

Some Notes on Intersubjectivity

After reading the summary of the situation regarding intersubjectivity by Ted Jacobs in the Italian journal of the Argonauts, a number of ideas came to my mind. First of all, the intersubjectivity people seem to miss the point that I have stressed and with which Drs. Beres and Brenner surely agree, namely, that, in the course of listening to a patient, everything that comes to the analyst's mind, except in circumstances where he is physically ill or in pain or distracted by some overwhelming personal problem of his own, is some commentary on the patient's material. I have written this and repeated this statement many times. It certainly occurs in my paper entitled "The Genesis of Interpretation." I have pointed out that such reactions are an empathic response but not yet an interpretation. They serve as a signpost leading in the direction of insight into the patient's difficulties and the insight so achieved ^{maybe} is correct. It does not imply that, simply by virtue of the fact that it occurred to the analyst's mind, that fact alone was sufficient to substantiate the interpretation. The thought has to be confirmed in a cognitive way according to the criteria that I have pointed out, those that pertain to the so-called cognitive phase of interpretation. To transmit one's thoughts, feelings and concepts indiscriminately to a patient because they come up in the context of something that the patient said, especially about the analyst, seems to me to be without rational justification.

The idea of self-revelation, furthermore, as described by such people as Renik, is a fraud. How harmless can any analyst really be in transmitting impressions, thoughts, feelings, memories, etc. to patients? Obviously he cannot do this indiscriminately. Some of the things he would have had to say would be downright insulting to the patient and destructive of the professional relationship. Those are things that pertain to what the analyst thought and felt about the patient. What about the element of self-revelation so artfully pressed by such people as Schwaber, Renik, etc.? How much does one tell? What person is there who does not have secrets that he would never want to tell anyone, even his closest friend, wife, lover, etc., things he might be ashamed of, elements that even might make him vulnerable to legal action? In the kind of technique that Renik and his followers espouse, one would nevertheless have to be selective, concealing and editing all the time. While we demand complete honesty in our relationship from our patients, there is no good reason personally or technically for a reciprocal kind of honest revelation on the part of the analyst. Some revelations, as Renik claims, would be helpful, but other revelations could be destructive indeed.

Also there is the element of accuracy concerning the patient's perceptions of the analyst. Renik makes it seem that the patient is a better observer of the analyst than the analyst is of the patient. If I were to take seriously the argument the

intersubjectivists offer about the accuracy of the patient's observations about the analyst, I think that I would have to be a person suffering from multiple personality disorders, because I have seemed like so many different people to so many different patients. This is not to deny that patients can and often do make astute observations about me and about analysts in general. The problem is how best this awareness that they have of us can be used to therapeutic advantage. I wonder how much of this mutual disclosure by patient and analyst is an outgrowth of political correctness. Everybody is equal to everybody else. Complete truth-telling under special circumstances can be very destructive. Even a superficial perusal of Ibsen's work will convince any reader of that. One of my patients, a very intelligent borderline personality, once said that the curliness of my hair reminded her of a certain boy who used to torment her when she was a little girl. I never had curly hair. In fact, at the time that she made this observation about me, I had hardly any hair at all.

The summary statement of Jacobs or Shaffer's view of the idea of narrative truth is clear and stated in such a way as to almost convince the reader. I must confess for a moment I thought it seemed quite accurate and I had a feeling that my aphoristic statement that the unconscious fantasy articulates a metaphoric apprehension of the events of childhood might fall in line with Shaffer's views. By this I mean that it was just ----- of truth and did not relate necessarily to what actually happened in

childhood. However, I then thought of my own experience. It was some 20 years after my second analysis, as a result of the concatenation of certain events and a specific dream which followed, which I analyzed myself, that I was able to reconstruct without doubt the actual time and place of the primal scene experience, which I had not recalled in either of my two analyses and which was not reconstructed. In addition, certain unconscious fantasies cannot always be or necessarily have to be tied to specific trauma to which technically they have to be traced. Such a connection would always be difficult to make at that point.