

learning and participation towards achieving the learning goals are decidedly enhanced. This model may prove to have a motivational value in fostering numerous achievement activities of both an educational and industrial nature in which small group participation is involved. The application or replication of the design for utilitarian purposes used here remains, of course, contingent upon refinement and elaboration of the approach focused upon in the present research. It would be particularly cogent to the body of social interactional research to evolve analyses of the actual sociograms of the groups.

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ROLE REVERSAL*

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Mr. Chairman, Dr. and Mrs. Moreno, Ladies and Gentlemen:

The genesis of role reversal is not only one of the most admirable but also the most paradoxical feature in the development of psychodrama. To paraphrase J. L. Moreno, role reversal was the third psychodramatic revolution.

When Moreno first stood up against literary drama and the theater of his time, he did so in the name and for the purpose of liberating stage creativity from the dead weight of literary achievements, from sterile ruminating on stored-up, canned, "conserved" theatrical staples, from second-hand recreations of some playwright's preformed, and vastly immutable, vision. To Moreno, the playing, not the play, was the thing. Moreno's drama was to emerge from the performance, not the other way round.

Thus came into being Moreno's Theater of Improvisations, his revolution number one.

Moreno's actor freely ad-libbed, on the spur of the moment, and in response to the extemporizations of his co-actors, the emotions, the speech, and the peripeties of the character created in the very process of the impromptu performance.

This deliverance from the corpse embrace of the written play could not for any length of time gratify Moreno's idiosyncratic craving for absolute creativity. Though the actor had been freed from the bonds of a prescribed text and plot, he was still restrained by the impersonation of historically coined characters. He still portrayed a soldier one night, a revolutionary the night after, and a dreaming poet the after afterevening.

Moreno's second revolution liberated the actor from the fetters of extraneous characters. The central notion of Moreno's new theatrical attempt—considerably more than the first one his original own—became SELF-ENACTMENT. The gist of Moreno's defying credo at that point in time was, Why should anyone enact anyone else? He shall and will enact, and through enactment create, himself!

Generously endowed with twenty-twenty hindsight, we see clearly now how sound, how logical, and how timely the transition to this second phase

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had been. Enriched by the experience of the first revolutionary span, Moreno's actor had now the skill and the will, the freedom and the courage to enact himself, to master his groping, ambiguous, multiple self.

And what made him do such with increasing eagerness was the discovery that self-enactment, besides offering the fascinating innovation of the protagonist being his own dramaturgist and his own dramatic creation, yielded also the unexpected additional boon of catharto-therapeutic gain and psychal integration.

But at this ascending stretch of psychodrama's history psychodrama was still a long way from the startling—and crucial—concept of role reversal.

Indeed, at this point we were farther from it than ever before, because by definition and intent self-enactment strictly precluded the enactment of anyone else.

This being so, how come the antithetic emergence of role reversal? When and why did Moreno's actor begin to enact, of all alien things, his antagonist? Was self-enactment, like its predecessor, improvisation, incapable of dispensing the ultimate fecundity of self-actualisation? Was there in the old literodramatic model something else that continued to confine and to hold back creative self-revelation and revelatory self-creation?

For answers to these questions we must return to our—and Moreno's—point of departure, to literary drama. This retrogressive detour may be something of a nuisance, but if we bore you, bear with us. It was at a spiraling bend of psychodrama's progression, faintly reflected in our sketching of it, that role reversal had been born, a concept and tool surpassing in originality everything Moreno had achieved theretofore and destined to give sense and direction to his complete break with the theater and to his conscious realization of psychodramatic therapy.

Now then, what last inimical principle was there in literary drama that Moreno had yet to overthrow to complete his revolutions?

As we have tried to formulate it in another context,¹ literary drama presents artistically structured human action. But it is not just any kind of action drama is interested in. Drama portrays the action of conflict and struggle. A dramatic utterance, unlike a genuine prose sentence or lyrical line, is, at least in principle, a tactical move, an "act" of aggression or defense. Every slice of true dramatic dialog is a skirmish. One of the basic nomenclatures for dramatic speech units is "riposte"—a fencing term.

¹ *International Journal of Sociometry and Sociatry*, Vol. III, No. 1-2, 1963, Beacon, N.Y.

And that is not all.

It is not just any kind of conflict that drama portrays. Commercial and doctrinal-propagandistic quasi-drama excepted, literary drama is built on the premise of ongoing, perpetual conflict.

Drama, to be sure, is always contaminated with ideology and non-dramatic literary components, with passages of an explanatory, philosophical, descriptive, or poetic character. Worse than that, for many internal and external reasons drama must and can portray only limited, episodal confrontations. Every play must have an end. And drama abounds in deus-ex-machinations to bring to a formal conclusion any given, time and structure bound, single dramatic work. But we entirely miss the point if we attach undue significance to the outcome of a play. The end ends only the play but not its message of unending conflict. The contest, not the score, is the thing.

The Greek tragedians, the unsurpassed masters of the art, were fully aware of the formal limitations of a single production. In fact, it was they who had imposed on the stage play the three restraining esthetic norms, the three unities of place, time, and action. In rational conformity with its inherent scope, the Greek play was a single dramatic episode taking place within one day at one spot.

At the same time, and in order to manifest that strife, unlike the play, was not transitory, the Greeks invented the device of trilogy. The very same protagonist who had somehow brought one lethal controversy to a conclusion in one play became the source of a yet fiercer, bloodier, conflict in the next tragic episode, thus adding personal guilt to the misery of anirenic impersonal destiny.

Whatever the merits or demerits of "Who Is Afraid of Virginia Woolf?", a play so far removed from the Greek tragedy in time, in form, in content, and in ethico-esthetical intent, its basic dramatic message is still perennial rage, exhausting but never exhausted dramomachy consuming the confronting parties, each one of them innocent victim and vicious nocent in unending virulent strife.

(To round up the survey, the most recent dramaturgic innovation has only replaced eternal interpersonal enmity with the just as perpetual existential collision between the rational and the absurd.)

This horrifying rigid, uncompromising, *tragic* aspect of literary drama, as we conjecturally assume, must have exerted a double effect on J. L. Moreno, who had in the meantime become Moreno, M.D.

Dr. Moreno could hardly have escaped noticing the amazing similarity between the patterns of the litero-dramatic and neurotic fabrics. And he

could hardly have failed seeing that it was precisely the relentless drive to absolute self-enactment that was inescapably leading all opposing dramatis personae into the dead-ends of everlasting confrontation and mutual sterilization, if not annihilation.

It must have been this final insight into the obsessional textures of literary drama, neurosis, and self-enactment that energized Moreno's complete break with the theater, his relinquishment of literary drama for psychodrama and of the theater for therapy, that triggered the creation by him of his most striking, and this time, *anti-dramatic* innovation aimed at complementing contest-generating self-enactment with collision-abating other-enactment, which is role reversal. A break that later, when he was judging a certain interpretation of psychodramatic techniques to be "from a theatrical rather than psychodramatic point of view," enabled him to say: "These two positions are diametrically opposed. Indeed, it is very unfortunate that we use the same terms for two operations that differ so strikingly."²

As the term implies, role reversal means an exchange of roles, an exchange of positions; conceptually, role reversal means transcendence of self or of self-component; in practice, role reversal is a gradual, cautious technique of out-sight training.

Initially, the protagonist, upon assuming the character of his "opponent," may actually intend to act as the "devil's advocate"; he may try to 'prove' the legitimacy of his hostile position. Yet the effect of the mere consent to relinquish one's own self, be it ever so deceptively or superficially, the very attempt to desist from the stance of confrontation, the sheer movement to the "other side," is of unflinching value. And there is, potentially, an increasing momentum in the effect. Properly conducted, the ongoing process naturally compels the psychodramatic protagonist to deepen and to widen his empathic identification with the opponent, just as this same process compels him to see his own self-enactment through the eyes of the adversary or adversary substitute (auxiliary ego) who now portrays him.

It cannot be sufficiently stressed that the optimal outcome of role reversal is not merely a rational settling of arguments, although it obviously is partly that, too. Nor is it group-induced acceptance of an ethical precept, something like "Love Thine Enemy," though, quite naturally, it is that too. If anything, it's living one's enemy, in an atmosphere of freedom and supervision, of self-will and nonthreatening external control.

It is therapeutic growth.

² Personal communication.

The effect of role reversal is an approximation to a total reorientation of the three images of the self, the other, and the reality situation.

In the cumulation of successful attempts—they are, of course, not always, and never completely, felicitous—the psychodramatic protagonist-patient learns to step out of the boundaries of the self into the interiority of the real or presumed antagonist. He is increasingly the self and the non-self, the I and the He, attainably proximal to a state of We, in which sadistic triumph, masochistic submission, and obsessive stalemate lose their emotion-, goal-, and behavior-determining power.

It is because of role reversal's unique purpose and exclusive potential to transform confrontation into contact and beyond that into co-agency through means other than logico-persuasive or purely analytic but by means of life-like, experiential training for these goals, that we, in conclusion, deprecate the abuse and trivialization of this ingenious therapeutic technique and its amateurish perversion into a gimmick freely dissipated for its effect on the onlookers rather than for that on the patient and the serious task at hand.

This paper, like its serial predecessors, has consciously restricted itself to one subject. We have carefully avoided as much as an allusion to the specific operative force psychodrama counts on, that is, to Spontaneity, Moreno's other great therapeutic concept, or to such practical questions as the applicability and effectiveness of role reversal in the treatment of psychoses and the expendability of psychodrama to inter-group confrontations.

We hope to deal with these subjects and questions in future papers at subsequent psychodrama congresses a great many more of which we wish Dr. and Mrs. Moreno to attend and to inspire.