

Post-Davanloonian ISTDP/EDT teaching and workshop design

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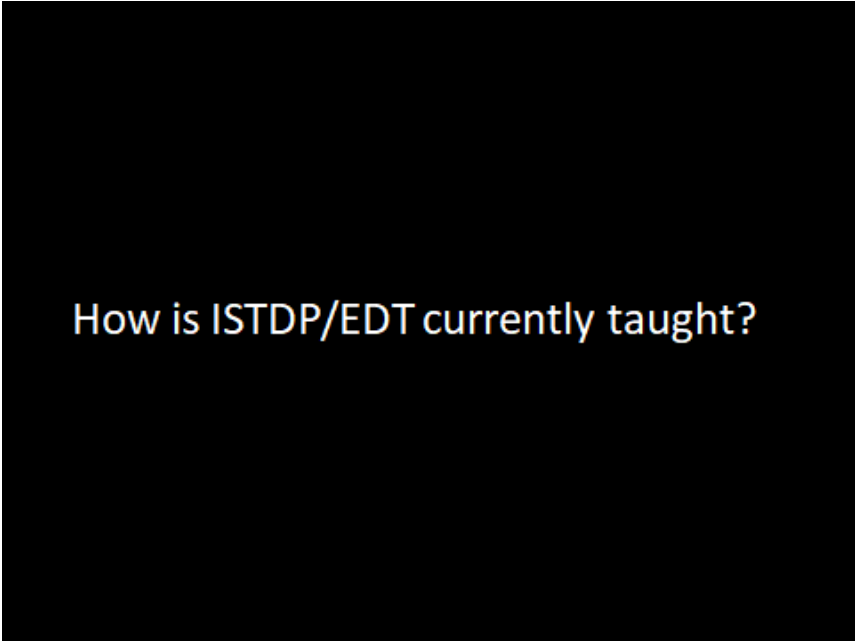
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We learnt from Joel Town's succinct summary at yesterday's research symposium that we lack empirical data on the impact of supervision and training on improving psychotherapy effectiveness. In my view, the available evidence is much (much!) less impressive than members of our profession may like to believe. With no formal studies of the impact of ISTDP core training, workshops, advanced trainings and so forth, it is unsafe to rest on the assumption that the current models of ISTDP teaching are at all effective in the one area that's really important, patient change.

**How effective are our current
training methods?**

If I understand Joel correctly, as there appears to be evidence to suggest the way a therapist manages their counter-transference *is* related to outcome, as illustrated in the preceding presentations by Robert Johansson and Jenny Svebeck, this seems to be an area where ISTDP training might be usefully focused. Along with the supervisor/therapist relationship, I think Joel also said.

So how is ISTDP/EDT currently taught?



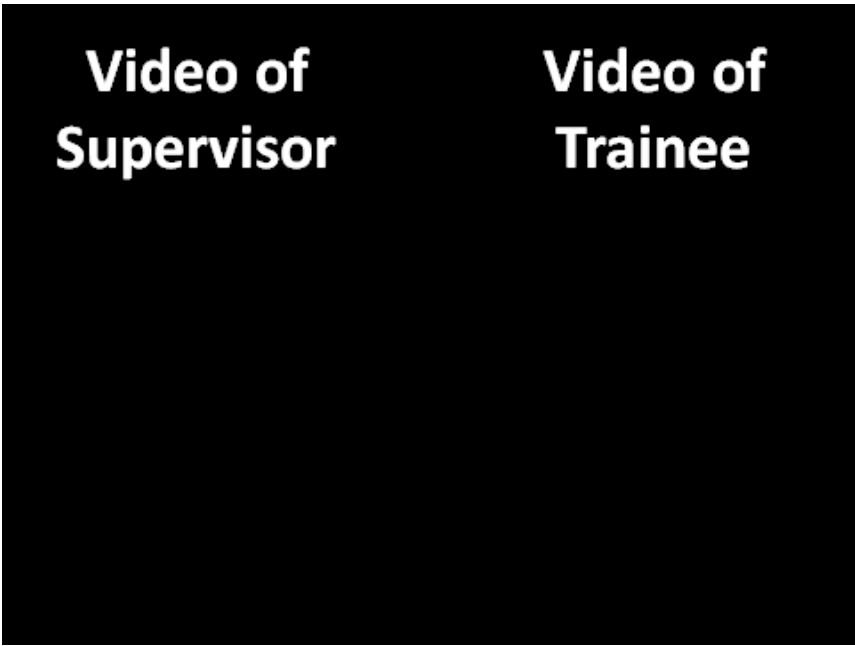
How is ISTDP/EDT currently taught?

Leaving aside, for now, the quite different direction of Tony Rousmaniere's deliberate practice paradigm (2017), which may bear fruit, the two conventional methods of teaching ISTDP are

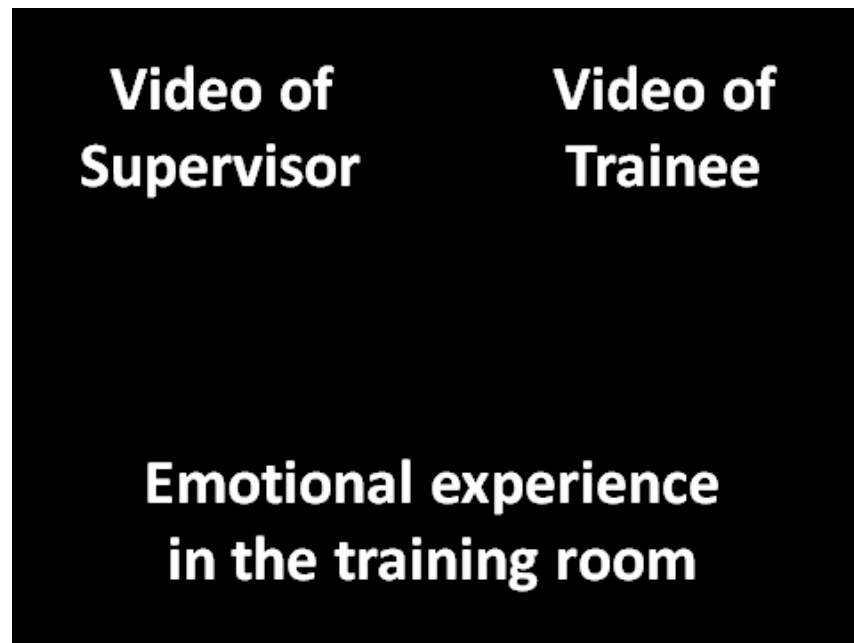
the training group viewing videos of the supervisor with patients,



and the training group viewing videos of trainees with patients.



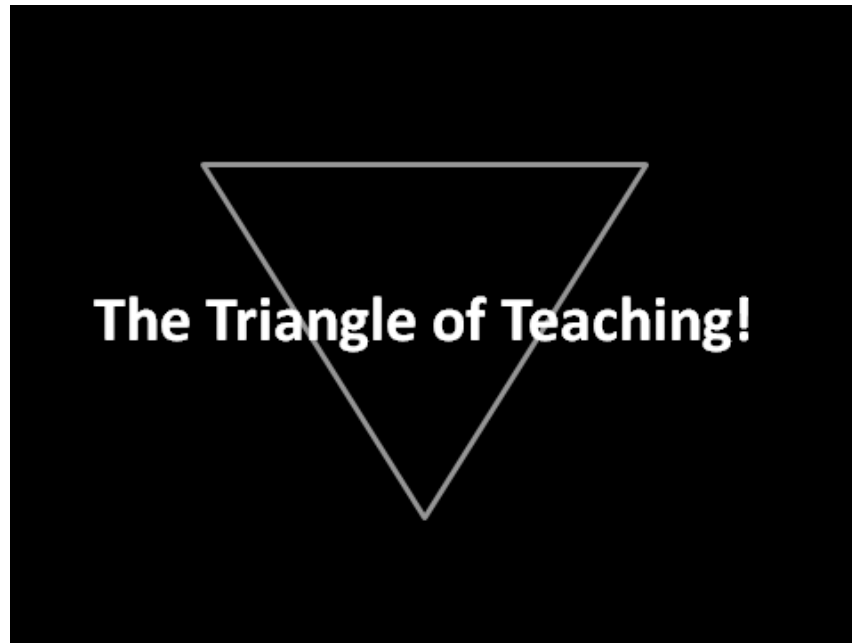
But what about the emotional experience of the group in the training room?



No, not another fucking triangle, I hear you say.



Yes, we are discussing the neglected third corner of the “triangle of teaching”,



the emotional experience of the training group in the training room.

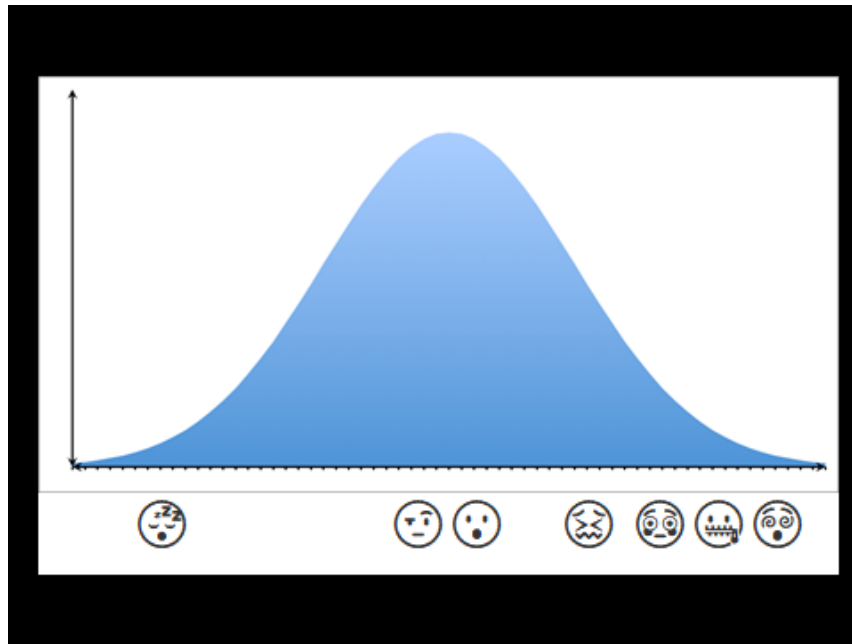
It is my view that this neglect represents the ossification, the unconscious institutionalisation, of Dr Davanloo’s training methods. One of the unfortunate effects of the emotional dynamics surrounding Dr Davanloo, the singular dominant figure in the development of ISTDP, is that there is little serious discussion of why “his teaching style did not fit the learning style of all his students” (Kuhn, 2014, p. xii). What discussions taking place seem to be off the record.



This might be a good time to outline the experiential component of my presentation today.

I *had* planned to invite three individuals here to take on the role, for the duration of this presentation, of monitoring group activation. But given the expertise in the audience, I invite you all to take on this task.

I'm sure all ISTDP/EDT therapists are aware of the principle of the optimal level of activation of individuals in psychotherapy. This applies to groups also.



So how are we now?

[discussion]

I will proceed to attempt to provide a *very* short outline of group psychodynamics,

Very short outline of
(my view of) group dynamics

starting from the elements of individual psychodynamics.

This table lists some of the opposing qualities, foci, interests and brain locations associated with Freud's two principles of mental functioning, the pleasure principle and the reality principle (Freud, 1911). It is a simplistic schema, but a rough, "back of the envelope", map may be of some use to us for the quick tour we take through the territory of group dynamics.

Freud's two principles of mental functioning	
pleasure principle	reality principle
primary process	secondary process
internal wishes	external reality
"free" will	psychic determinism
magic and religion	science
right brain	left brain
unconscious	conscious
infantile	adult
feeling	thinking
looks out onto a supernatural world	looks out onto a natural world
irrational	rational
faith-based beliefs	evidence

The essence of Freud's clinical theory is self-reflection.

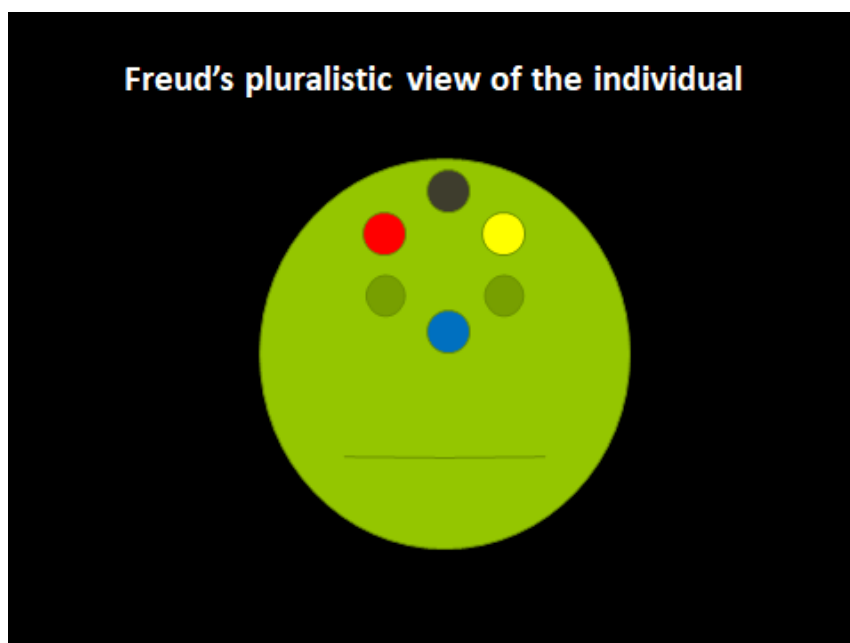
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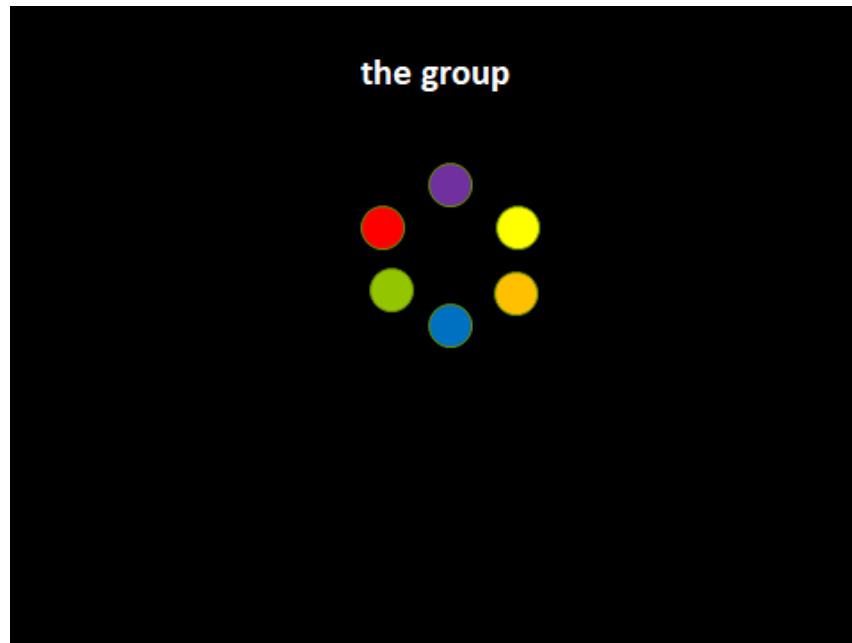
A process within the individual is encouraged, where the reality principle reflects on the operation of the pleasure principle, consciousness reflects on unconscious processes, “where id was there shall ego be” (Freud, 1923), and so forth.



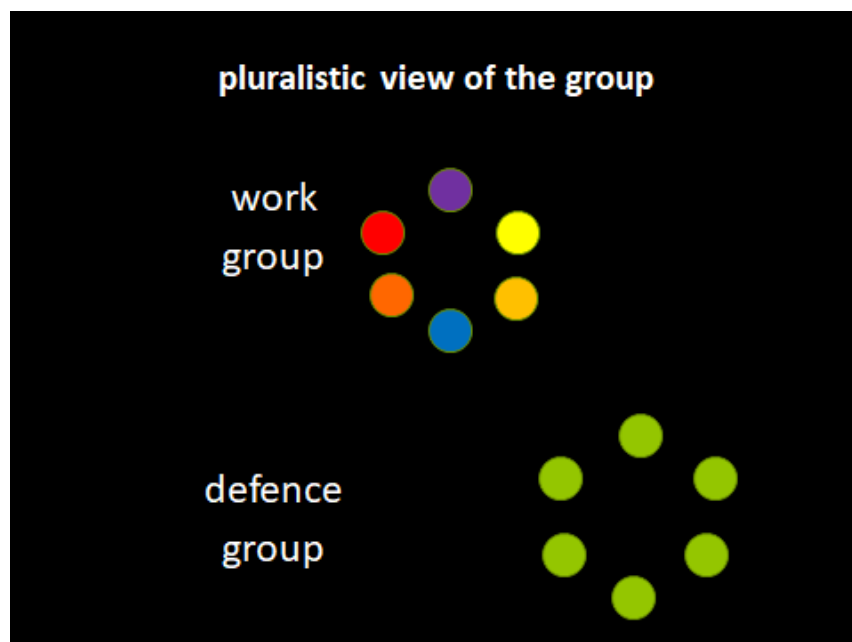
In Freud's pluralistic view of the individual, a person is not one, unitary mind, but a whole internal society of different interests, or drives, or emotions, or processes, or parts of the mind.



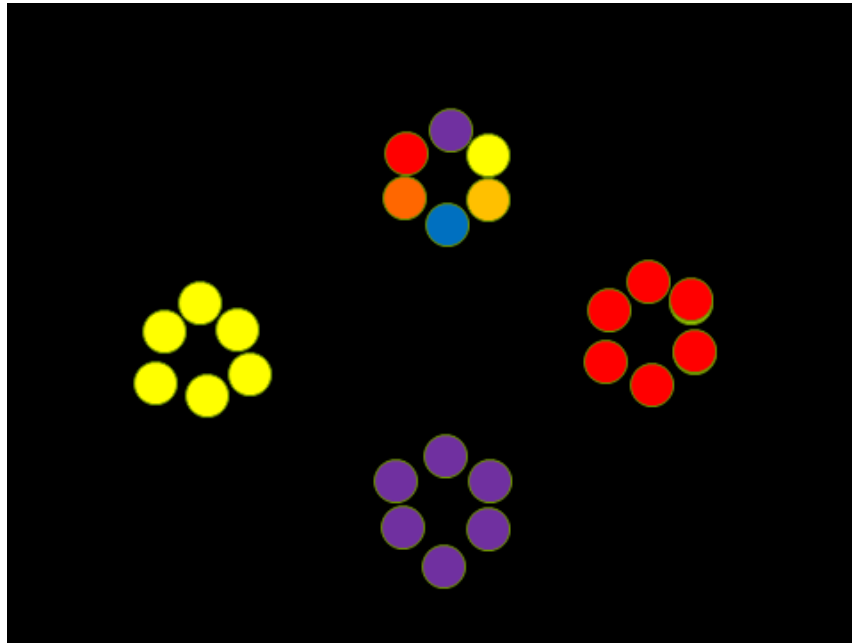
The group is no different.



In a pluralistic view of the group, a group, then, is not the bodies of the six individuals sitting in the circle. If we agree with Bion's idea of a group (Bion, 1961), there is a group engaged in a task, co-existing with groups disengaged with the task,



avoiding the task, sabotaging the task, pursuing other aims, and so forth, in various ways – a plurality of groups existing in the same circle of people. And not necessarily with their conscious awareness.



If we acknowledge, in addition, that each of the people are activated to enact, from time to time, the interests of individuals and groups not physically present in the room, I think we start to appreciate the complexity of the situation.

Self-reflection for a group, then, would be the group reflecting on the other, unconscious, groups operating in the room, at the same time.

Now, I appreciate that these last few steps may be rather novel to some of you. The standard, conventional assumption about psychology, especially in the individualistic West, is that group phenomenon can be accounted for by the motivations of the individuals that make up the group. The term for this position is atomism.

atomism

This is the idea that there really are *no* social forces other than the individual person.

“Give us an example of social forces that cannot be fully accounted for by the motivation of individual persons”, I hear you say.

Okay, let me provide you with an example of a primitive, syntonic, unconscious group defence.

primitive,
syntonic,
unconscious,
group defence

This is the big whopper of group defences. Ed Tronick, in his keynote presentation yesterday, spoke about the infant's response to the world, formed by their prior experience negotiating a "volatile, unpredictable, complex, ambiguous world", or VUCA. VUCA is a military term, which really took hold in the USA after 9/11. We might think of primitive, unconscious, syntonic group defences (PSUGD, does not have the same ring) as a tribe or a society's response to a volatile, unpredictable, complex, ambiguous world.

By "primitive" I mean defences that seriously interfere with the operation of the reality principle (idealization; devaluation; splitting; projecting).

By "syntonic", I mean that these defences are experienced to be benign or beneficial by the groups who share them, fitting well their view of themselves.

By "unconscious", I mean that these defences operate automatically and invisibly within the respective group cultures - we don't notice the water in which we swim. That is, when primitive group defences are working well in the background, not only are the groups free of group anxieties, the defences themselves remain invisible

The example I provide will *not* be taken from the minefields of



religion

gender

sexuality



politics

or contemporary illusions, like those conveyed on social media, or the worship of celebrities,



illusions

but we can safely talk about war, right?



war

We can all agree that the ugly excesses of large group dynamics – mobs, hordes, packs – if they emerge anywhere, will emerge during war? Nobody here today can possibly be offended by taking a *critical* attitude to war? It's not like we are questioning virgin birth, the concept of an afterlife, intelligent design, or the idea that our lives can be made perfect through the purchase of various products and services, that our lives can be made safer by the ownership of a gun. Nobody is actually in favour of war, right?

Or are we?

The following is taken from Ernest Jones' biography of Sigmund Freud. He discusses his personal observations of Freud following the declaration of the Great War.

"Freud's immediate response to the declaration of war was an unexpected one. One would have supposed that a pacifist *savant* of fifty-eight would have greeted it with simple horror, as so many did. On the contrary, his first response was rather one of youthful enthusiasm, apparently a re-awakening of the military ardours of his boyhood... and said that **for the first time in thirty years he felt himself to be an Austrian.** ...He was quite carried away, could not think of any work... As he put it: '**All my libido is given to Austro-Hungary**'. He was excitable, irritable, and made slips of the tongue all day long".

Ernest Jones (1955) *Sigmund Freud Life and Work, Volume Two* (p. 191)

Here is a more local figure. This is from Randall Fuller's *The Book That Changed America: How Darwin's Theory of Evolution Ignited a Nation* (2017). The book of the title is Darwin's *Origin of Species*. Following its publication in 1859 London, it was quickly taken up by the dominant intellectual group in 1860 Boston, the transcendentalists centred around Ralph Waldo Emerson and the Divinity School at Harvard University. In the year preceding the commencement of the Civil War, they weaponised the idea of natural selection against the *polygenists* of the time, who justified slavery on the basis that the different races were distinct species, arranged in a hierarchy.

Ralph Waldo Emerson remarked "**sometimes
gunpowder smells good**".

His eldest daughter, Ellen, could not recall "**a more
intimate and social town-feeling**" following the
commencement of the Civil War in 1861

Randall Fuller (2017) *The Book That Changed America: How Darwin's Theory of
Evolution Ignited a Nation* (p. 232)

More recently, Neil Young supported an attack on Afghanistan following 9/11, and wrote a song about fighting terrorists on a plane.



Six months afterwards, Freud was writing about his disillusionment with war (Freud, 1915).

By 2006, Neil Young had released an entire album criticising President George W. Bush's war on Iraq.

If primitive, syntonetic, unconscious group defences remain invisible to the group when they are working well, as I have outlined, their *effects* are quite visible. Whatever it is that can **temporarily**

(a) emotionally invigorate old men, who normally display thoughtful natures and pacifist attitudes.

(b) withdraw our concern for the children of others, whom we start to see as enemies to be slaughtered.

(c) narcotize our concern for the children we send out to do this on our behalf.

(d) create a rare intimacy between us.

is pretty powerful stuff.

How are we now?

[discussion]

OK, back to the triangle of teaching!



We are now in a position to ask the question: what primitive, syntonetic, unconscious group defences are activated when the supervisor shows his video? We know what happens in Montreal – rituals of humiliation, compliance, idealization, devaluation, splitting, projection and zombification (Luiker 2016).

(A more technical discussion of zombification is found in Isabel Menzies' classic 1959 paper on nursing hierarchies in hospitals).

Dr Davanloo appears to have been aware that exposure to his videos produced emotional activation in the room, and seemed to regard this activation as useful in and of itself. Participants at the annual Montreal symposiums would be aware of individuals at their tables deeply moved, activated, weeping, variously over threshold. In my view this is quite a blunt teaching weapon: is it any more useful than, say, applying the technique of vertical unlocking to all patients?

What primitive, syntonetic, unconscious group defences are activated when the *trainee* shows *their* video to the training group? In every setting that I have seen it, trainings focused on the video of the trainee involve quite a lot of "out of school" discussion about the trainee's PSE, their fears of public humiliation, why the supervisor makes admiring comment of one trainee's obviously crap video and seems to be looking for unfair points of criticism in your video, and so forth.

On the other hand, in working in the “room” - the moment to moment transference which we are being trained to address and pay attention to - there are many possible areas to enrich our learning. But also new risks and anxieties that trainers and students, alike, will need to address.

Where is the trainee, at this moment in time, on the spectra of neurosis and fragility?

Where is the supervisor, at this moment in time, on the spectra of neurosis and fragility?

What is being activated in the trainee or supervisor?

What is the interaction between supervisor and trainees, in the room, when they activate each other?

For example, does the trainee’s activation lead to responses towards the supervisor, which sends the supervisor beyond their threshold of ability to teach? We know what happens in Dr Davanloo’s training - you are exiled, like Napoleon. What family dynamics are being enacted there? *Whose* family dynamics? In what religious ceremony are we participating, where the student needs to choose between excommunication or zombification?

But these type of group dynamics don’t take place outside of Montreal, do they? Now, it could just be me, but since my participation in the annual Montreal symposiums from 2013 to 2016, I am seeing group idealization and group projection at all ISTDP training events. You will not be surprised when I say to you that this observation is not always met warmly by my colleagues and friends. I am asked, what is *my* thing with idealization and projection. I am told, “your observations about Dr Davanloo are interesting”, but “it doesn’t happen here”, “my students just *appreciate* me”, “I am not running a cult of personality”. If you say so. Is it working well for you?

Now, fortunately, these type of group dynamics are absent from *this* presentation. I think we can all be in agreement with that!

When I am warmly approached by smiling people at the end of presentations I make, I think “finally, my awesomeness is being recognised”. I certainly don’t think, “what primitive, unconscious, syntonic group defence am I participating in now”. So maybe my friends are right?

What do you think?

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