

# PSYCHODRAMATIC WORK THROUGH THE SOCIAL PERCEPTUAL ATOM

Centro Zerka T. Moreno

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## PSYCHODRAMATIC WORK THROUGH THE SOCIAL PERCEPTUAL ATOM.

Psychodrama considers man a creative and inter-related being, therefore the therapeutic technique which it proposes works on his creative possibilities as well as on the establishment of links and personal relations.

Dr. Moreno has said that man builds his ego through the different roles he performs and develops. Thus from the psychosomatic roles, on which the family or founding roles and the social roles lean, the process shows several stages until the final structure of the personality is reached when all roles balance.

The complex of roles which mark a personality conforms the cultural atom. This cultural atom has also undergone several changes before its complete structure is reached. From what we call cultural primigenial atom in the matrix of identity –where the psychosomatic roles develop- it evolves into the founding cultural atom in the family matrix –where the founding roles develop- to reach the social cultural atom in the social matrix in which derived or social roles are the ones to develop.

This three cultural atoms form then the individual cultural atom in which one is basis and part of the other. Their development has taken place in the constant interchange of role playing with the complementary roles which significant of the surrounding world play along the evolutive process.

Several creative acts uphold this development. To psychodrama man's first creative act is the passage from intra-uterine life to autonomous life being it the first spontaneous choice between life and death.

This creative and founding act will be the first of a succession of creative acts which will take place along life performed not in a void but together with and helped by the "other".

To each stage of the development of the cultural atom corresponds a social real atom formed by those individuals who play the necessary complementary roles. The perception of this individual real atom will crystallize in the perceptual social atom through which man will then establish links and relationships with his fellow men.

Psychodrama to reach its therapeutic end and must work on this social perceptual atom to achieve a modification as well as an enrichment of the actual roles, pertaining to the cultural atom.

## CONSTRUCTION OF THE CULTURAL ATOM

### *PRIMIGENIAL CULTURAL ATOM*

The primigenial cultural atom corresponds to the identity matrix. Dr. Moreno states that the matrix is a place of happenings in continuous modification and change, a locus. It is

# PSYCHODRAMATIC WORK THROUGH THE SOCIAL PERCEPTUAL ATOM

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*03 de febrero de 2007*

in this matrix where the psychosomatic roles start their development towards their ultimate end of differentiation.

From the creative moment of birth when a completely dependent structure of corporal behaviour is modified the child makes use of this spontaneity to structure his psychosomatic roles directly related to each one of this physiological functions.

Growth is a large chain of creative acts which leads to independence.

When a child breaths for the first time he adequates himself to his new environment, he institutes through this creative act a new way of being.

With the founding act of his first breath the role of breather is established together with the basis attitude which allows the change to take place.

When in the five stages described by Dr. Moreno the child develops his role of eater in direct relation with his defecator role he experiences with the basic attitudes of reception and giving and their derived ones of acceptance-rejection, fulfillment-opposition, communication-isolation.

The possibility to discover the "other" is offered by his role of contactor which will inform him of the presence or absence of those who surround him. From the structure of this role will follow the attitude of tenderness-violence with all derived implications.

The role of cenesthetic preceptor will be the basis of the acknowledgement of his own reactions before each situation which may arise especially when faced with fear and protection.

The kinesic role will give the child the opportunity to try his independence starting with the lightest facial muscular movements to deambulation.

The sensory psychosomatic roles introduce him into the world. The sighter's role will discover space; that which surrounds him as well as the one which separates him from the "other". This role complements the one of eater and follows the same five evolutive stages.

The roles of hearer, smeller and taster are different approximations, with them the world penetrates the human being with outside elements which he must codify for himself.

In some roles the founding act of their emergence and the final settlement of the function coincide in time (breather role). In others a greater distance separates the founding act from the full development (eater-defecator). The remaining roles are definitely instituted after a long search when the development of the cultural atom is consolidated.

Roles start their institution with founding acts which take place in the identity matrix and complete their development in the following matrixes.

# PSYCHODRAMATIC WORK THROUGH THE SOCIAL PERCEPTUAL ATOM

**Centro Zerka T. Moreno**

*03 de febrero de 2007*

Mother and son as an indivisible whole constitute the identity matrix where both form a unit, the mother's breast and the child's mouth are a unit in the act of nursing. The physical link makes the function possible and offers the ground for the founding acts of the psychosomatic roles. It is known as the "zone". The process develops in five stages from indifferenciation to roll reversal.

The primigenial cultural atom is established in the identity matrix. Its structure is set when the psychosomatic roles-upheld by the auxiliary ego (the mother) of the social real atom-emerge and begin their development. The maternal roles of the social real atom – formed by the mother and those who surround her-offer the necessary complementation for that development.

In the indifferenciated structure formed by mother and child the father plays an important sustaining function. This function will play a relevant role in the original cultural atom.

## *ORIGINAL CULTURAL ATOM*

The original cultural atom pertains to the family matrix. The roles which we call founding or original roles are structured in this matrix (son, mother, father).

Their development will be helped by two unreplaceable elements: the basic attitudes acquired during the establishment of the primigenial cultural atom and the structure of the social real atom formed by the family, in particular the parents.

The concept of "zone" –a physical link in the matrix of identity- will pass to the relations and affective links in the family matrix.

The process of development of the role of "son" starts with the psychosomatic roles. Its founding takes place with the child's awareness of his mother's complementary role. He discovers here the existence of the other, of the mediate and subsequently the possibility to imagine, basis of thought. He recognizes his parents's existence different from his own and later will see himself in the mirror.

There is not a unique founding act but successive and continued founding acts with the child step by step creates himself always in relation with his parents.

If the parent's attitudes are coherent and do not interrupt their sequence the role of son will spontaneously and creatively emerge. The outlines of the roles of mother and father will be clear to him and he will learn to play them. Through the reversal of roles he will later perform these roles in relation to another who will have his own role of son.

An original role receives several stimulus which allow its development. The correct basis attitudes of the complementary roles which form the environment are of the utmost importance. They will remain as a continuum attached to that experience which the primeval cultural atom has offered.

# PSYCHODRAMATIC WORK THROUGH THE SOCIAL PERCEPTUAL ATOM

**Centro Zerka T. Moreno**

*03 de febrero de 2007*

The basis attitudes acquired in the identity matrix will allow the correct assumption of the new roles which will develop in the continent family matrix.

On the contrary the deformed and/or contradictive basis attitudes of those who play the complementary roles will make it difficult for the child to place himself in relation to others, to recognize those who surround him and the perception of the complementary roles will be hindered. The result will be a distorted structure of his own roles in his cultural atom and in his tele process.

The continent family matrix reinforces all basic attitudes and at the same time upholds and sustains them to allow their unfolding.

An adequate family matrix may fill in the gaps of an incontinent identity matrix and complement the formation of basic attitudes while the development of the original roles is taking place.

If both matrixes suffer lacks and difficulties the psychosomatic roles as well as the original will be deeply damaged.

In those cases where a correct identity matrix is followed by an incorrect family matrix or vice versa psychotherapy will work on the social matrix and correct the malformation of the original roles.

The armonic combination of the three matrixes generates the emergence of correct roles which will enable the individual an appropriate and successful handling of each situation during his life.

We call this atom “founding or original” atom because it is here where personality conduct patterns are set.

Moreno maintains that the role is a cultural conduct unit.

The roles developed in the family matrix and which belong to the original cultural atom are the conduct units which together with the family culture offered by the social real atom which the family constitutes- will insert the individual in the social matrix in an original, unique and personal way.

## *CULTURAL SOCIAL ATOM*

The social cultural atom pertains to the social matrix. It is formed by the social or derived roles. Some of the roles fulfill the three stages of development: learning, assumption and creation, others stop in a semi-development and those which stay as potential roles need encouragmen to emerge.

The emergence and later development of social roles is based in their play and interchange with their complementary roles played by the significants of the sorrounding world.

# PSYCHODRAMATIC WORK THROUGH THE SOCIAL PERCEPTUAL ATOM

**Centro Zerka T. Moreno**

*03 de febrero de 2007*

The process leans on the primigenial and founding atoms already constituted when the social roles –which they support- are formed.

The social cultural atom is subject to several modifications which may either enlarge or diminish it according to the different social real atoms of this environment.

The insertion in the successive real social atoms will depend on the individual cultural atom as well as on the particular links developed in the preceeding matrixes where basic attitudes, founding roles and the ones acquired played their part.

An incoherence in the identity matrix checks –as we have said- the development of a role therefore it will hinder relations in the social matrix.

The social roles must revert to the basic attitudes established by psychosomatic roles to create themselves. From the original roles on which personality is founded they will receive all those family cultural elements which will allow their own conduct patterns and individual creativity. The original roles which emerge with the discovery of the “other” and the possibility of communication give to the social roles the necessary elements to establish each new relation or link.

To the unavoidable dependence of the social roles from the psychosomatic and original or founding roles is due their name of “derived”.

The structure of the definite cultural atom will be reached not as an adding of parts but as a complex in permanent communication and complementation.

## *INDIVIDUAL CULTURAL ATOM*

The individual cultural atom is the unit formed by the three cultural atoms already describe. It is the result of their integration in a whole where each one is imbricated as part of an only body.

Psychodramatic technique begins its contact through any of the atoms and one or all roles are played.

At a given moment the work may center on a social role but while correcting its structure there will also be a modification of a basic attitude acquired during the establishment of the psychosomatic roles, the situation could also be the reverse.

If through psychodramatic work there is a positive modification of the social perceptual atom a therapeutic psychodramatic act or a catharsis of integration will have taken place.

The work must be carried on from the dramatic possibilities of the social perceptual atom.

# PSYCHODRAMATIC WORK THROUGH THE SOCIAL PERCEPTUAL ATOM

**Centro Zerka T. Moreno**

*03 de febrero de 2007*

## *PERCEPTUAL SOCIAL ATOM*

The perceptual social atom is the awareness of all the significant which have peaped and individual's relation world. It is build up on the perceptions and experiences of each of the social real atoms.

Each of the cultural atoms (primigenial, etc.) bases its structure on the roles played complementary by those who constitute the social real atom of each matrix and on the possibility of interchange.

In the matrix of identity the cultural primigenial atom corresponds to a social real atom in wich the principal character is the mother –fundamental auxiliary ego- or those which accidentally fulfill her role.

The correct, partial or distorted perception of his mother by the child will depend on the continece of his matrix and the tele possibilities of them both.

According to the tele process the perceptual social atom will come closer to or farther from the social real atom.

To a greater identity between both atoms will correspond a greater number of correct roles and the new links to be established will be of a more spontaneous and creative nature. Thus neither distorted perceptions nor defectively structured links will be transmitted to the new social roles.

The social perceptual atom will be the sum of each of the matrixe's real atoms inset by role playing as partial perceptual atoms and the new patterns for the establishment of links acquired with each situation resolved.

The partial social perceptual atom of the identity matrix will be enriched by the one corresponding to the family matrix and both will be the basic for the perceptual to be developed in the social matrix which offers a continued evolution and change.

Then, the confluence of the successive partial perceptual atoms of the matrixes constitutes the social perceptual atom.

The more or less healthier links that the individual has established in the imbricated net formed by the real atoms described will be the accumulated experience which will superimpose itself to the correct or incorrect perception of new significant with the result of positive, negative or neutral patterns of links.

For each link there will be a particular warming up which will awake the role, start the search of the complementary role and move to the pertinent action.

In any new social atom which may face him the individual will play a role and according to his apprehension of that role in his cultural atom he will establish his links and search for the one or many complementary roles.

# **PSYCHODRAMATIC WORK THROUGH THE SOCIAL PERCEPTUAL ATOM**

**Centro Zerka T. Moreno**

*03 de febrero de 2007*

When a conflict is made apparent in a social real atom it is imperative to investigate if the difficulty is due to the insertion in that atom or the incorrect structure of a role during the process described above.

The therapeutic group forms a social real atom for each of its integrants. Roles and links which happen inside it constitute a process in time in continuous evolution where a role warms up another and a link may modify the total structure. It offers the opportunity to modify at a sociodramatic or group level, or at a psychodramatic or personal level in the here and now the long process described.

When a protagonist is chosen and his psychodrama is worked on by the investigation and subsequent corrections in his perceptual atom we modify the structure of links and roles of the group, the sociodramatic ubication and at the same time clarify a psychosomatic, original or social conflictive role or the protagonist.

The protagonist selected through group warming up will be the one individual in whose social perceptual atom the structure of his links echoes to the group's here and now. This protagonist will offer the possibility to work psychodramatically on a determined conflictive link.

The character on the scene will always belong to the social perceptual atom of the protagonist. If its perception has been distorted or partialized the psychodramatic work will endeavour to correct the distortion and reach a more complete understanding. The work will be on three levels: the imaginary, the immediate, including corporal experience, and the symbolic.

This possibility of a new structure will exclusively be attained by the understanding and playing of what role of his perceptual social atom which placed him in the dramatic here and now of the group.

When the psychodramatic session achieves a positive evolution in the cultural atom and the correction of the social perceptual atom it becomes a true creative act because it modifyies in a positive sense not only the protagonist who is playing but his surrounding environment.

## **THE SESSION OF PSYCHODRAMA**

First stage in a session of psychodrama

A warming up is a process of preparation for a determined psychic or physical act.

Dr. Moreno says that it is not a stage with beginning and end in a fixed lapse of time but that is present before, during and after the act for which it was necessary.

There is an individual preparation of the protagonist and a group preparation of each of the members of the group, these processes will take their own particular form during the dramatization.

# PSYCHODRAMATIC WORK THROUGH THE SOCIAL PERCEPTUAL ATOM

**Centro Zerka T. Moreno**

*03 de febrero de 2007*

The first period in the warming up will be the search and investigation of both processes. In a periodical group there is a deep inquiry into the actual here and now, a detailed story of the current individual situation and the group's position.

The function of a warming up is to make possible the dramatic play. Its highest level will be reached with the emergence of an individual or group protagonist. If as a group emergent he represents the meeting point of the individual and group warming up he will be the link between them and allow the dramatic act of this conjunction.

When a director prepares and starts a warming up he may plan to reach this conjunction by two paths:

1) Giving priority to the group situation by selecting elements for the warming up which may facilitate its expression. In this case his work will be to direct a sociometric selection which will make clear the links and affective climate of the whole group. This warming up will then be centered on the group and will flow into a group dramatization which will point to the group's problems. In the dramatic play one or more members may be protagonists of the conjunction group-individual. Even if the playing up is apparently mediated only by one or some members of the group it really represents the work of all.

2) The selection of a protagonist when the director prefers to induce the warming up by introspective techniques, dramatic plays, probing of the individual situation, making it evident and explicit, etc. will lead the group to select between the many proposals one or more protagonists but individually. In this selection it is convenient the complete group participation. It will lead to a dramatic play enacted by a protagonist but shared by the group.

The warming up of the group will not disappear, it will continue in all and each one of the members even if it is not explicit, while selecting the protagonist it coexists and will emerge through the sociometric selection in links and roles.

The role of group emergent will be taken by the individual for whom the sociometric situation is charged of a greater significance due to the coincidence between the given situation and his own constellation of roles and links.

It is on the structure of fundamental roles where a really effective dramatic action and a catharsis of integration takes place based on the work on these roles in the second stage of the psychodrama session. A correct warming up will make this second stage possible.

## *SECOND STAGE IN A SESSION OF PSYCHODRAMA*

During this second stage of the session of psychodrama a sequence of dramatizations lead to the creative act which will produce a positive change not only in the protagonist selected but in his surrounding world.

# PSYCHODRAMATIC WORK THROUGH THE SOCIAL PERCEPTUAL ATOM

**Centro Zerka T. Moreno**

*03 de febrero de 2007*

This act is insert in a long psychotherapeutic process made possible by the actual sociometric net of the group prepared by the previous acts which have warmed up links and roles to be developed in the group process.

The dramatic situation emerges when a role of the protagonist warmed up by the group process revives a conflictive link established in his social perceptual atom and that actually superimposed to his here and now prevents him a correct relationship to others.

The object of the dramatic play enacted in this second stage will be to modify through a long elaboration of the link and complementary roles of the social perceptual atom a role insert in the cultural atom of the protagonist.

The dramatic play must then follow a psychodramatic program in an organized sequence of dramatic situations.

- 1) Indetermined search of the role which begins in the specific and unspecific warming up and flows into the contract.
- 2) Determined search of the role during the first sequence.
- 3) Delimitation of the conflictive role and his original founding role in the following sequences.
- 4) Reversal of roles; acknowledgement and understanding of the complementary roles in the fundamental dramatic sequences.
- 5) Creative assumption of one's own role.

The psychodramatic program must therefore enclose these five periods.

## *PSYCHODRAMATIC CONTRACT OR INDETERMINED SEARCH OF THE ROLE*

Questions and answers show the way to establish through the dramatic play to be enacted the conflictive link or role in the social here and now of the protagonist. From this role we shall endeavour to find the conflictive founding role and at the same time we shall have an actual anchorage that gives sense to the dramatic sequence.

The contract makes clear some points which form its structure:

- 1) Why are we going to start a dramatic play? 2) What is it going to be? 3) What is the actual conflictive situation? 4) How does he feel in this situation? 5) With whom is this role played? 6) Where does the action take place? 7) When does it take place?

This contract will provide us with a wide look on the protagonist's situation, a knowledge of what he considers is his place in it, his desire for change and his participation in that change, his degree of conscious acknowledgement of the conflict. We shall search the warmed up role indeterminedly and single it out from other similar ones. The protagonist will have an active participation in this search.

# PSYCHODRAMATIC WORK THROUGH THE SOCIAL PERCEPTUAL ATOM

**Centro Zerka T. Moreno**

*03 de febrero de 2007*

Sometimes the protagonist will give only a slight indication, a grimace, a body movement, we shall then look for the answers in a psychosomatic role of the identity matrix which we will unveil in the immediate world.

The director must be constantly aware of the three levels in the encounter: the body level, the imaginary and the symbolic. Their antagonism or coincidence will provide valuable information for the selection of dramatic clues.

## *FIRST SEQUENCE-DETERMINED SEARCH OF THE ROLE*

Once the contract has been established the dramatic play will begin. The dramatic ambiantation must be carefully treated, it fulfills two functions:

1) The specific warming up. 2) Information with each small detail.

Where, when, chronological time, temperature, furniture, colours, textures, etc., must be deeply investigated.

The ambiantation once achieved will offer elements which will fit like in a puzzle with those explicit in the contract and make evident the dramatic clue for the second sequence.

During the first scene the complementary roles, the links and ways to establish them, the creativity-spontaneity of all roles played in any level, etc. will outline the warmed up and conflictive role.

When its delimitation is made clear, from it, we shall search for the original or founding role in the family matrix which hinders its correct exercise.

## *SECOND AND THIRD SEQUENCES: DELIMITATION OF THE CONFLICTIVE ROLE AND ITS ORIGINAL OR FOUNDING ONE.*

This dramatic sequence marks the emergence of the original role which belongs to the family matrix.

In the fundamental sequences of the dramatic play we shall look for the conflictive nuclear scene. This scene will allow us to recreate on the stage the situation or situations which established the role with its determined characteristics. The conflictive nuclear scene is a dramatic structure result of several scenes real or unreal, which condensed in this dramatic moment permit us to investigate, clarify and modify the role.

In this sequence there is a deepening of the conflict, constrained feelings, loves, hates, etc., are freely expressed in all the roles played.

Therapeutic psychodrama commences here and once faced with the conflictive nuclear scene the search ends and comprehension begins.

# PSYCHODRAMATIC WORK THROUGH THE SOCIAL PERCEPTUAL ATOM

**Centro Zerka T. Moreno**

03 de febrero de 2007

## *FOURTH SEQUENCE, REVERSAL OF ROLES AND COMPREHENSION FROM THE COMPLEMENTARY ROLES.*

This sequence will be played from the reversal of roles. From the complementary role all those conflictive elements hidden to the moment will be discovered and reinstated as parts of one's self.

This sequence is fundamental to psychodramatic therapeutic. We have laboriously searched the conflictive role, we have found it in the three matrixes, we have defined its characteristics. We know that it has developed in permanent relations with the complementary roles played by the significant of the environment which form its social perceptual atom. We also know that in this atom all encumbrances experienced by those who played these roles have remained deeply engraved, with particular characteristics and dark sides on the total perception of the role.

Work during this sequence tends to clarify and modify in the social perceptual atom of the protagonist these dark sides, so that they do not shadow the establishment of new links in his actual social real atom and at the same time his and the group's here and now.

This moment marks the climax of the dramatic process. There is no catharsis of integration without this integrating sequence of those elements of the protagonist which to the moment had been beyond his comprehension. There is here a true possibility of change. This change will be achieved through the protagonist's personal comprehension and not through an exterior interpretation of the director.

## *FIFTH SEQUENCE. ASSUMPTION OF THE ROLE*

The closing scene in an enactment is a recreation of the first scene –that conflictive situation enacted at the start when the roles of the social matrix were laboriously played-based on the acquired psychodramatic experience.

After the dramatic work has cleared the conflictive nuclear scene the protagonist is asked to recreate the initial scene so that he may enact it constructively. This recreation will be the first creative play from the role we have worked upon.

This scene gives to the protagonist an anchorage in the present which will allow him to leave the "as if" and assume for the first time on the stage his own role creatively and spontaneously as the ghosts which hunt him disappear.

## *THIRD STAGE IN A SESSION OF PSYCHODRAMA*

The third stage in a session of psychodrama is centered in the group, it is the analysis or sharing.

The dramatic play has finished, the protagonist has shared with the group his personal myth, his drama, his internal ghosts, his roles, etc., the group will be now the bridge to

# PSYCHODRAMATIC WORK THROUGH THE SOCIAL PERCEPTUAL ATOM

**Centro Zerka T. Moreno**

*03 de febrero de 2007*

link his imaginary world and his real relations with the people who live in his surrounding world.

The group will bring him back to its here and now, will insert his in itself and give back at the same time all the experiences, sensations, feelings, etc., that the protagonists work reawoke in its members.

Through those who played the auxiliary roles or constituted the audience the protagonist will understand that he is part of a whole and not an isolated being.

While sharing each of the members of the group tells the protagonist the personal experience awakened by the dramatization. This is a key moment to achieve the unification of the group in the new sociometric situation to emerge, different from the previous one. In this new situation several psychodramas to be developed later will be evident.

The three stages in a sessions of psychodrama described are then the therapeutic instrument with which we work towards the correction of the social perceptual atom of the individual so that he may be able to assume his roles with spontaneity and creativity after having been correctly structured.

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