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The Classical Psychodrama of Moreno: It's background.

Psychodrama has been defined in many ways. By J.L. Moreno, its founder, as *"the science which explores the 'truth' by dramatic methods"* (1) by Zerka Moreno, his wife, as a laboratory for training people how to live without being punished for making mistakes. (2) I myself have described it as an action approach to group psychotherapy which enables a person to look at what does happen in his or her life, what doesn't happen, and what could happen. (3).

Moreno was born in Bucharest, Rumania, in 1889 and died in New York in 1974. He wanted to be remembered as the man who brought laughter into psychotherapy. His work also included group psychotherapy and sociometry, but he felt that psychodrama was his greatest contribution.

He moved to Vienna with his family when he was five, then to Germany. At thirteen he moved back to Vienna on his own, earning his keep as a tutor until his family returned. He was a student at the University of Vienna, first in philosophy and then he graduated in Medicine in 1917. At this time he met Sigmund Freud and had some discussions with him. But Moreno rejected words as the royal route to the psyche. He pointed out that human beings are non-speaking actors for a long time, almost 2 years. During this time they learn power, and soon, powerlessness. The conflict between power (I am the centre of the universe) and powerlessness (I cannot get the response I want) can sow the seeds of neurosis at an early age.

The roots of psychodrama came from an experience when Moreno was four. He and other children were play-acting in his parents' home. He took the role of God.

"... we collected every available chair and piled them up on an enormous oak table until they reached the ceiling. I now mounted my heavenly throne, mine, 'the Kingdom, the power, the glory' while my angels flew round me singing. Suddenly one of the children called out 'Why don't you fly too?!, Where-upon I stretched out my arms and . . . one second later lay on the floor with a broken arm. So ended my first psychodrama . . ." (4)

Later he wrote:

"My work is the psychotherapy of fallen Gods. We are all fallen Gods. As infants we have a godlike sense of power, what I call a normal megalomania. Because everyone around the infant responds to his needs he feels at one with the whole world. Every event seems the result of his own spontaneous creation. But as society makes its demands, our once boundless horizons shrink, we feel diminished and our frustrations sometimes produce emotional disorders. Psychodrama helps people recover something of their primary selves, their lost Godhead."

In 1910 Moreno began a humanistic theatre called the Theatre of Spontaneity. It was a place where groups of people could act out their deepest frustrations, dreams, fears, aggression, love, the whole range of human emotion. The emotions were not someone else's, as in legitimate theatre, but their own. Moreno wanted to develop a *"theatrical cathedral"* for the release of human spontaneity and creativity which he believed existed in everyone. He once jumped up from the audience and onto the stage during a performance of *"The Deeds of Zarathustra"* in 1911. He confronted an astonished actor. *"What's your name? Your real name?"* The actor replied *"Carl Mueller"*. Moreno said *"What's wrong with Carl Mueller? WHY do you have to play someone else?"*

An episode in his own theatre helped Dr. Moreno realize some of the therapeutic potentials of improvisational drama:

"Barbara was married to a young playwright, George. Barbara always portrayed gentle wistful ingenues. But according to what George confided in desperation to Moreno, at home she was a hellcat who cursed and kicked him when he tried to make love to her. One day the newspapers reported the murder of a streetwalker by her pimp. Convincing Barbara she should broaden her range, Moreno cast her as the streetwalker. She played the part with such ferocity, rousing the actor who played the pimp to such a frenzied response, that at the climactic murder scene the audience stood up, screaming "stop!" At home after the show, temporarily purged of her aggressions, Barbara was all tenderness. Moreno kept her playing violent characters and she grew tractable away from the theatre. He then put George on stage opposite her to duplicate episodes of their real private life." (6)

The couple's own enactment was more electrifying than any theatre they were doing. He began to see that one individual could become the therapeutic agent of the other within a group process. *"Some months later,"* he recounts, *"they sat with me in the theatre, full of gratitude. They had found themselves and each other."* (7)

In 1925 Moreno came to America to develop his work based on the idea that the greatest human resource was innate creativity. He developed a method of dealing with psychological problems by spontaneously acting out the problems.

The classic psychodrama session is a live, poignant drama in which the subject or protagonist acts out key life experiences with the help of other participants

(auxiliaries), under the guidance of a trained psychodrama director. A stage area is used to physically represent the person's life space. The group members play key roles. They observe and respond to the problem presented, much like members of the larger society outside the group would respond.

There are three parts to each psychodrama session, the warm-up, the enactment, and the discussion or sharing of the situation presented.

The warm-up is the initial phase of any psychodrama session when the participants, the director, and the group prepare for action. The members of the group become acquainted with each other; respond to each other as people; discover, and discuss the situations to be explored. Warming-up encourages spontaneity. This can include physical movement or action, psychological investigation within the individual, looking at the social implications of the action; and games and fantasy.

The second part of the session is the enactment. The problem is presented in life space, in the kitchen, bedroom, or office. wherever the situation actually occurs. A key event, central to the problem is dramatised. Members of the audience are chosen to play supporting roles. During the action, the director helps each participant to clarify the feelings within each scene. The director helps keep the focus on the main issues and encourages everyone to freely express their feelings. Other techniques are used such as role reversal, doubling, and soliloquy. The action, is guided toward problem solving. One is able to look at what doesn't happen in life and to look at all the potentials of what does.

Finally, following the enactment, members of the audience share their personal experiences of the drama with the protagonist. Moreno called this section a "love-back" rather than a "feed-back", as protagonists need affirmation that what they have presented is both human and acceptable. Members of the group can share to what extent they identified with the protagonist. Aspects which group members found emotionally moving are discussed.

This results often in new insights and an ability to deal with emotional problems. But for Moreno the process itself was as important as the results. As he wrote in 1934:

"If the nineteenth century looked for the lowest common denominator of mankind, the unconscious, the twentieth century discovered or rediscovered it's highest common denominator - spontaneity and creativity."

Bibliography

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 - (4) (ed) International Handbook of Group Psychotherapy, N.Y. Philosophical Library, 1966
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 - (6) Kobler, John, "The Theatre That Heals Men's Minds", The Sat. Evening Post, Oct. 27, 1962
 - (7) Ibid
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What is Spontaneity?

Creativity is a sleeping beauty that, in order to become effective, needs a catalyser. The arch catalyser of creativity is spontaneity, by definition from latin *sua sponte* which means coming from within. But what is spontaneity? Is it a form of energy? It is energy but unconservable. It emerges as is spent and is spent in a moment; it must emerge to be spent and must be spent to make place for new emergencies like the life of some animals which are born and die in the love act . . .

J.L. Moreno MD Explorations in Human Potentialities. Thomas 1966.

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