

VITALIZATIONS IN PSYCHOANALYSIS

Perspectives on Being & Becoming

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&

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Introduction

Any profound crisis in our lives also carries the potential to place us in contact with the fundamental being-ness of human experience – the very essence from which all generativity emerges.

We can think more about the conditions and qualities that spark novel experience and can generate contact and movement within the therapeutic encounter.

We can take up paradoxical questions about how the old relates to the new, how loss relates to discovery, and how the therapist can meet the client in ways that both recognize the injuries of the past and instill hope for the future.

What is needed to bring life to deadened states? What do we do with the experience of deadness itself? And what might we do that transforms it, or makes creation of new life possible?

Anne Alvarez speaks specifically of patients who need the analyst to rouse them to life, so they may be ‘called into awareness of the human world outside themselves, and thus be called into awareness that they themselves exist.

Alvarez’ concept of ‘reclamation’ refers to the need to reach out to clients who are in withdrawn or ‘undrawn’ states. Reclamation is a response to states of lifelessness, in which an action is necessary to promote connection and reclaim vital aspects of the self.

A therapist may respond to experiences of deadness in the therapeutic relationship by actively reaching out to a client, spurred by counter-transferential urgency that emerges in the relationship.

The therapist’s movement in these moments creates something new, instills life, curiosity, and interest in the mutual exchange. Alvarez’ thinking is infused with a sense of hope and possibility, a willingness to look beyond deficit to consider capacities that may be underdeveloped and that may, through the therapy relationship, come to life and newly thrive.

The term *vitalization* signifies the fostering of novel experience, the ignition of an enlivening internal process that can come about through deep engagement with the other.

The notion of vitalization encompasses a confluence of ideas concerning the creation of new experience, progressive action, generativity and emergence.

It also allows for the exploration of the ways in which the therapist can be a catalyst for change, and examines how enactment itself can be generative and life-giving.

Chapter One – Vitalizing Enactment – A Relational Exploration

Amy Schwartz Cooney

- *Vitalizing interventions are enactments that can be enriching and transformative in their lived experience rather than in a retrospective processing.*

Enactments are not only repetitive of old conflicts or expressive of dissociated affect but also opportunities for potentiating new experiences in the therapeutic dyad.

A vitalizing enactment creates opportunities for realizing unlived potential within oneself through new experiences.

For people who are chronically dissociated, or ‘undrawn’, the therapy may need to focus on *vitalization and reclamation*, helping the person connect with feeling themselves.

- *Vitalizing interventions involve the therapist using herself actively as an enlivening transferential object: initiating contact, insisting on meaning, reaching out to (re)claim the client and draw him into the world of objects and feelings.*

This addresses the need to facilitate the internalization of a good object, especially in cases where the client’s early life relationships have been severely lacking.

Alvarez suggests that the container can also hold and make meaning of a range of unformed mental contents, such as joy, efficacy, and a sense of future possibility.

She uses herself as a uniquely generative container, metabolizing different kinds of unformulated experiences, negative and positive, in an effort to realize her patient’s capacities.

A Relational Interpretation of Vitalization as Enactment

Alvarez concerns herself both with what has been damaged and lacking, and what has not yet taken form.

This ‘undrawn-ness’ can be applied to relational work with despairing adults in deadened impasses.

“Nothing reached him. I felt more and more worried I had lost him for good. I found myself moving my head into his line of vision and calling his name. He suddenly looked at me in surprise, like someone surfacing from the deep and said, ‘Hello-o-o’ wonderingly and sweetly, like someone greeting a long lost friend.”

The therapist seemed to breathe life into her patient. The moment was meaningful and vitalizing for the therapist as well.

This can be understood as a ‘counter-transferential urgency’, as an expression of her own subjectivity as the therapist. Her response reflected the unique ways this relationship had touched her and created a disruption within her.

Alvarez’ reaction emanated from *her* psyche and *her* connection to her patient, and to some part of herself that was stirred by him.

The therapist and patient met in a way that was progressive and alive. This encounter was an enactment in the sense it was unconsciously driven, spontaneous, and seismic in impact.

This was asymmetrical, but also a mutual exchange between two people, two minds meeting, touch and transforming one another.

The therapist’s enlivening use of herself in a moment of therapeutic crises can be usefully generalized and applied to therapeutic work in general.

Vitalizing Enactment

These enactments are distinct in that they can potentiate underdeveloped affects and capacities for the patient and therapist alike.

Vitalizing enactments represent efforts to progress consciously and unconsciously rather than co-create old pathological patterns or manifest dissociative experiences.

In a vitalizing enactment, *the action is in seizing the moment and creating something new.*

Enactments have come to be understood and thought of as high-risk encounters that hold the potential for great rewards if they can be survived, withstood, and processed.

Another way to think of enactments is that they offer *a range of unconscious experiences that can emerge.*

A therapist and client can respond to each other from unconscious areas that contain newly forming feelings of love, joy, and hope as well as conflict and painful dissociated affect.

All of these interactions can be intense, spontaneous, and destabilizing – all can be forms of enactment. But they need not be repetitive and problematic.

Enactments can be progressive and can lead to the creation of novel feelings and capacities in the here and now.

- *The enactment itself can be transformative for patient and therapist, bringing to life experiences that have been submerged or unborn.*

Convergences & Expansions

Enactments can be generative, a way of practicing novel possibilities that can subsequently be lived out in the evolving future for both people in the therapeutic dyad.

Through enactment we can anticipate, envision, and construct new possibilities, paving the way for their subsequent realization. They are potentially creative and forward moving.

- *The key point is that in a vitalizing enactment the action is in seizing the moment and creating something new.*
- *The relational therapist can function as an enlivening object, catalyzing intrapsychic change within the client, through their interactions.*

This is a shift in the model from damage and cure to one of mutual growth and enhancement of subjective experience.

In vitalizing enactment, the focus is on the creation and enhancement of experiences for both people in the therapeutic dyad.

- *The idea of living through, rather than interpreting, vitalizes an interaction.*