

DYNAMICS OF ROLE REVERSAL

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Undoubtedly the most singular aspect in the spectra of man is his capacity for growth; to be alive, a thing must grow; when it ceases to grow, it ceases to live. Life is essentially development and growth; conversely, to develop and grow is to live.

"The self, as that which can be an object to itself, is essentially a social structure, and arises in social experience," wrote G. H. Mead.¹ In order to engage in this self-aware process of social interaction, the individual can never be a mass-man, he must think first. Mead perceived thinking as preceding the act in an intelligent relationship where the mode of action is based on the individual's total picture of the social process. Thinking was "inner conversation" to Mead and formed the basis for significant "social intercourse."²

Mead defined the "I" and the "me" in relation to the social community because he continually stressed that people do or act and are simultaneously aware of themselves. The "I" then is the responsive self; the "I" reacts to the attitudes of others while the "me" is the organized set of attitudes which the "I" accepts as the social response. The "I" expresses itself through experience and action as the "me." The "I" is the individual's initiating, thinking, decision-making self which responds to the "me" of the community through acting. The human personality, Mead believed, needs an "I" to respond to a "me" which is social experience. Without an "I" there would be no communal "me," only irrational animals. Man has language which affords him the opportunity to discuss situations. He also has the capacity to utilize his "I" to reflect upon the social situation.

Social change occurs when the "I" reacts to the situation by initiating new ideas and concepts. Essential to Mead's contribution as a social behaviorist was his view that the self cannot be reconstituted without also altering the community and the social relations of the self to others within the community. Social progress is related to individual progress, growth, and attainment.

Abraham H. Maslow expresses the feeling that all basic needs can be categorized under the general heading of self-actualization, that is "every-

thing that the person can become."³ Maslow listed ten characteristics of the healthy, most fully human individual.

1. Clearer, more efficient perception of reality.
2. More openness to experience.
3. Increased integration, wholeness, and unity of the person.
4. Increased spontaneity, expressiveness, full functioning; aliveness.
5. A real self; a firm identity, autonomy; uniqueness.
6. Increased objectivity, detachment, transcendence of self.
7. Recovery of creativity.
8. Ability to fuse concreteness and abstractness, primary and secondary process cognition.
9. Democratic character structure.
10. Ability to love.⁴

As Maslow wrote: "The human being is simultaneously that which he is and that which he yearns to be."⁵

J. L. Moreno finds a parallel between the problem dealt with by behaviorists, existentialists and psychoanalysts and attempts a synthesis. Moreno's constructs, socio- and psychodrama, both utilize and are concerned with "spontaneity theory of learning." In a letter to *The American Journal of Psychiatry*, Dr. Moreno condenses his theory into two tenets:

1. The principle of a-historical treatment, and here-and-now.⁶ "Both Freud and Jung have studied man as an historical development; and the one from the biological, and other from the cultural aspect. On the other hand, our approach has been that of direct experiment: man in action; man thrown into action, the moment not part of history but history part of the moment—sub species momenti." (1932)
2. Behavior is a very abused term with multiple meanings. It is preferable to focus on acts, action and specific situations which manifest the behavior of the patient concretely. According to the spontaneity theory of learning, whenever spontaneous remission takes place, it is through the autonomous experience and learnings of the patient (mental role reversal, mirroring, etc.), that the neurotic symptoms from which he ails are overcome or corrected *in situ*. Gradually the neurotic residua begin to vanish. The patient "learns primarily through self-discovery. He has

³ Abraham H. Maslow, "Psychological Data and Value Theory," *New Knowledge in Human Values*, edited by Maslow, Harper & Brothers, 1959, p. 123.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 130.

⁶ Jacob L. Moreno, *The First Book on Group Psychotherapy*. Beacon House, 1932. Also: Robert B. Haas, Editor, *Psychodrama and Sociodrama Education*, Beacon House, 1948.

¹ G. H. Mead, *Mind, Self and Society*, Chicago University Press, 1934, p. 140.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 141-142.

a better chance to learn if his responses are not inhibited by interpretative, analytical comments which stifle the possibilities for self experimentation.^{7,8,9}

There is a feeling of need, of insecurity, and frustration, which leads men to seek for some authoritative source of wisdom and direction. To meet the demands that modern life makes upon the individual, however, each person must in the end discover the way for himself. At best, he can find in the experience and ideas of others suggestion and instruction, but the final decisions in this undertaking must be his own. Every human being must have a set of guiding principles by which he can govern his existence—there are moments in the life of each person which reveal with clarity the deeper needs of human spirit and which stimulate with greater urgency the search for a satisfying philosophy. Actually the issue is not whether the individual desires a philosophy by which to live; it is a question rather of adopting a vague, inconsistent, a half-conscious, blindly accepted, and probably foolish philosophy or having one that is carefully conceived and based upon the best available information about the individual and of his world. Gradually, unconsciously, but surely, every person absorbs from parents, from friends, from the texture of early life, those attitudes and convictions which provide the framework of the individual's working philosophy of living. What a person accepts uncritically as right or wrong, what a person feels most deeply concerned about, what a person spends time and effort in securing for himself—these values shape a person's view of life as naturally and inevitably as the things an individual has to eat and wear influence preferences for food and clothing. It is of such deeply rooted, unreasoned conviction and values as these that a working philosophy consists, even as a person begins to examine life more critically and objectively for himself. Indeed, the very process of reasoning, by which a person conducts a more mature self-examination, is itself shaped by these underlying convictions. There is no such thing as complete objectivity in philosophy; a person cannot construct a philosophy of living for himself as a person might plan to erect a new home and occupy it at his convenience. All the individual can hope to do is to reexamine in some larger and more mature perspective the actual convictions to which he gives allegiance, seeking to identify obvious limitations in his outlook and

⁷ Gordon Allport, *In Psychodrama*, Vol. II, Beacon House, 1959.

⁸ M. S. Shaw, *Spontaneity Training, in Role Playing in Business and Industry*, Free Press, 1960.

⁹ Jacob L. Moreno, "Behaviour Therapy," *The American Journal of Psychiatry*, Vol. 120, No. 2, August, 1963, p. 195.

inconsistencies in his conduct. Gradually, if he is determined, he may perhaps reshape his underlying attitudes and convictions into a fairly consistent whole somewhat more nearly in line with the facts of experience and the enduring values of life. His task, then, is comparable not to the building of a new house but to the re-construction of the home in which the individual is living and in which he must continue to live while the re-building is in progress. A philosophy of living which evolves from an inner calmness of spirit which comes in turn from knowing what the individual believes and why—and that outer strength of purpose which comes with a sense of inner peace and security.

It is in this domain that Moreno's psychodrama not only stimulates the person to think for himself, but develops an instrument of greater inclusiveness. "Existential theorists have contributed much to our comprehension of the central position of the experience of time in human existence."¹⁰ They have demonstrated the future's precedence over the past. They have accentuated the need for including the future in any conceptualization of human existence. "Personality can be understood only as we see it on a trajectory towards its future,"¹¹ wrote Rollo May. Much earlier Gordon Allport reminded us that "People, it seems, are busy leading their lives into the future, whereas psychology for the most part is busy tracing them into the past."¹² Existential theorists have proposed that the future and past meet in the present to form the moment of action.

By "re-living," through the vehicle of Moreno's psychodrama, a person forces the future and past to merge together in the recreated spontaneous present. Initially, the individual encounters great hesitancy to enter into the real situation,¹³ to reveal a "naked intensity of spirit,"¹⁴ or to re-live the agonizing situation. The reluctance to become personally involved diminishes with the aid of the director and auxiliary ego, enabling the protagonist to ventilate his anguish, hostilities, irrationalities and/or hatred. At the zenith of this involvement—when the emotionally charged vendetta has been re-experienced—the director of the psychodrama suggests a "role reversal" of the protagonist to the role of other person involved.

¹⁰ Henri Ellenberger, *Existence*, "A Clinical Introduction to Psychiatric Phenomenology and Existential Analysis," p. 39.

¹¹ Rollo May, *Existence*, Basic Books, 1958, p. 69.

¹² Gordon Allport, *Becoming*, Yale University Press, 1955, p. 51.

¹³ Carl P. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person*, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1961, p. 109-110.

¹⁴ Thomas Wolfe, *The Story of a Novel*, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1936, p. 17.

To further illustrate role reversal is, indeed, difficult. The driver of an automobile, for example, accelerates his car slowly and, after the lapse of several seconds, attains the arbitrary speed of fifty miles per hour. At this juncture, to reverse roles would entail having the driver shift to "reverse" immediately and go backwards over the same road travelled. According to physics, however, this cannot be accomplished because of an intermediate phase of inertia that must occur prior to going into "reverse." Even this instantaneous deceleration, assuming it is possible, would lurch the person forward and disturb the existing heretofore equilibrium. The impact upon the driver, in brief, would be tremendous. To attain a corresponding rate of propulsion backwards would scientifically require, the same process of going from +50 miles per hour to 0 to -50—a total speed difference of 100 miles per hour. No technological analogy, however, should be overemphasized because human behavior is more complex.

It is this spontaneous transition, suspended in eternity, immediately preceding the shifting from "drive" to "reverse" that interests me: the moment of impact, of explosion, of transition. It is this point when the individual is furthest, it seems, from reconciliation from either any objective (or subjective) solution that he must enter into that diametrically opposed world of the antagonist. (In comparison to the car analogy, the human personality is more flexible.) The hostility, hatred, nihilism the protagonist experienced is now viewed from the perspective of the other, the sweat, the blood, the guts, the agony. And it is precisely by creating this dialectic of the thesis and antithesis that produces a synthesis which, ultimately, may be only tangentially related to the former components. It is this creative process of merging two polar concepts and/or sentiments that creates not only anxiety but also provides insight. Individuals must be free to exercise their creativity and their imaginations. Gardner Murphy wrote, "The impulse to perceive, to understand, to imagine is just as much part of human nature as are the specific adjustment processes which we describe in terms of visceral drives."¹⁵ The human being must be permitted and encouraged to explore the unknown heights and react toward "the potentials for becoming a human being."¹⁶ Goethe has said "A young man must dare to be happy." In the final analysis, it may be a matter of courage—of advancing beyond the confronting but restricting frontiers of knowledge and experience acquired at twenty and penetrating the darker but maturing areas of the unknown. The goals of psychodrama, I believe, are to enable the protagonist to reach a stage of

¹⁵ Gardner Murphy, *Human Potentialities*, Basic Books, Inc., 1958, p. 23.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

independent action and control; to gain success according to his own interests, abilities, and needs; to gain increased confidence in and an understanding of himself and others, and to take his rightful place in interpersonal relationships.¹⁷

Rollo May suggested a person is subjectively equipped to confront unavoidable anxiety when he is convinced (consciously or unconsciously) that the values gained in progressing are greater than those created by escape.¹⁸ The connotation of "escape" possesses great significance because the protagonist will probably avoid maximum effort, maximum involvement by attempting to escape.

But being able to evaluate oneself realistically (objectively) requires an inner courage and sensitivity in order to promote a self-trust which makes it unnecessary for an individual to prove his prowess (to himself and/or others) and enables him to ascertain reality with productive energy.¹⁹ Men who are aware of their strengths and weaknesses are seldom haughty because knowledge of self, combined with experience and education, has a humbling effect of recognizing a person's limitations.

Anxiety, often confused with guilt, as is May's error, is a destructive, negative emotion that impairs self-awareness and growth. In this context, anxiety assumes the form of shame, and differs from guilt in that the former involves not the exposure of a wrong doing; but the exposure of the individual's self which is accomplished through psychodrama. Shame can accompany socially acceptable behavior and cannot readily be that which, in turn, threatens the person's being. Shame manifests itself. The shameful person tends to conceal his shame, becomes more ashamed for covering it which results in a negative cycle. If dealt with, however, according to Helen Lynd: "Shame can become not primarily something to be covered, but a positive experience of revelation."²⁰ Lynd believed it is the conquest of shame resulting in pride and self-respect that creates and fosters a genuine humility.²¹ Guilt, a by-product of psychodrama, if it is to be constructive to man, must be based on self awareness and a commitment to a value system. Guilt, a rational and positive factor, assists the individual in his interpersonal relations and with himself.

¹⁷ Katherine D'Evelyn, *Meeting Children's Emotional Needs*, p. 31.

¹⁸ Rollo May, *The Meaning of Anxiety*, The Ronald Press Company, 1950, p. 229.

¹⁹ Bonaro Overstreet, *Understanding Fears in Ourselves and Others*, Harper Brothers, 1951, p. 95.

²⁰ Helen Merrill Lynd, *On Shame and the Search for Identity*, Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1958, p. 20.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 258.

These feelings of anxiety, guilt, shame, revelation, occur when it is possible for the person to re-examine the various components of his irrationality or experience a nuance of feeling without the paralyzing or blinding passion—to stand away from and view within.

To tell a mother, for example, that she is overly aggressive and should not regulate her child's life as much as she does will not and cannot produce significant behavioral change. She will only alter her behavior when she perceives herself to be wrong—when she gains "*action insight*." J. L. Moreno believes the quickest, most effective method to obtain action insight is through psychodrama. If she is forced to live under her dictates, if only for a few moments, while she role reverses with her child, it may be sufficient to produce significant change.

Each person has a variety of ways of reacting to a familiar situation, differing because of a multitude of complex personality factors. Any conflict—conscious or unconscious—consumes psychic energy which otherwise would have been utilized to cope with the problem. In order to cope with the problem, it may be beneficial to construct a microcosm (a stage) which is indicative of the more complex macrocosm. To exist with conflicts, to view them before they can be solved—herein is the essence of the existence of the delicate psyche.

STANISLAVSKI'S METHOD OF IMPROVISATION AND MORENO'S SYSTEM OF SPONTANEOUS PSYCHODRAMA

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It may be helpful to the reader to familiarize himself with Moreno's own view of the differences between the two methods: "Improvisation in the Stanislavski method is supplementary to the aim of playing a great Romeo or King Lear. The element of spontaneity is here to *serve* the drama conserve, to revitalize it."

Moreno's method of spontaneity, by contrast, made an end to this dilemma when he dropped the role cliches altogether and permitted the actors to be entirely spontaneous-creative, to develop roles in "*statu nascendi*." The Theater of Spontaneity postulated an *art of the moment*, as against the *art of the conserve*. The next step was the development of the therapeutic theater, the psychodrama. It may not be without historic significance that Moreno's earliest publication on the therapeutic theater and the theater of spontaneity, *Die Gottheit als Komödiant (The Godhead as Actor)* appeared more than ten years before Stanislavski's book *My Life In Art*.

A survey of the two fields of psychodrama, and the legitimate theatre, especially the system of Constantin Stanislavski, is of value.

There is a great temptation to state, simply, that Moreno uses theatrical techniques for therapeutic purposes and the Stanislavski method, popularly referred to as "The Method," uses improvisation techniques for theatrical purposes. Obviously, this is too simple, and a more detailed study is necessary.

If spontaneity is considered the key to psychodrama, and improvisation the focal point distinguishing The Method, the two elements for the purpose of study may be handled as parallels.

The two obvious points dividing the two media are the placement in time and the purpose of production.

There are three types of improvisation of The Method: Those related to training of the actor; those related to characterization study; and those known by the term "preparation" whereby the actor moves into characterization directly preceding a performance. Consideration must be given to the types when comparing the techniques to psychodrama.

A quick survey of a few basis techniques may help to give a better understanding of the two media. The basic psychodramatic techniques are compared to those of The Method improvisation. The latter are scenes