

Viewing some Key Conceptions of Moreno

written by Don Reekie *in September 1998 revised in August 2002 & tweaked in April 2010*

Moreno had certain significant ways of viewing human experience. These include four distinct and interactive factors that go to the core of being human. One is "spontaneity", another is "creativity", another is "role" and another is "relationship". Entering into Moreno's view of human experience will assist us to appreciate the vision he had of each person developing to become as truly herself or himself as she or he can be.

Moreno's thinking gave birth to these concepts. Each of us births our own ways of making sense of and appreciating our unique ordinary moment by moment experience. The idea, that you or I or Moreno has, can be thought of as capturing an experience as a photograph does. We move closer to Moreno's concepts when we recognize that an idea is full of life, and when we see that each of our ideas carries our life forward with vitality. As we borrow and experiment with Moreno's conceptions we tickle and enliven our own constructive responses to becoming the particular human each of us is.

Focus on each concept in turn. Bring the word lightly into your mind and begin to play with Moreno's concept in terms of your experience of yourself in your world day by day. Try out the usefulness of his way of thinking. You will notice in yourself thoughts, feelings and movement towards action.

Start with "spontaneity". At the centre of life is the continuous birthing of new wet and juicy acts. Each form of functioning in each bit of life is either spontaneous or a habitual performance. Repeats of a successful performance might have the quality of: "if you've got a good thing going then don't knock it". We can see the value of this conserved functioning throughout the cosmos. "Spontaneity" is also functioning throughout the cosmos so that there is "a novel response to an old situation or an adequate response to a new situation". Instead of habituation there is an act of creation. Variation or novelty in one bit of the cosmos changes the cosmos in small and possibly extensive ways.

Now turn your attention to the act of creation. "Creativity" happens in interactions that occur anywhere in the cosmos in a specific moment of time and in a particular space somewhere in the cosmos. The event in that particular space is connected to all other spaces close or distant and has reverberating – like wave rippling - interactions. "Creativity" has an originating quality of activity that gives form, structure, organization, and direction to events. "Creativity" in one person impacts on another. The second person is moved; thinks differently; experiences a range of feelings; notices body movements and chooses to move towards, against or away from the creative act. "Creativity" has the power to make a difference. Each difference that happens in the cosmos is a difference that adds to the nature of the cosmos. We humans are creative creatures. We make a difference: we are creators. We can produce dramatic effects in the places where we live and on the people we live with.

Bring your attention to the way each one of us has of being: "my self" one moment to another. The "functioning form a person" has in a specific context we can say is "role". Role is the whole way of being herself or himself that a person has in a particular time and space. The degree to which a person is free in her or his functioning is able to be discerned. Roles may be 1. taken, 2. played or 3. created: this shows an increase in freedom from 1 < 3.

Aspects on conceptions of "role" can be said to arise from experiences that are psychosomatic, in social positioning, sociodramatic, and psychodramatic.

Early in infancy experiences are primarily psychosomatic. Body and spirit/mind experiences that are pre-verbal for quite a while see the emotional and body responses deeply embedded in our ways of being ourselves. These patterns are firmly in place before a child becomes familiar with the tasks-to-be-done or positions-to-be-taken in their society, before a person learns to follow or vary from the regular patterns of interaction in their culture, and also before their creative imagination takes them into modeling on what others are doing or into creating roles that are uniquely their own. These aspects show in the patterning of sleeping, feeding and breathing; in the skin's colour and moisture production; in the bodies heat modulations, its digestive and defecation processes; and in emotionally expressive noise and movement.

Social positioning experiences arise from where a person finds themselves placed, how they are expected to act or notice that they find themselves acting. They learn to picture themselves fitting into the scheme of things in certain familiar settings; they recognize the status they have with those they are with and who it is that might turn up at any time. They discover what influence they have on events, and what others think they might have or expect they will have on events. All of this fits in the social positioning area.

The drama of social-interactions are sociodramatic. The construction of Moreno's double edged words weave or juxtapose realities that run together the bodily with the mind, the static notion of positions with malleable society, the dramatic flow of life stories with the cultural patterning of culturally shaped social interactions. Later we acknowledge Moreno's third and my own fourth aspect: psychodramatic.

Sociodramatic actions and interactions with others include all that the person does - to, for, against or in withdrawing from the others around them. These can be recognized as having familiar patterns that are common in a specific culture in a particular geographical area and time. It is, as if there is a language of behaviour patterns that are taken for granted and predictable. These have a fit with the values of the particular society.

I have chosen to add Sociodramatic aspects to Moreno's three: psychosomatic, social and psychodramatic. This assists me to clearly distinguish the psychodramatic aspects of a role with their motivation and essence of a person's functioning.

The psychodramatic aspects of experience are noticed through the way a person is being themselves. Their words, thinking, emotional expression, body movements, intentional actions develop new and repeatable responses to situations and produce what may be discerned as characteristic functioning of this particular person. These demonstrate each person's uniqueness in producing their own being from her or his own spontaneity and creativity. The psychodramatic elements arise from the soul of being, the quality of motivation, the intentional visioning and the constructive organization of every element that contributes to this person's whole way of being himself or herself in this precise moment and this exact space.

Beside these aspects of role there are organizational modes by which we give form to our interactions. These have been called *progressive*, *coping* and *fragmenting*. The elements and aspects of role can be seen as grouped together to achieve effects that are progressive where they are spontaneous and creative expressions of a person's heartfelt essence of being. They may be seen to have been copied from others, or be reactive to situations, where they serve to cope for survival. Sometimes have a fragmenting effect cutting him or her off from her or his self. They can also split them from others in their community. [Note that from 2004 onwards I have been thinking of organizational systems as progressing/sustaining, as coping/surviving and as

struggling/striving. I like to remind myself that each gestalt of organization has its own quality of activity and motivation. Writing this in 1998 I used the headings *progressive, coping and fragmenting*¹ while not forgetting the earlier and reverse ordered form of *neurotic, coping and individuated*². See my articles 2007 to 2010]

Roles are always interactive, which focuses attention on relationship. It is in living our relationships and their reciprocities that our roles form and are developed. In relationship we meet people, have exchange of appreciation, engagement, and are reciprocally affected. Moreno was from early in his life committed to development of intimacy and a fullness of encounter in relationships. Each person is seen to open himself or herself to other's experiences with acceptance and appreciation. This is viewed widely as the connectedness of human and universal systems being enacted in the ordinary grandeur of daily life. It happens in the minute particulars of meeting with and avoidance of people, in loving and hating, in being indifferent or neutral, in becoming conflicted or unified, and in generating responses each to their own hopes and fears.

With recognition of the pragmatics of role dynamics we have the means by which to observe, research and make analysis of the various systems of human living such as society, culture, values, intimacy, purposeful-tasks, family and individual-personality. Dynamics of role are phenomena that simply are what they are. They do not invite judgement. There is no right or wrong, no good or bad and no absolute measure of control or successful completions.

Role can help us describe a person systemically so as to see the dynamics of relationships. We can recognize that each person has will, dissatisfaction, anger, desire, creativity, agency, determination, ambition and hope. We can discern when they may have despondency, fear, distress, or inadequate resources against forces in their society.

Thorough going pragmatics of role and spontaneity will contribute to us being able to see a client's progressive motivation even when he or she is highly conscious of being trapped and helpless. We could be swamped by sympathy, lost in identification, and/or objectify them as "victim". To do any of these would be to fail to value the psychodramatic and concentrate on the social aspects of role. We would have seen the inadequacies in coping aspects of role and have failed to see the embryonic progressive aspects. The imperceptible movements, will, and wish will be there. They will be alive like embers of fire or seeds lying beneath the surface potent though dormant. They wait to be recognized and to be provided conditions for flaming and flourishing in healthy response. When we are able to see and relate to the progressive and the health we become a companion producer and therapeutic guide. This requires heart and mind. We enter the relationship subjectively, bringing ourselves alongside the other's subjectivity as fully as we are able.

Role pragmatics includes sociometric thinking which will bring our attention to the contextual factors that influence and constrain people. These include physical restraints, differentials of power, and cultural pressures and barriers. Psychodrama. We can promote a client's spontaneity, spirit, will, and creativity even if they have no belief in themselves. We can, through our practically oriented love, ally ourselves to their health, will, wish and hope. We can do this even when they have not found a means of accessing these themselves.

Pragmatics of role dynamics guides our attention to reciprocity and interactive systems. Role holds our descriptions to considering a person in terms of their own being and essence not their place in the lives of others in society. We will not be satisfied to see any person as simply a victim, or as triggered, or traumatized, or outcast, or even only as a wounded-child. This would be to objectify and treat a

person, with insufficient valuing of her or his health, courage and creativity. Saying for example that a person is a "traumatized person" or worse a "damaged person" can have a labeling effect. That is once a person is labeled then they are likely to carry that label in the minds of others and in their own. All that person's reality and possibilities are inevitably restricted. The label can become a foundational identity. It may become a crucial and dominating reality.

If we follow Moreno's concepts we will be expected to go beneath the surface to the dreams and fantasies the person may not dare to put hope in and to the wishes that they long to fulfill. Working with role dynamics we will give attention to the response a person makes in encounter with a vicious bully or neglectful guardian. This is not done in order to explain. Certainly we will not inadvertently fall in to giving support to any self-blaming that has been consciously or unconsciously taken on. We will work to build on and build up the unfulfilled wishes, the desire to be strong, and the will to have a rightful place in the universe. We work to access embryonic progressive roles or elements of roles that can create healthy relationship with self and a belief in viable relationships, alliances and networks.

If we focus on the hopelessness towards the power of others we are not likely to promote courage and sturdy self regard. We will give too much value to the other people interacting with them and not enough value to the person themselves. When we regard someone as being a "traumatized" person our thoughts and our words have an unfortunate effect on that person and on our treatment of them. They and we can behave as though they are dependent upon others and without agency in themselves. If we identify that that person is actively responding, though that may be by withdrawal into a mode of functioning toward others that is as if they have gone away into outer space while their body is still in the situation, then they and we have ability to work progressively together. They may recognize that they were unprotected from violation, and that their body had filled with the chemistry of fear, and that they at that time naturally had inadequate resources for defence. When we focus on the person themselves and their response reality and surplus reality with new current realities are all available in the new present.

Psychosomatic role elements are likely to have been first developed in situations when powerless to protect themselves as a small child or infant. At that time they are likely to have been relatively competent as an infant in most of their living, but with all the limitations expected in infancy. The psychosomatic role elements will be dominated by the automatic aspects of infant nervous system functioning. The person now an adult is likely to have infant experience and responses reverberating within them and be reactively self protective, while inadequately organized with infant striving fragmenting and diminishing their strengths rather than to producing coping survival strategies that might have positive benefits.

Healing the psychological social cultural atom is crucial. Social, physical and other contextual restrictions and oppressions require interventions that match their influence and force in the world. The current reality of the sociological social atom can be addressed alongside the earlier experiences.

Role, as Moreno began to conceive it, can be seen as a whole way of being of a person's functioning interactive in the dynamics of a social context. It is capable of useful analysis to uncover a person's motivation, intention, purpose, perceived direction or goal. This requires that the psychodramatic elements will always be considered, not just the position a person has in a system, nor simply the expectations others will take for granted of them. Role will not be limited to the behavioural action nor the emotional state. Role considerations will always take account of what is running the show in a person's heart and at the level of dreams and motivations.