

500 words on Enactment: By Russell Rose

Enactment is when the dynamics of a primary wound become replayed in the dynamics of the therapeutic relationship. This is often understood by the therapist as a therapeutic error, a mistake made, a transference unseen or poorly contained; but for me that misses the point.

It was once assumed that transference and countertransference were likewise unfortunate intrusions in the analytic process, whereas we now see them both as inevitable and as valuable sources of information regarding the client's relational patterns. Transferential dynamics can take us beyond *knowledge* of a client's dynamic symptoms into a here-and-now *experience* of their actual relational presence; which includes how they construct us through transference into versions of their own primary storylines, how we construct them through countertransference into versions of our own; and, crucially, how it is that our respective stories might collide or merge - enactments usually become apparent when the working-alliance ruptures in some form of collision, or when it remains impassive and undisturbed in some form of collusion.

Enactment dynamics can only be understood as simply a mistake if we assume that we would be better off if the whole disturbance could have been avoided, and that a strident stability in the working-alliance is always therapeutically preferable.

If, however, we acknowledge that 'the mistake' emanated from a largely unconscious, co-organised relational-psychological field, incorporating the psyches and developmental wounds of both participants, then we might imagine that 'the mistake' is significant in their *underlying dynamic relationship*.

If we now conceptualise that these underlying enactment dynamics are a mimesis of a primary developmental wound, dissociated from awareness, we can then see that we have been given an extraordinary access to the wound itself, not in the relative abstraction of past or external relationships, but in the here and now of the therapeutic encounter.

It is therefore the therapeutic relationship that needs to be experienced and healed; though this can be problematic for a psychotherapist, as it requires us to step beyond the relative detachment of our therapeutic position, into an intersubjective marriage between the real and the professional relationships.

Martha Stark's notion of 'two-person-psychology' points us towards this uncertain and challenging territory, whereby it might just be necessary to resolve something within ourselves in order for the therapeutic relationship to resolve something within itself, and thereby for the client to resolve something within himself. If we wish our clients to risk navigating the path that might lead to the razor's edge of transformation, surely we should be willing to do so too.

The more I approach enactment as the vehicle by which dissociated relational dynamics come into the foreground of the therapeutic process, the more accepting I become of the idea that my own flawed being and subjective process are at least *as alive* in the therapeutic process as any training, knowledge, structures, and capacity for analytic positioning that I might employ; and that this is to be embraced as an exquisite, excruciating potential for mutual growth.