

BOOK REVIEWS

The Past in the Present: Therapy Enactments and The Return of Trauma

David Mann and Valerie Cunningham (eds) (2008). London: Routledge

The book is about what the authors call '*enactments*', which according to the editors is understood as symbolic interactions between the client and therapist, where personal issues of both parties become unconsciously entwined. Enactments are often experienced as a crisis in therapy and the editors argue that they are especially occurring with clients who have had some form of trauma in the past. These enactments are seen as a potential turning point, whose outcome can either be positive or destructive. The book has come into existence during a clinical discussion of enactments when one of the editors wondered how other therapists understood and dealt with this phenomenon. Thus therapists of both the psychoanalytic and humanistic traditions were asked to write articles on this theme.

The appeal of the book for me came out of the same question during a taxing time in my private praxis when the work with several of my clients seemed to have the flavour of what the editors call a play-within-a-play. Something about the particular interaction and situation between client and therapist trigger associations to past trauma where feelings and ways of beings of both the client and therapist become intertwined and played out. Both client and therapist are trapped in a play where the present and the past are acted out in a manner where momentarily awareness of the here and now is lacking. The therapeutic 'success' depends on the therapist's ability to recognize their part in the play and their ability to bring their insight into the work so that the client can see the reality for what it is.

Something of this sort was my experience, my sense was too, that this did occur with clients who had experienced trauma in their past, which did somehow cross path with my experience of my own traumas. I found little to go by that seemed helpful at the time from my existential training. It wasn't something that had particularly been discussed in my training and I felt that this created a gap in my practice. I found myself looking towards the psychoanalytic traditions, which seemed to discuss such entanglement processes with concepts like transference, countertransference or projective identification. I was curious to see how enactment fitted into that and whether I could gain some further understanding. I was doubly curious to see how authors from humanistic traditions conceptualized and worked with such processes.

The book most helpfully gives an opportunity to engage with the issues of shame and anxieties that surround enactment situations. Mann (Chapter