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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF DOUBLING AND ROLE REVERSAL
FOR COSMIC MAN

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Marx postulated the economic man, Freud the psychological man, Moreno the cosmic man. Man's cosmic nature is evident at his birth. Of this, motherhood brings its own intimation. One of the most potent experiences of the mother (and of the father, in role reversing with his mate) when she first sees and holds her newborn child is of great wonder, awe, a sense that this is a gift, this child, an inheritance, that she could not possibly have produced it, that there are forces at work which have caused this to come into being, over and beyond the biological. It is as if this child is "loaned" to the parents by the cosmos for a certain period of time, eventually to be returned to it when an adult. The mystery of this is overwhelming, rarely completely grasped.

The behavior of the neonate and young infant, with total involvement in body movements has been observed and described by a large number of specialists. Moreno named this phenomenon "the act hunger syndrome". He concluded that the organism of the child is driven by a hunger for action. As the child develops the movements become more refined, better controlled and focussed, but he continues to exhibit what appears to be to adults at times irrational behavior, moving into space, running about, looking, listening, touching, smelling, tasting, searching. He hungers to know what is going on about him, who and what is out there; he also wants to define his own position in space and to be affirmed as an entity. The multiple stimuli he encounters are so challenging and arousing, their bombardment requires a great deal of his energy and attention to sort out. To an adult this behavior may seem exaggerated, purposeless and irritating. For the child it is sheer necessity. There may, however, be a deeper reason for all this activity; a need to re-integrate himself with the cosmos, to become once again united with it.

If, as the idea of the cosmic being suggests, the child has been lifted from the universe, given human embodiment (or to speak in oriental-mystical terms, if he has chosen to take this embodiment for karmic purposes) and loaned to his parents, one may assume that this rupture has been more or less a shock and that the behavior described is a consequence of this separation. It is not merely separation from the mother's body, described in psychoanalytic terms as the "trauma of birth", which is the shock, but separation from the totality of the universe. Moreno viewed birth as first of all a victory, he thought the traumata came latter, in life itself. But this present view may form a bridge

between the two concepts, that of the birth trauma *and* the victory of birth, provided the journey into life and the material world is properly guided. This is the thesis of the present paper.

There is also increasing awareness among us of the "traumata of death" and an entire section of our psychological practice is bent in dealing with death and dying in a more wholesome, integrative fashion, at the other end of life's spectrum. Approaches to death and dying can be greatly enriched by the introduction of psychodramatic techniques into this sensitive arena.

Moreno described the child's first universe as the "matrix of all-identity", the phase in which the child experiences himself as the total universe, without any separation from it. In the next phase, that of differentiated all-identity, persons and objects are perceived as separated from one another but he is not yet aware that he does not control them. The third phase is that of the breach between fantasy and reality. This is when the child suffers one of the deepest existential shocks: he becomes aware that he is not the total universe, that he does not have control over other beings and objects, that they move to and fro in space and are not totally at his command. This is also the phase in which, to bridge the shock, fantasy may replace reality, the fantasy being preoccupied with restoring power to himself. When these preoccupations lead to a complete break between perception of reality and fantasy profound pathology may develop. Because this experience of the centrality of the human organism never quite leaves him, man suffers from "normal megalomania" which it takes him a lifetime to evaluate and deal with. For the child it is magic medicine: with it he is restored to his rightful place in the center of the universe.

When the child discovers himself capable of moving independently into space, he begins to experience the world as friendly or threatening, interesting or amusing, painful or entertaining, according to encounters along the way. One of the most demanding tasks of his significant adults is to assist him to have integrative rather than traumatic experiences. Before the child can integrate himself into the world, then, he needs to be assured that being himself is a positive category. He requires self affirmation above all. This is of essence because without it he is not able to role reverse adequately or later on double, as will be necessary, with all the significant others in his world. Spontaneity-creativity must first be affirmed in him. To that end, we have found that it is essential that the parents at first, later extending to others such as siblings and more remote relatives or friends, learn the essence of affirmative doubling, still later of non-injurious role reversal.

If our assumption is correct that the child has been lifted from the cosmos, given human embodiment and loaned, it is the parents' responsibility to make the child's transition from the cosmos to the terrestrial world as integrative as possible, up until such time that the parent is himself ready to be yielded to

the cosmos and the child can prepare himself and his child, for his own return. Doubling and role reversal are basic to this circular development.

We have found the earliest suitable moment for the parents to double with the child to be at the time when the child starts to make sounds, the baby language or pre-verbal language. Shucking off her own identity, the mother takes on the bodily position and makes the same sounds as the baby. When this doubling is started early, the baby delights in it, responds to it and enriches his basic vocabulary. I have myself done this with our child and we have never, before or since, told one another more beautiful fairy tales. And the laughter and joy we co-experienced! Later the parents can double with the child as a day-by-day process, to understand the child's needs and meet them better, to assist in emergencies, or merely to invigorate diurnal contact. Children so affirmed are able to reach the next level, that of role reversal with significant others, earlier and with greater depth. The child is not able to role reverse with others until he recognizes his separateness. He can not yield what he does not own. Lack of ability to role reverse indicates deep lack of early self affirmation.

The parent precedes the child in the world. Regretably, he can not pass on his experiences of that world to his child. It is the tragedy of the human race that every child and each generation needs to explore life from the very start. Very little experience or wisdom can be passed on. But through doubling first and later through role reversal, some of these gaps can be bridged.

We see this ability of the child first to accept doubling, then role reversal and still later, to role reverse with the parent and, in the final stage, to double with the parents, as essential and clearly indicated for emotional growth. It has attained a firmly needed position in developmental thinking in psychodrama.

I have begun to see the Seven Stages of Man in these terms. In the first stage it must be the parent who is the child's auxiliary ego and doubles with the child; in the second the parents role reverse with the child, the child begins to take the role of the parents versus himself; in the third stage he can take the role of his parents versus siblings and significant others. These may all still take place, up to this point, on the psychodramatic level, that is, within the confines of the family setting. Simultaneously he starts to become his own parent more consistently.

In life itself meanwhile, the child has learned to role reverse with his peers and has begun to test himself out in that form of relationship. In the fourth stage, somewhere in the late teens he desires to be seen as a peer to and by his parents; if the earlier stages have been successfully mastered by both parent and child, it will not be difficult for the parent to begin to see the child growingly as his peer. But it is frequently at just this stage in their interaction that the parent fails the child by continuing to take the role of the

parent in a fashion more suitable to the earlier phases. In the fifth stage he is totally independent of his parent and begins the cycle all over again versus his own child. In the sixth stage he can role reverse and double with the parent, divining the parent's needs, as once his parent did for him when he was unable to speak. In the seventh and final stage he is able to completely assume responsibility for his parent and for himself in terms of dealing with the end of the parent's life, returning the parent to the cosmos and also starting to deal with his own eventual return to the cosmos. If he has learned his lesson well, his child will now go through the same stages and in turn become his auxiliary ego, role reversing and doubling with him as he may require.

Incomplete doubling and role reversal leads to a great number of intrapersonal and interpersonal conflicts. With increasing longevity we are seeing in our clinical practice a growing number of problems stemming from the lack of orderly development. When the child has not been sufficiently affirmed in the early stages, the problems are enormously augmented at the time when the parent becomes dependent upon the child. If he then demands role reversal and doubling from a child who is being forced prematurely into the parental, responsible position before he has had good parenting himself, depression, guilt, resentment and even outright hatred and rejection or neglect may ensue. Self recrimination and emotional upheaval are frequently seen in such deprived adults, bringing in their wake great torment for all concerned.

The adult normally precedes the child into eternity. If in the course of their life together the doubling and role reversal has taken place on a satisfactory and sequential basis the child will be enabled to yield up the parent to the cosmos without experiencing separation anxiety, guilt and remorse. He will want to double for and with the parent and give him of his own power and status, support and assist him. The child must first become his own complete parent before he can become the parent of his parent.

Much of our psychodramatic, clinical attention is now spent in bringing back the dead so that the protagonist can complete the relationship which has never been completed in life itself. The psychodrama has to provide via the auxiliary ego that which has been denied in life. The psychodrama is the treatment of choice for this type of need. But we see its most productive application to be in life itself with the parents actively participating in this circular process with their own children.

Moreno pointed out that death takes place around us, in our social atom, long before it takes place in our own organism. Even children encounter death throughout childhood and adolescence in the form of death of a pet, a beloved friend or relative or the death of a relationship although the person involved remains alive. They are, therefore, already sensitized to some extent to the idea of death. But adults are familiar with the tremendous fear children

suffer at the mere idea of their parents' death. I believe it is not merely that they are dependent upon them, they intuit that the relationship would remain incomplete, unfulfilled and therefore they can not relinquish their parents yet, they cannot yet permit them to return to the cosmos whence we all came.

Studies on death and dying have not taken the sociometric and psychodramatic aspects of the life and death cycle sufficiently into consideration, largely because a lack of awareness of the significance of doubling and role reversal, and of the contribution sociometric approaches can make in these areas.

In view of the "cosmic shock" which being born may bring about, we may also revise our attitude towards suicide. It may be a contradiction in adjecto, but we have all witnessed "therapeutic suicides", i.e., suicides whose eventual effect was not destructive to the survivors and may even have been salutary. In view of the cosmic shock, we may conjecture that suicide is a form of returning to the cosmos without waiting for the life span to complete itself. It may be, viewed in that light, a healing effort at restoring the unity with the cosmos.

The psychodramatist has a valid contribution to make to child development on one hand and to gerontology on the other, by teaching the process of doubling and role reversing to both young and old. In addition, he has the opportunity to make the path of cosmic man here on earth that much more rewarding.

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