

Review of: "The Empty Chair"

Isabelle Meier¹

¹ University of Zurich

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

I enjoyed reading the article by Susan Schwartz. She gave this text as a lecture at the Emotion Conference, at the C.G. Jung Institute in Zurich which took place at the end of June 2023. The theme of emotions runs through the article, or rather the absence of emotions, which led to the title of the "empty chair" as a symbol of emotional absence and the formation of an as-if personality.

Schwartz refers theoretically to the works of C.G. Jung, Andre Green, Andrew Samuels, Hester Solomon, and many others to substantiate emotional wounds caused by parents' lack of emotional responsiveness. She quotes C.G. Jung who wrote '.... whole tracts of our being can plunge back into the unconscious and vanish from the surface for years and decades...' (Jung, 1934/1964, para 286).

The consequence of this are dissociative processes with frozen feelings, that also spread in practice between analysand and analyst and tangentially affect the analytic transference and countertransference. The analyst is confronted with an empty chair and does not really know who his counterpart is, because the analysand suppresses the emotions out of fear of shame, destruction, but also fear of the new.

Analytic therapy according to C.G. Jung works with dreams and symbols and Susan Schwartz now beautifully shows how such treatment can lead to healing by giving space to what was previously absent. Emotions can be experienced tentatively and a narrative about past processes become conceivable, even describable, which was impossible before. The dreams and symbols from the unconscious are helpful door openers. In addition, an emotional responsiveness of the therapist is necessary, because only through her the transcendental function becomes possible: The splitting processes of the client are cancelled by the symbolic attitude of the therapist and in the relational field of analyst and analysand consciousness and unconsciousness can come together and facilitates a personal development.

Schwartz illustrates this with two case examples. The empty chair as a symbol of being held is no longer empty in the dreams; in one there are objects on the chair, and in another there is a woman behind the chair who lays her hands caring on the analysand's shoulders. However, Schwartz rightly writes that the therapeutic process is difficult and that it is not easy to fill the emotional absence with feelings and trust.

The article describes very important processes and procedures in the therapeutic space, and it is thanks to Susan Schwartz that she dedicated her paper to this topic. Sometimes one would have liked to know in more details about the processes of transference and countertransference, also about negative transferences of the analysands. But nevertheless, I hope that my review invites others to read this interesting article.

Literature

Jung, C.G. (1934/1964). *Civilization in Transition, Collected Works 10*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.