

The play within the play

Supervising the uncanny.

“When the analysand projects his inner life into the analyst, it is as if the analyst is an actor who receives stage directions from the patient, but the entire process remains outside the consciousness of both participants. For some patients it seems that their affective experiences need to be placed within the other because language itself is inadequate, and some other means must be found to communicate.” - Arnold Modell (1990) Other Times, Other Realities

Following on from Modell’s metaphor of the therapist as actor in their patients ‘play’, this presentation explores uncanny aspects of the unconscious *subtext* of the patient’s inner drama. In supervision this subtext can remain hidden from view.

In the theatre, working on the subtext usually differentiates the focus of the professional actor from that of the amateur. Amateur actors tend to concentrate their energies on remembering the ‘right words’ of the script to the detriment of working with a director to imagine what is going on *beneath* the words.

Using a combination of film extract and case material, Carol Leader will be looking at the role of the supervisor as ‘director’ who ‘stops the action’ at key moments to enable the therapist to make conscious the ‘play within the play’ in which they are unwittingly involved. Thus the work of the supervisory couple promotes the emergence of a more authentic conscious response to the patient’s ‘script’. This in turn brings meaning to the underlying ‘stage directions’ that the patient has been unconsciously communicating.

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