organising principle of psychotherapy for the 21st century

Hawkins/Shoet model

see handout 1

Extending and expanding the meaning of parallel process...

▪ **within psychotherapy**

transference and countertransference as parallel process,
interpersonal and intrapsychic relationship as parallel processes
external relationship parallels internal relational positions, developmental patterns, character, RIGS or schemata),
body and mind as parallel process

Extending and expanding parallel process ...

▪ **into neuroscience and biology**

- what kind of capacities does a brain need to be capable of in order to recognise parallel process ?
- the brain = multiple systems (many brains) = capacity for 'parallel processing'
- but maybe their parallel processing and our parallel process have more to do with each other than just sharing the same term ?
- left brain naming an object, with a one-to-one relationship between the name and the object; this is just one kind of thinking, and it's NOT process thinking, it's NOT relational thinking; nothing exists in isolation, but everything is defined by relationship context

Extending and expanding parallel process ...

▪ **into cosmology – fractal reality**

- fractal reality of a multi-dimensional holographic universe (each part carries the whole, yet the whole is more than the sum of its parts): patterns and dynamics are replicated at all levels of scale or organisation: parallel process is the glue, the mechanism, the principle that allows that replication across levels
- parallel process as one basic principle of an 'informational, fractal, holarchic paradoxical universe';
- beyond psychotherapy, beyond *psyche*, in a formulation which transcends the mind-over-matter split: information is tied to matter, but neither defining it nor defined by it – how does information get carried and replicated from one system to another ?
- Jung's psychoid unconscious and synchronicity can, for example, usefully be formulated as parallel processes

Preparation: internalisation

- how does the dynamic get carried from one system to the other where it can get replicated ?
- Family Constellations: ‘knowing field’ which helps representatives tap into the protagonist’s story and dynamics
- information gets carried and somehow communicated from one system to the next via the one common factor to both: the therapist.
- usual explanation: therapist – having opened themselves to the dynamic with the client and been affected by it - has taken it in, has internalised it, largely subliminally and carries it across
- this explanation is supported by the degree of non-verbal, right-brain communication which neuroscience has drawn our attention to, the myriad of messages which get registered subliminally every second and the speed and complexity of internal representation of the other that takes place (mirror neurons).

Internalisation as a major feature of how human relationship works

- pervasiveness of projective identification
- POP: ‘dreaming up’
- mirror neurons (Gallese: shared intersubjective manifold = we are swimming in the soup of each others’ body/mind representations)
- parallel process = dominoes of enactment
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Internalisation as a major feature of how the human mind functions

- ‘countertransference revolution’ = the therapist’s internal experience contains information about the client’s inner world
- object relations and ...
- concept of projective identification
- Searles proposed parallel process in supervision about the same time that Klein’s notion of projective identification was applied to countertransference

Extend Hawkins/Shohet model

- *therapist-supervisor dynamic parallels client-therapist dynamic*
- *1. client-therapist dynamic parallels client’s internal world (=internal object relations)*
- *2. the object relations dynamic in the client’s mind (mental representations) parallels the dynamic in the body (and between mind and body)*
- *3. the interpersonal and body/mind dynamic in the ‘here & now’ parallels the dynamic in the formative past*
see handout 2

three parallel relationships:

Michael Jacobs “The Presenting Past”

- past originally wounding relationship
- internal(ised) through character formation
- (re-)externalised in here & now (transference)

three parallel relationships

see handout 3

five parallel relationships

- original, past relationship
- internal(ised) spontaneous conflict
in conflict
conflicted ego
- (re-)externalised in here & now (transference)

five parallel relationships

see handout 4

integral-relational model

- **five parallel relationships between client and therapist**
- **+ SV**
- **= six parallel processes**

all the same dynamic

enactment = parallel process
as the crucial concept in relational work

- transference can be enacted BOTH ways of internalised relationship

enactment = central principle of psychotherapy = pervasive parallel process

How to work with it ?

- *becoming aware of it: distinguish content and process*
- *becoming aware of it: noticing parallel process*
- *becoming aware of it: noticing reverse parallel process*
- *interpretation (is possible from expert position)*
- *entering enactment (bodymind relational surrender)*
- *resting in paradox until spontaneous transformation occurs*

Resources:

- *integral mind*
- *neuroscience / biology (Schore)*
- *holarchic, epigenetic theory (Wilber)*
- *parallel process across holarchic levels:*

holarchic epigenetic theory = transcend and include

- spontaneous emergence of new complexity (new level, or holon)
- something qualitatively new = quantum leap = dependence on initial conditions
- each level emerges through the previous one (established structure)
- each level therefore, carries the marks of previous ones, but can also transcend and compensate (maybe an example: Goethe: flower metamorphoses)
- sense of self developing Wilber Fonagy/Target
- destruction AND creation

Conclusion

- we want to make the therapeutic space an instrument that is sensitive and impressionable to parallel process: allowing myself to be constructed as an object by the client's unconscious
- the closer you get to the heat, the more likely you are lost in parallel process
- it happens, anyway, but we will not notice = no unfolding of the deeper levels

booklist