

Interpersonal Therapy and Co-Unconscious States, A Progress Report in Psychodramatic Theory¹

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I. Historical Note

Group psychotherapy and psychodrama have had a similar historical fate. They have had to defend their birthright against the persistent efforts of the psychoanalytic movement to absorb them since I brought them from Vienna to the U.S.A. in 1925.

Group psychotherapy developed for a decade (1925-1935) within the framework of psychiatry and social science, with group structure (sociodynamics, sociometry and microsociology), and the role concept as cornerstones until by 1936 the psychoanalytic intervention began (Renouvier, 1957). This intervention broke the method into two directions, the original direction, "socioanalytic" group psychotherapy and the second direction, "psychoanalytic" group psychotherapy. Since then socioanalysts and psychoanalysts have been up in arms against each other, a conflict which has not yet been resolved.

Psychodrama, with sociodrama and role playing as its subdivisions, remained fairly intact until about 1950. It was again the intervention of psychoanalysts which tried to bring about a schism. This time, however, the schism did not come from the U.S.A. but from France. The "classic" psychodrama was confronted by the "analytic" psychodrama (Anzieu, 1959). The operations are about the same except for different views as to the value of interpretation.

II. Co-Unconscious States and the Function of the "Interpsyche"

The "return to Freud" is a nostalgic reaction of every new generation of psychoanalysts. Whenever a new method arises on the scene they have to make a decision either to accept the new orientation undiluted or to return it to their father, Freud, by adapting it to psychoanalytic theory, at least by giving him lip service. The movement of such a to and fro between extreme anti-Freudism and extreme Freudism can be shown in behalf of every concept of group psychotherapy and psychodrama. The task how (1) to harmonize traumas of the remote past with the living moment, the structure of the here and now, the present constellation of events; (2) to relate the abreactions of the individual organism with the role structure in which it operates; (3) to harmonize ego psychology with role psychology; (4) to combine the dissociative character of transference with the integrative function of tele; (5) to reconcile psychodynamics with sociodynamics; (6) to confront intrapsychic phenomena with interpersonal relations; (7) to harmonize psychological phenomena with a monistic concept of the body, presents great difficulties. Sullivan's theory of interpersonal relations (1938) has added "nothing new" to the classic psychoanalytic situation. That is the reason why he was so easily accepted. My own system of "two-ways" interpersonal relations (1937) which preceded that of Sullivan was bypassed. Now it is generally considered as the core of interpersonal theory.

¹ In *Group Psychotherapy*, 14 (3-4), 234-241 (Sept-Dec., 1961).

Recently it is the theory of the psychoanalytic unconscious which is in a serious crisis. We have no means of proof for the idea that the un-conscious is an "entity" which underlies and dominates all psychic phenomena. We prefer to talk about unconscious "states." The distinction which Freud made between unconscious and preconscious has proven equally unproductive. The "origins" of unconscious states are probably closely allied to the origin of nocturnal dreams. Both can be comprehended as forms of "introverted creativity" (see my "Canon of Creativity" in *Who Shall Survive?*). The individual unconscious (Freud) and the collective unconscious (Jung) have been found insufficient to cover the wide area of interpersonal relations. The individual unconscious is related to the psyche of a single individual. Jung's collective unconscious is universal but void of means of proof, inapplicable to any concrete collectivity facing the therapist. The advances of interpersonal therapy have made it imperative to define and study the phenomena "between" persons and between groups and with this to hypothecate the existence of co-conscious and co-unconscious states. The hypothesis of co-unconscious states has great methodical value; it enables us to study unconscious states within an experimental setting. (See my Psychodrama, Volume II).

The "first" encounter between two individuals who are destined to form an intimate ensemble is the starting point of co-conscious and co-unconscious states. These states gain in significance from encounter to encounter. They are experienced and produced jointly and can, therefore, be only jointly reproduced or re-enacted. A co-conscious or a co-unconscious state can not be the property of one individual only. It is always a common property and can not be reproduced but by a combined effort. If a re-enactment of such co-conscious or co-unconscious state is desired or necessary, that re-enactment has to take place with the help of all partners involved in the event. The logical method of such re-enactment "a deux" or "a plusieurs," is psychodrama. However great the perceptive ability of one partner of the ensemble might be, he can not produce that event alone because both partners have in common their co-conscious and co-unconscious states which are the matrix from which they draw their inspiration and knowledge. Co-conscious and co-unconscious states are phenomena which they have "co"-produced and which operate between partners who live in "intimate" ensembles and can not be substituted by other persons; they are irreplaceable. They are tied together through "encounters"; it is life itself which binds them together and it is the experiences of living which develops between them an "interpsyche," a structured stream of co-conscious and co-unconscious states. The encounters between individuals and the co-conscious or co-unconscious states developed between them are the source from which tele, transference and empathy spring. Their operation within every group setting has been stated by many observers and a consensus has been reached. *Transference dissociates; empathy perceives; tele integrates.*

My experiment with multiple couches (1921) raised the question: how can several individuals, each with a separate unconscious track, communicate on an unconscious level? In order to make such communications plausible we may assume the existence of co-conscious and co-unconscious states. They play an important role in the life of persons who live in intimate contact like father and son, husband and wife, mother and daughter, siblings and twins, lovers and close friends, but also in other intimate ensembles as in work teams, combat teams in war and revolutions, in concentration camps or charismatic religious groups. Being thrown together by social destiny into situations which require rapid communication, co-action and cooperation, such persons must often act not only as individuals each separate from the other, but as an ensemble. Such persons, involved in immediate and often spontaneous and ill-prepared co-action, have to surmount numerous emotional difficulties by confronting

each other. It is not an interaction between unequal partners like in the symbiosis between mother and infant but between two equal partners who are sufficiently mature to challenge each other. It is an "encounter" between two individuals both of whom have developed a self of their own.

III. Development of the Concept of Co-unconscious States

The first time I suspected the existence of co-conscious and co-unconscious states was in my work with spontaneous actors (1921 and 1923). A cast of actors, day by day worked routinely together and had to gain an intuitive perception of how the various co-actors in a "new" fully unrehearsed situation might think, feel or act, so that they could act in conformance with them and produce together a significant scene. I postulated then that the co-players in impromptu productions have to develop a special kind of communication talent which I called "mediale Verständigung." "Sie haben eine Art Feingefühl für die gegenseitigen inneren Vorgänge, eine Gebärde genügt, and oft brauchen Sie einander nicht anzusehen."

The concept of medial understanding was the forerunner of what I call today co-conscious and co-unconscious states. Such a technique of reciprocal comprehension and "interpersonal memory" seemed to make possible astonishing matrimonial psychodramas, husband and wife reaching back into their first encounter and reliving, often with astonishing detail, all their moments of love and suffering, their silent tragedies and their moments of great decision (Moreno, 1923).

We call any mental process co-unconscious if neither of the intimate partners remembers an episode which we are obliged to assume has taken place. Large parts of the inter-psyche are apparently normally co-unconscious.

We call a mental process partly co-unconscious if one member of the intimate ensemble is amnesic of the episode whereas the other member recalls it. Such amnesia can be explained in several ways, N. 1) partner A does not remember because of having been in the position of the actor when the scene took place; partner B remembers because of having been in the position of observer (act-hunger theory in psychodrama). 2) Partner A repressed the scene because it was unpleasant for her to remember. 3) The explanations 1) and 2) may supplement each other.

In the acting out of significant episodes for which both partners are amnesic, they usually begin at a point they both see clearly (co-conscious states). They are guided by vivid "co-enactment pictures." "It was on September 17th, after supper, in the livingroom." Now comes a blank for both and they both begin to explore alternatives. "You were standing." "And you were sitting near the piano—you tore the picture of my mother to pieces." They begin to move around, to act out fragments and then dismiss them until they reach their common track. (Moreno here inserts a lengthy footnote about the mnemonic techniques of a person with an extraordinary memory, as described by the psychologist A. R. Luria.)

The minimum requirement for a quasi-scientific proof that an event has taken place is that there be at least two individuals who have shared in the experience of that event, who can re-enact that event without communicating with each other in advance, that is, without rehearsal. If, for instance, husband A and wife B re-enact a certain scene X in which they have been participant actors as well as participant observers, they may be able to reconstruct that event with a fair degree of competence. We would assume, of course, that in such an experiment they would warm up each other to that recall, they would act it out and not only talk about it.

After they have consciously enacted together an episode which they both remember, they may drift into episodes which they have both partially or entirely forgotten. In the course of such experimentation we have found a number of discrepancies. It is rare that the two partners perceive and re-enact that episode the same way, but there are some pure cases. (Category of pure but separate identity.) In a large number of cases each of the partners re-enacts their recall as well as certain aspects of the event of which the other partner is oblivious. We may say, therefore, that there is a portion a, with which partner A identifies himself; then there is a portion, b, with which individual B identifies himself, neither of them being able to recall the portion of the other (Category of mixed identity). Then there is a third category of relationship, a certain shared episode is not recalled by either of the two partners; in the course of the warm-up and re-enactment they stumble over some fragments and come to an agreement. This happens often to crucial parts of a common experience. (Category of common identity.) Summing up, there are certain episodes which are important to A, certain episodes which are important to B, and there are some important to both.

Our argument is, therefore, if A by himself could not re-enact the entire episode and B could not do so by himself, but if A and B could do it jointly, that it is plausible to postulate co-unconscious states. One may, of course, argue in favor of a different hypothesis, a science of signs (semiosis) : A and B, being intimately related, may have developed in the course of the years a number of signs and symbols which they mutually recognize as meaningful, locus of physical objects, space signals, signs of avoidance, time conditions, sudden turns of the head, facial expressions, sounds and words, or sentences. But these motoric expressions and local signs also may have become a part of their co-unconscious constellations. The two hypotheses can be easily combined and tested. A great deal of research is still necessary to make the hypothesis of co-unconscious states plausible, but it has the advantage that we can 'work in the open with intimate ensembles of various sizes, change our hypotheses and establish an empirical basis for hypothetical construction.

IV. Co-Unconscious States in Social and Cultural Contexts, A Forensic Psychodrama

It has been conceived that co-unconscious states are the result of direct interpersonal experience between intimate ensembles of individuals. But they may be also the result of shared experiences on a social and cultural level. The personal contact of the intimate ensembles is then replaced by indirect, transpersonal or symbolic contact. The familial interpsyche is replaced then by a "cultural interpsyche." The sociodrama of a global group of participants becomes feasible as, for instance, in the case of the recent Eichmann Trial (addressed in the last issue of this journal) in which common experiences shared by people from all walks of life were brought to enactment.

V. General Discussion and Summary

I have observed in the re-enactments, of intimate and collective ensembles a number of rules. The memory of shared experiences differs in the partners. 1) Two or more individuals may supplement each other or be in conflict because one exceeds in visual perception of their common experiences, the other in acoustic or color perception, due to differences in their sensory apparatus. 2) Two or more individuals may supplement one another or be in discord with each other because their psychomotoric senses differ. One exceeds in sensitivity for locomotion clues; for instance, walking downstairs during the re-enactment he remembers that in the actual scene the stairs were curved and not straight. His partner, who was entirely blank for this locomotion clue, now that she sees herself taking part in that episode, is able to

add to it her own. reconstruction; at the bottom of the stairs she bows her head and kneels down in prayer. 3) In the enactment of their future, using the technique of future projection of how they expect to die, they expect that they are going to die together, but he sees the coming death in an explosion, she sees them being victims of an epidemic scourge. Being in agreement or discord as to their "future" is often a clue for a harmonious or maladjusted relationship.

The relationship of co-conscious to co-unconscious states operates in various levels of intensity and depth. In some partners the co-conscious states of common experiences may be relatively high. Partners may have a near-photographic memory for certain events, for instance, for the first encounter, due to an extreme case of clairvoyance for each other. Or it may result from a long life of gradual acceptance, adaptation and integration, so that what they remember they both remember well, and what they hide from each other may have greatly decreased. Then there are partners who, although sharing experiences, have lived practically separate lives. Their range of co-conscious states may be weak and in small numbers. Their range of co-unconscious states may dominate their relationship.

One of the crucial problems in the area of interpersonal and intergroup relations is a physiological one, at least as far as our present knowledge goes. Each individual partner has his own brain which registers all his impressions, including the impressions he assumes his partner to have. What is true about partner A is equally true about partner B, C, D, etc. Each depends upon his own brain. This may be an adequate system for the single individual, but what is missing is an organ of synchronization of the physiological conditions of all the individual brains, brain A, brain B, brain C, brain D, etc., and of their epi-phenomenal counterparts, the brain C, brain D, etc., and of their epi-phenomenal counterparts, the psyches of these individuals. What is missing is a "co-brain," a "mankind brain." The fact that nature has not provided us with a co-brain system, a kind of unifying cerebral physiology of mankind, is probably the reason why sociometrists, sociologists, cyberneticists, anthropologists, religionists, etc., are trying to invent a substitute for such a - brain. The sociogram, the sociomatrix, the automatic calculator, etc., are illustrations of such efforts. The experiments in extra-sensory perception, the training in tele perception and in spontaneity, might eventually in the process of evolution produce that co-brain, centuries or millennia from now. It will look then as if nature has provided us all along with such a synchronization organ. It will be a part of our world system, as well integrated into it as the cerebral cortex in the individual organism.

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Regarding memory, Moreno has a footnote: Recently I read an article by A. R. Luria, "Memory and the Structure of Mental Processes" in *Problems of Psychology* (Numbers 1 & 2,

1960, Pergamon Press, New York City), in which he describes a man endowed with a phenomenal memory. Luria's report has no bearing upon interpersonal relations and "interpersonal memory," as dealt with here. The report concerns the memory processes of a single individual; but the pictorial mnemonic technique the subject used to memorize a text in a language unknown to him (Italian) is akin to the classic psychodramatic technique of acting out in a familiar frame of reference, concretization of life scenes, using the names of people one knows, objects, streets, forms of speech and space and time signals. As we know, our protagonists, by using the most intimate, private denominators of their life, feel exceedingly comfortable in the presentation of their strangest experiences. This man, Shereshevskii, by putting unknown words he has to remember into a vivid personalized network, a la psychodrama, is able to carry them along and to remember them at anytime in the future. Herewith follows one example given by Dr. Luria on page 85 of the abovementioned journal: "The beginning of Dante's 'Divine Comedy' was given to Shereshevskii for memorizing. Slowly, isolating each word, he read through a series of lines. Let us confine ourselves to the first three lines:

Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita
Mi ritrovai per una selva oscura
Che la diritta vis era smarrita.

Here is the technique of memorizing employed by Shereshevskii, recorded directly at the time of the experiment (December 1937) ; the second reproduction being 15 years later:

"I knew a woman called Nel'skaya—a ballerina. I placed her in a corridor (nel) ; alongside her I placed a violinist, he's playing a violin (mezzo) . . . ; then there's some Delhi cigarettes (del) ; next to that I put a fireplace (cammin) ; (di) . . . there's a hand pointing to the door . . . someone says "get out" (nos) . . . a man peeps in through the door . . . gets his nose caught; (tra) he steps over the threshold; there's a child lying there . . . that's vita; (mi) I put a Jew on the scene, he says 'We're nothing to do with this'; (ritro)—a retort, a small transparent tube; (vai) . . . a Jewess runs along shouting 'ai, vai' . . . she runs along and when she gets to the corner of Lubyanskii Street there's father (per) riding in a cab; there's a copper on the corner, standing as straight as the figure 1 (una) ; next to him I put a dais and Sel'va is dancing on it (selva) ; so as not to confuse her with Silva I visualize the stage cracking beneath her and producing the sound of letter "e"; there's a shaft (os) sticking out of the stage and its pointing towards a hen (curs). (Che)—that's perhaps a Chinaman—Che-chen; next to him. I put a woman, a Parisian (la), who becomes Die in German (di) ; (ritta)—that's my assistant Margarita, etc., etc."

This note does not do justice to Dr. Luria's article by any means, it refers only to one aspect of it. The report deserves to be read in its entirety.