

INTERGENERATIONAL WORK AND THE SOCIOMETRY OF THE SOUL

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Jacob Moreno and Bert Hellinger: The Background

Jacob Moreno, the founder of psychodrama, and Bert Hellinger, the developer of Systemic Constellation Work, are the two giants in the experiential therapy and learning fields. Each has expansive theoretical structures, with wide-ranging implications. Both have international organizations with far-reaching influence.

Jacob Moreno's work has had many offshoots, influencing other fields and endeavors. Those carrying psychodrama on in its classical form apply it mostly as a group process, either in an action-based group psychotherapy, or action education in a group format. Moreno, the grandfather of all subsequent action work going back to the 1920's, has three principal theoretical structures worth mentioning: spontaneity theory, role theory, and sociometry, these three remaining the principal frameworks for further study/development since his original experimentation.

Hellinger, as the newer giant in experiential work, has experimented with his work since the latter 1970s, following Moreno's death, using constructs quite comparable:

- 1) The intergenerational flow of creative love, (an energy process comparable to Spontaneity, also connected with the creative process, at its most biological and physiological origin in procreation itself)
- 2) Representation, (contrasted with role reversal and the process of role development in auxiliary work)
- 3) The network of *positionings* (an action sociometric matrix of interrelationships within a social network or system, indicative of 'psychological currents,' seen in the distances the auxiliaries are placed from each other, and the direction each auxiliary or *representative*, faces). This network he calls a "constellation."

Like the earlier Moreno, they are constructs developed phenomenologically from what is seen to happen repeatedly in experimental action. Watching a systemic constellation, particularly one focusing on the family, reminds the psychodramatist of Moreno's social atom, which he defines as the small nucleus of relationships around every individual (*Who Shall Survive?*, 1953). Although Moreno has a different idea about who belongs to his social atom than Hellinger has for his "family constellation," they are still quite comparable, especially since "family" for Hellinger has a broader connotation than just the individual's biological relations. In fact it is close enough the psychodramatist can use psychodramatic language to describe a family constellation, understanding Hellinger's action process within a psychodrama context. When I witnessed my first family constellation, facilitated by the German psychiatrist Albrecht Mahr in Minnesota, in 2000, I was sure he had to know Moreno, as I could predict 75 percent of his interventions from my knowledge of psychodrama. I was stunned to learn afterward, he knew nothing about psychodrama.

So while it becomes possible to understand Hellinger's work within the psychodramatic framework, the reverse is not true. It is not as feasible for a trained systemic constellation facilitator to comprehend what is going on in a psychodrama from a systemic framework.* Hellinger's systemic work can even be seen from a psychodramatic context to be simply an expansion on Moreno's work. As I have said before, in other places, I believe if Moreno had lived a couple decades more, he himself would have come up with what Bert Hellinger did, out of implications already in his own work, in particular his *telic relationships* and *sociometric networks*.

*Though I have found that while facilitating a family constellation, certain techniques from psychodrama can be added, from time to time, primarily soliloquy and what I term "position reversal," a variation on our role reversal. Such additions can even improve that process. These techniques are unknown to Systemic Constellation facilitators, most of whom know little of Moreno or psychodrama. Most people who are drawn to Hellinger have never been exposed to experiential work of any kind.

Ursula Franke, one of Hellinger's internationally known protégés, sees that his experiential work has roots in Moreno's action work, particularly Moreno's contribution of spatial representations of relationships (*In My Mind's Eye, 2003*). I see Hellinger's roots most particularly in Moreno's social atom, when set up in action.

I have asked Franke whether Hellinger at all recognized that his work had been built atop Moreno's action sociometry. Her response is that she didn't think he was *conscious* of Moreno's precedent. Hellinger has talked and written extensively about the myriad of influences on him, but has not mentioned Moreno. At times there have been rumors he knows psychodrama, but that may only be from inference, because his action work looks so much like psychodrama.

The idea of depicting relationships using spatial distances could have come from the family sculptures of Virginia Satir, whose work Hellinger claims to know, but it still looks much more like action sociometry than family sculpture. Franke concludes Hellinger picked up on it without having direct familiarity with its source in Moreno, that knowledge being 'out there' already in the 'knowing field' of what had been already developed. That is to say, in the increasingly complicated matrix of human knowledge, Hellinger happened upon it through the network of *what was already known*, without any particular knowledge of its origin. Hellinger has never seen himself as an innovator, like J.L. Moreno, instead seeing himself as a synthesizer, knowing where he got most of his ideas, attributing them to whomever he knew first developed them, yet still not necessarily knowing where all his ideas originated.

Jacob Moreno and Bert Hellinger: Similarity and Contrast

Both Moreno and Hellinger are interested in the interconnections clients have with the significant others in their life. Both feel that our difficulties emerge out of our relationships, so those relationships should then be reflected in the onstage sociometric matrix. Both their clients set up auxiliaries for those relationships onstage to reflect the distance between the client and each auxiliary, the aim being to discover where in one's relationships difficulties lie. Both therapists share the view that a resolution of a client's problems will entail needed changes in the configuration onstage. For both, the network of significant others onstage will need to be rearranged either to effect or reflect solutions for the clients' problems. The difference will be only in the path they each use to reach that point.

When working with hospitalized patients, I used Moreno's social atom in order to get a quick snapshot of the inpatient's world, finding out with whom that patient had the most pressing unresolved issues, then developing a treatment plan accordingly. The model I always used, in an action inpatient group, was the *psychological* social atom developed by Moreno's students Carl and Sharon Hollander. I asked patients to set up auxiliaries onstage to represent the crucial people in their life, i.e., the smallest number of those who were needed to effect social equilibrium in their life. To make sure the patients didn't forget or suppress critical people, I would ask each one, after placing their chosen auxiliaries onstage, the following question: Would anyone in your life be upset knowing you hadn't represented them on your stage?

Whoever else came to mind, I would have them add those persons to the configuration. Then the protagonist would take their place in the center of the configuration. It became easy, then, for everyone in the group to get a view of the protagonist's world, seeing the distances between the protagonist and auxiliaries, seeing the way the auxiliaries have been placed, even sculpted into position by the protagonist. This became the way for the protagonists to show others their perception of their social world. In the next stage of action the intensity of the tele, of the psychological currents between the protagonist and his auxiliaries became obvious, as I conducted role reversals between the protagonist and each auxiliary. This is how the social atom became filled out with each of the personalities, revealing the stances each auxiliary took toward the protagonist at the present stage of life. As the protagonist took the center of his world again, I would have him close his eyes, and listen to the messages from each of the auxiliaries repeated again, one by one, in order to assess which auxiliary (and issue) he needed to deal with first.

Hellinger also uses an onstage picture of one's relationships as a diagnostic tool, revealing the underlying sociometric issues, as well as the intensity of feelings amongst them. In Hellinger's constellation work, however, the auxiliaries are placed onstage on a different criterion than that mentioned above, to get at the

feelings between not only the client and each of his significant others, but the feelings each auxiliary has toward all the others, offering more of a three-dimensional look. Henceforth I will refer to this criterion for placement as the Hellinger criterion.

The criterion tries to go beyond what the protagonist perceives about his or her auxiliaries, to more elusive, subconscious interrelationships amongst all the significant others. The work is now dependent upon the intuition of the auxiliaries. Instead of using a role reversal process to gather information about what is going on between the protagonist and auxiliaries, this process relies on the intuition of the auxiliaries to determine whatever information is necessary. The intuition is derived from their positioning--where the auxiliaries are placed, which way they face. No knowledge of the personalities is needed, since what is being sought is that which lies beneath the protagonist's current perception of his auxiliaries. So no role reversals are necessary on this criterion. Auxiliaries rely instead on the telic interplay, the psychological currents emerging from the 'energy field' created onstage. So in order to establish that energy field onstage, the Hellinger criterion requires protagonists to place auxiliaries onstage according to the intuition of the moment, not their perception of the way it is. The specific aim is to get at what lies underneath, in the soul, so to speak.

Hellinger use the same matrix of interrelationships to resolve the issues that the matrix reveals. Either the director can *change* positionings onstage to effect a resolution; or he can allow the process to unfold on its own, with auxiliaries following their inner impulses to move about onstage, basically in silence, until a resolution is 'felt.' Hellinger's experience during the past 30 years setting the stage up this way is that the resolution needs to be felt by all the auxiliaries onstage to effect a lasting resolution. His view is that, until the whole system feels at peace with the change, the process cannot effect a permanent shift, and there will remain a tendency for the protagonist's problem to return.

My thesis is that psychodramatists can use much of Hellinger's systemic constellation work within a psychodramatic context. Constellation work offers us a further expansion on what we already know about spontaneity, role, sociometry, and tele. In this shorter paper, however, I will use psychodrama language to describe what happens in an action (psychological) social atom when you add this new criterion for placement: the Hellinger criterion. It is not a 'perfect' fit, but close enough to be very useful to directors of psychodrama.

The Hellinger Criterion

Jacob Moreno's social atom is a way to depict a protagonist's perceptual picture of their relationship to their most significant others, including emotional distances of the protagonist with each, and, *to a limited degree*, their emotive relationships with each other. Explored in action, Moreno places the protagonist in the center of the stage, for an established point of reference, but it also indicates Moreno's world view, namely his therapeutic goal for the protagonist, that the individual take the center of their own universe.

Hellinger, on the other hand, invites the protagonist to place the significant others in his life on a different, non-perceptual criterion. The aim of the exploration is to uncover what lies underneath the protagonist's perceptual world, at a more intuitive, subconscious, soul level. He wants to know what the *unconscious* picture is of those 'telic' currents interacting in the protagonist's social network. He is curious not only about what is in the protagonist's soul, but in the auxiliaries' soul as well. Hellinger believes that in every system there exists a collective unconscious, which can be fleshed out, and represented in action, onstage. (In Moreno's early talk of 'telic relations' within 'sociometric networks,' they are loaded with a myriad of psychological currents. He was well aware of the mystery of our underlying connectedness. But as time went on, he would reduce his concept of "tele" to the more measurable categories of positive, negative, and neutral tele. Linnea Carlson-Sabelli recognized the problems inherent in categorizing tele, when she raised the question of what you do with "ambivalence." But it was not that Moreno's understanding of tele, or the complexity of psychological currents within a social network changed any, when he started categorizing. It was more that, being ahead of his time, but nonetheless a creature of it, Moreno felt the needed to put something forward acceptable within scientific circles.)

Hellinger has returned to Moreno's original intuition, to take a look at the whole sociometric network of the

protagonist, then to make a protagonist of the whole system as well. He believes he has found away to bring the underlying telic interplay alive in action, through the newer criterion he uses to have protagonists position their auxiliaries onstage.

Like Moreno, Hellinger sees systems of interrelationships as significant at different levels: national, corporate, family (or social atom) level. Beneath those systems is what he calls the collective or common soul, belonging to us in whatever various groupings we have in life. His attempt is to bring the collective unconscious alive onstage, whether working within a small context, like that of the protagonist's community of significant others, or a multi-national corporation. (This latter is a growing arena for work in Systemic Constellation circles.)

Hellinger has the protagonist place auxiliaries for himself and his significant others--not according to his conscious perception, but his intuition of the moment. The protagonist is 'stuck' only because he cannot see clearly what is going on beneath his perceptions, his perceptions insufficient to resolve his problems. So the protagonist chooses auxiliaries from a group to take various roles, including someone (a double) for himself. Those chosen are then asked to stand. The protagonist positions them onstage in the following, specific way: with the chosen auxiliaries standing, the protagonist goes behind each one, taking hold of their shoulders; then, looking down to the floor, he trusts his intuition and moves each one across the stage, to locate where it onstage feels most 'right' at this moment. Allow yourself to be surprised where you place each one. Do not worry about making sense of where you place them. I might add, as a footnote, that in this intuitive way of placing auxiliaries, protagonists seldom will place themselves in the middle of the configuration. Protagonists seldom do *actually experience* themselves at the center of their universe. What is more, after the protagonist places a 'double' to represent him- or herself, on this criterion, the protagonist withdraws from the stage to join the audience, and watch the subsequent action. The reason is clear: the protagonist's perception of the issue must be sidelined to look underneath at the common soul.

Hellinger has experimented with setting up *our* psychological social atom this way since the latter 1970's, after Moreno's death. Perhaps, not realizing where he got this method, he doesn't *actually know* this is what he's doing, but it is. There are at times variances over which significant others are to be positioned onstage between a family constellation and the psychological social atom, but otherwise it feels quite the same. So, for the psychodrama director, there is now an additional choice in how one has the protagonist sets up the social atom, namely, the Hellinger criterion.

**What situations would make this criterion a wise choice?
When is it wise to use the Hellinger criterion?**

When a protagonist repeatedly works on the same issue in psychodrama, each time having positive results, but being unable to hold onto the change long, it might be because the catharsis needs to have happened in an earlier *status* and *locus nascendi*; in other words, in a prior generation. Moreno and Hellinger both have found that healing lasts better and longer when achieved at its source. Now, using Hellinger's criterion, it can be more easily searched for in a past generation, especially when there is a sense that the same patterns have been repeated from one generation to the next. When I see a daughter have issues with her mother, I always inquire as to how her mother related to her mother (i.e., her maternal grandmother). A protagonist might not have thought of that before, and it may come as quite a surprise that the protagonist's issue is the same, or comparable to that of their parent. In this case, it is wise to put not only a female protagonist and her mother on stage, but the grandmother as well. It may be that the great-grandmother also needs to be put up there, because the issue of a protagonist's relationship to her mother may have sprung not from her individual life, but her intergenerational history. Anne Ancelin Schutzenberger, the well-respected French psychodramatist (*The Ancestor Syndrome, 1998*), acknowledges this *intergenerational patterning*, and incorporates it within her psychodramatic work.

A second situation making it advisable to use the Hellinger criterion to set up a psychological social atom is when *a known traumatic event* stems from the past-- either in the present *or* a prior generation, hampering the free flow of spontaneous love from one generation to the next. If anyone in a previous generation was affected by a traumatic event, without having healed afterward, there is less spontaneity, less love available to shower onto the children in the next generation. A traumatic event can be loss of a child; war casualty;

or a tragic accident leaving someone dead, disabled or paralyzed; a suicide or murder; and either a grave injustice or an enslavement, to mention a few common ones. It can as well be that one of our forebearer's love for his family got distracted by an affair. Or, not having gotten over a love prior to marriage, one was not available to either their spouse or children. When our family histories reel from traumas that did not get healed, or are riddled with *unfulfilled loves*, such things can affect the protagonist's life, whether he or she is aware of those connections or not.

Hellinger believes 70 percent of the problems we carry are not really ours, but have been passed down to us from past generations. When such events *become known*, it may be wise to place on stage the victim or perpetrator of a traumatic event, maybe both. When known to have put distance between ones' parents or grandparents, the liaison, or 'pined for' love, can likewise be put up. Hellinger's family constellation is mostly made up of one's biological relationships, but can also consist of those who have *most impacted the family* from outside, in this or a prior generation, so they can also belong to our social atom. The death of a child, an aborted baby, a war casualty, a past suicide, a murderer and/or victim, a former lover or past affair-- all these can be placed onstage, if only to test for any 'telic interplay' taking place between them and others in the psychological social atom. If no energetic connections arise with these other auxiliaries onstage, they can be withdrawn. But it is important when attempting to access a deeper subconscious level, one's "common soul," to test the telic interplay to find out their relevance to one's current issues.

Here is a list of events and people who can affect us, from our own generation or previous generations:

- 1) *Unexpected* deaths, never sufficiently *grieved*, including child losses, stillbirths, miscarriages and abortions. Deaths by murder, suicide, tragic accident or war are included.
- 2) Chronic *mental illnesses, disabilities* and *addictions* in the family history.
- 3) *Rapes* and other serious *personal violations* never sufficiently resolved.
- 4) Family members who have been *disowned*; family members *abandoning* the family.
- 5) *Being still in love with someone else* when one marries.
- 6) *Affairs* both of the flesh or of the heart during marriages
- 7) *Any other event that would shut someone down*, or otherwise get in their way of being able to pass love freely on to their own children, or the next generation.

If a traumatic event has happened in the current generation or a previous one, and there is uncertainty who to set up because several may have been involved or affected, perhaps the best way to depict it onstage is to choose an auxiliary like the Korean War, or, an unfair eviction of the whole family from their property by some bank foreclosure— in which case you can set up the war, or the bank.

So what would be the difference between having the protagonist name the crucial people in their lives and place auxiliaries in an action (psychological) social atom, and one's using the Hellinger criterion? Doing it the Hellinger way, one starts out the same way, naming and placing who they perceive as the significant people in their life, especially those related to their particular situation now. Then that can be followed by a question about who would be upset if they knew that they had been left out. But then:

- the director makes sure the protagonist includes *their biological parents*, because *one's ability to love spontaneously* evolves, or is hampered by parents' inability to love and be there for their children, from birth onward. It does not matter whether the biological mother has died in childbirth, or the biological father abandoned the family, with the protagonist having no memory of him. Auxiliaries for the biological parents still *must be placed* onstage, in addition to foster or adoptive parents, as their story is key to where the protagonist finds himself. When protagonists do not name their biological parents as belonging to their psychological social atom, it is always wise to ask that they be placed as well.
- A second addition to the protagonist's listing of crucial people would be auxiliaries for *ancestors who were severely traumatized; unexpectedly or tragically died; otherwise were distracted from letting their love to flow freely and spontaneously into the next generation.*

The above list of seven possible ways spontaneous love can be *shut down* is a good checklist for an initial interview prior to a protagonist's placement of the auxiliaries. 3) A director can also choose to have the protagonist add auxiliaries for whatever institutions or 'events' from our pasts may have blocked our ancestors' ability to be fully present in the moment.

The Hellinger criterion only works when the protagonist is open and receptive to receiving an answer to a problem of theirs, i.e., able to suspend personal agendas. When a psychodramatist has a client who shrugs their shoulders, claiming to be at a loss with the issues they bring, and are more or less willing to surrender themselves to the process for answers, the Hellinger criterion may be the best to use. Because protagonists are seated in the audience through most of the action, having chosen 'doubles' to represent them onstage, they need to be able to let go of their 'control,' *so they can take in what they see*. It is not that necessary to accept all that transpires onstage as 'truth,' but certainly to be able to 'weigh' what unfolds there.

When you have auxiliaries representing different generations onstage, there exists a time warp, of course, and a protagonist may get confused as they put the auxiliaries in place. You mean, where they are now, or *then?* is often the question they ask when they go to place them. Think of it as the eternal now, is my answer. The protagonist will often hesitate in the way they move auxiliaries, still grasping onto the shoulders of their auxiliary, still looking down to the floor, then make the decision. There may be certain deliberation in the process.

The Next Step: Interviewing the Auxiliaries

When a protagonist sets up their auxiliaries on the Hellinger criterion, a sociometric matrix, or energy field of interactive relationships is created onstage, but only to the degree the auxiliaries are positioned free from the protagonist's conserves about them. When a director sees a protagonist trying to sculpt the bodies after placing their auxiliaries, he knows the protagonist is caught up in trying to show how he sees the auxiliary, and that is not what is wanted here. The auxiliaries need to be free *to feel into the actual roles*, unbiased by the protagonist's perceptions. On the Hellinger criterion, the director is attempting to discover what lies beneath a client's perception of his auxiliary's personality, to where that auxiliary is actually coming from. The protagonist only *positions* them. Once the protagonist has found the place onstage that feels 'right' in that moment, they face them in a particular direction, without having to have any explanation for why they are placing them there. Directing long enough on this criterion, a director becomes better able to differentiate when placement is by intuition as opposed to cognition.

Then, the protagonist sits down in the audience, preferably where they can best see the resulting configuration and any subsequent action unfolding from it. The director then instructs the auxiliaries how to assume their roles. The director tells them to empty themselves of their own feelings, and let go, too, of anything they might have learned about the roles they are assuming. It is not important for the auxiliaries to know anything about the roles they take on, on this criterion. The subsequent process works best, actually, the less they know about their roles. Auxiliaries simply give themselves permission to be open conduits for the reality of the other auxiliaries (see *Moreno, Psychodrama, Vol. 1, 'Inter-personal Relations'*). They are asked to become aware of any bodily sensations, emotive *feelings*, or impulses for movement that come up for them. It may well be there are none in the role they are taking, so the director lets them know it is all right if they don't experience anything. Directors do not want auxiliaries manufacturing responses to meet what they think might be expected.

Impulses for physical movement may include twisting around, falling to the floor, or urges to move from one's current location to another onstage. If the urge is more than fleeting, insisting itself on the auxiliary, the director will permit the auxiliary to follow his or her 'inner' movement. The director wants movement to come out of the depths of the energy field onstage, out of the 'common soul,' not out of an auxiliary's anxiety about what is expected. Lastly, directors ask each auxiliary to become aware of where onstage, or off, their eyes are drawn, i.e., where the eyes want to focus. As the Hellinger criterion taps a subconscious region, it is important that directors maintain a respect similar to what is required when directing a client's dream work. The way auxiliaries have been positioned in relation to each other onstage sets up an energy field often reflecting an inner revelation. The configuration can depict a social atom's underlying problem,

and have a diagnostic quality to it. Therefore, the director may take time at the beginning simply 'to read the tea leaves.' Stepping into the configuration itself, the director often feels the electricity of interacting psychological currents. The director may stem any eruptions of dialogue--impulsive interactions amongst auxiliaries. It is wisest to allow the telic interplay onstage to 'stew' a while, to see if any movement comes from it, and not move to dialogue too soon. It is a seemingly radical departure from the role development process known in the psychodrama world. There, such verbal activity is usually readily accepted, even encouraged, but here remains premature.

When enough time passes to give the auxiliaries a sense of themselves, with a 'feel' for whatever 'telic interplay' exists amongst them, plus any needed movements acted upon, the director interviews each auxiliary, to ask what each is aware of. The director also inquires whether auxiliaries are aware of the others onstage, and if so, whom, and what feelings, if any, they have towards the others.

In psychodrama, directors are used to having the protagonist available for role reversals so they can find out what each auxiliary is like, so they can be adequately role-played in a way the protagonist can believe them in role. But on this Hellinger criterion the client sits in the audience. It is not quite as important that the protagonist believe what is reported in by each auxiliary, not at each and every moment anyway. Sometimes the protagonist will blurt out, That's not what she would feel. At this point a director will simply implore the client to wait and see, giving it more time, even asking that the protagonist consider whether that *might actually be* where the auxiliary is coming from beneath how it has appeared to them.

Though the director will watch the reactions of the protagonist closely, the protagonist in the audience is observing more than participating, waiting to see what happens onstage. The client here is not as readily available for role-reversal, except in an extraordinary circumstance, when it appears to the director that a protagonist is completely dismissing what he is watching. Such seldom happens, but when it does, it is usually early in a director's usage of the Hellinger criterion, indicating one of two errors in the director's assessment:

- 1) that the protagonist has an agenda the director didn't see before, and is not open to looking at what may be beneath his perceptions, or
- 2) that some auxiliaries are improvising rather than intuiting their roles. If so, it may be necessary for the director to employ brief role reversals of the protagonist in the audience with an auxiliary onstage, to see what the protagonist does with the role, or else, just replace improvising auxiliaries with others.

In either case, the director may assess it best to drop the Hellinger criterion, and have the protagonist take over his role onstage. Then you can employ a combination of role development for some auxiliaries while others may still operate on intuition, as long as the protagonist accepts them, only employing role reversal whenever and wherever it needed to keep the protagonist in action. Otherwise, on the Hellinger criterion, with clients who relatively free from agendas and open enough to look for answers, the goal is to find out what lies beneath the protagonist's perceptual conserves. And it is to find out not only what is happening with the protagonist's relationships, but the relationships amongst the whole of the social atom, learning also where each auxiliary is coming from in relation to each other as well.

Psychodramatists have not known they could find this out any other way than through role-reversal and the role-development process. There was an attempt in earlier days by Jim Enneis and Ira Greenburg at doing hypnodrama, attempting to get at the truth beneath. But I do not know anyone who talks up this method. any more, and until I experienced this particular way, i.e., the Hellinger's criterion, I really didn't think that any other way was possible.

The research that has been done shows that once a protagonist places an auxiliary in a particular position, onstage, on the Hellinger criterion, the same bodily sensations, feelings and impulses will be experienced, in that position, no matter who the role-taker is. Even those unfamiliar with either the protagonist or the significant others set onstage, i.e., whoever comes in blind to what is going on-- If that person is then set up in the same position as the previous auxiliary, they will experience the same or comparable feelings in that same position, as well as towards the other auxiliaries described by the previous role-taker. And one

can continue to replace auxiliaries with others, and the same will continue to be true. Comparable feelings within a close range are reports such as, I'm feeling anger towards that woman, I'm feeling upset by that woman somehow, to I feel frustrated with that woman over there.

(www.p.schloetter.de/systemische.aufstellungen)

Adding Soul Movement to Interviewing Auxiliaries

There is a variation on using Hellinger's criterion working with a sociometric matrix, besides interviewing the auxiliaries about what is going on. It is where the director sits back and waits for auxiliaries to follow their urges for physical movement, until some kind of resolution is felt onstage and in the audience. That is, one can also allow the telic interplay to unfold onstage, on its own, without words, or even the director's interventions. Unless auxiliaries believe and trust their urges, usually requiring auxiliaries to have worked with this criterion for some time, it can be painful to wait and watch, not knowing precisely what is going on, or where it is headed. On the other hand, it can come across as fascinating, and entrancing art. The method is called soul movement.

Many people trained in Hellinger's systemic constellation work enjoy soul movement. I have known of psychodramatists familiar with Playback Theater who will naturally get in tune with this method, when they see facilitators of Systemic Constellation Work using soul movement. Protagonists watching their unfolding dramas done only in movement usually have a sense something has shifted within them after, but cannot necessarily articulate it. When I have asked this question of former protagonists months later, they report the same thing. The claim is that afterward something shifted within. They no longer feel the same difficulty with their old issue, yet cannot articulate what made the difference.

Most often, a psychodrama director using the Hellinger criterion can vary how he uses soul movement, and maybe only use soul movement when auxiliaries have strong urges to move onstage. The director can then stop interviewing, and allow soul movements to unfold for a time on their own, before he resumes directing interactions. The director can say, Without reporting in for now, just follow your urges to use movements awhile. But do so slowly. Resist abrupt movements. Spontaneity is never impulsive. Hellinger says, 'the soul always moves slowly.' Moreno's spontaneity can flow in that slower way too, another guard against impulsivity.

Experimenting with Moving Positions Around; Changing the Sociometry

After enough interviewing shows where the difficulty lies, the director can begin trying interventions. The intervention I have found to be most useful is changing positions (in the sociometric network) to see what difference that makes in the 'telic interplay,' the feelings reported.

In constellation work, what shows up most often is positioning with members of the social atom not really looking at each other, sometimes even reporting they are not that cognizant of each other. What is often discovered is that the auxiliaries are avoiding seeing each other, so the frequent question is, 'Why is that?' The answer may be discovered by having what appear to be the critical people 'repositioned' to face one other. Once that intervention is made, the auxiliaries now looking at each other, can report on whatever difference that makes.

I recently had a client, the youngest of five siblings, who, after her parents had died within a few weeks of each other, became estranged from her siblings, after discovering she had been named the executor for the will. She did not understand why they had turned on her. I asked her if anyone outside the family was involved in this issue. She thought not, so I decided I could limit her social atom to her family of origin. She chose auxiliaries for her parents, and her four older siblings, and added a 'double' for herself. Once she set them up, intuitively, the resulting energy field was loaded with static amongst family members. The most negative charge was felt between the oldest brother and the rest of the family, particularly the father. This brother, the oldest child, had been placed facing away from all the others, the only one who was looking completely away. The other siblings were scattered around both parents, who stood next to

each other, but the parental eyes and energies were focused on the back of the oldest brother, not the other children. In my interviews with the auxiliaries, I found negative tele felt towards the older brother from most family members. There were two exceptions: the mother, who said she was very 'pained' about the older brother, and the third child, a sister, who said she felt an impulse to grab at the oldest brother's shirt, and pull him back into the family. I asked her to wait on that impulse until I had completed my interviews. The father was intently aware of the oldest brother in front of him, was 'not sure about him,' but claimed he felt little other concern regarding him. I asked him if he felt 'cold' towards him. He said, you could say that.' But he also said he seemed fine with the son's back to the family.

The protagonist sitting in the audience resonated with the information the auxiliaries provided, and saying beneath her breath, God! That's just how it is! It is often a surprise to the protagonist how accurate the auxiliaries' reporting is, and how it resonates with them. When auxiliaries are placed on this new criterion, the resulting telic interplay is often not only accurate in terms of positive, negative, even neutral tele, but further, having particular emotive qualities beyond those three categories

Now comes the experiment. Sensing the main static was between father and oldest son, as director, I turn the oldest brother around to face his father. What the director asks himself is, who needs to face whom in this family? Who needs to say what to whom? When the oldest son was turned around, to face his father. I ask whether the change affects anything for anybody. All the auxiliaries immediately reported increased tension. The older brother didn't like being turned around, and at the same time the father involuntarily took a step backward. I wondered why the tension, so I turned to the audience to ask the protagonist if she knew anything about the birth of her older brother. She reported her father was fighting in Viet Nam when the oldest was born, and the boy was over a year old when he returned to the family. I then asked the two auxiliaries if hearing that information made any difference to either of them. The son said yes, saying that he felt more justified in what his feelings were, being 'cheated somehow.' The father moved another step backward when the son said that. He admitted a mixture of feelings, anger, guilt, even fear of his oldest son.

I attempted to set up a dialogue between the son and his father. There were two choices I felt I had at this point. I could ask the father to explain, as best as he can, his feelings, to his son, getting into a dialogue between the father and the oldest son, based on the intuited knowledge each had regarding their roles. Or, I could go with a hunch I felt that, actually, something needed to be said by the father to his wife first. I felt he needed to say something like, I came back from the war feeling different from who I was when I left. I'd just gone through something I couldn't let go of yet, wanting to be able to talk with you about it, but couldn't. You weren't available in the same way you were before. When I saw that you and the boy already had a relationship, I withdrew into myself and my work for a long time. I wanted to feed lines like these into the scenario, but had to think a while how to do so in a way that would have a healing power to it. I had a sense it could make a difference in the family relationships if I could come up with something.

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I ended up having the father turn towards his wife, to try saying, in a monotone voice, I was not there for you when I returned from war. I was still carrying on the battle alongside my comrades then. I could not see you. What you are doing as director is attempting to come up with words that will resonate in the common soul of the configuration and audience. It is a kind of doubling that, once said by the auxiliary, can be rejected or corrected by that auxiliary, based on how it felt to say it. As director you only ask the auxiliary *to try it*, without expression, to see *if the words themselves resonate* with any power. If the words are true, and 'fit' the situation, the voice often will tremble, regardless of its monotone, and resonate in the body cavity. And they will be felt by the others to be true as well. As director I listened for resonance of the words in the body cavity of the auxiliary to confirm its truth. The auxiliary for the father had emotion vibrating within both voice and body when repeating it. His eyes even teared up. I asked him, anyway, if it felt true. The father nodded, yes. At times an auxiliary will edit words given him to say, so that it feels more true, before saying it.

Spontaneously, the auxiliary for the mother said in response, I know. I didn't then, but now I do. She said it out of an immediate sense about what was there, inside her. She took his hand. He grasped it, and tightened his hold.

I then have the father add, When I saw you with our son, I also didn't know where I belonged anymore.

Again, it had resonance. She immediately took his hand into both of hers, and sensitively looked up into his eyes. I know, now, she repeated spontaneously again. You always belonged, she added, pulling her husband closer. She reached out also for her oldest son with one hand, to pull him in close too. He accepted it. You *both* belong, she added, looking alternately between her husband and her son. You always did. I asked her to add, And always will. She added my words, and lifted her head to kiss her son's cheek, quite spontaneously. The father puts his arm around her shoulders, now noticing how close his son is.

Then I have the father turn and say to the son, one sentence at a time: I haven't always been able to see you there, son. I now take the responsibility for that. It had nothing to do with you. But I see you now. You are my first-born son. And you will remain in my heart as my first-born son from this day forward. The father auxiliary repeats it after me, to see whether the words resonate within his body cavity. If they don't resonate, he can correct them to what feels more right, or just say, 'it doesn't feel true.' But when it does feel right to the auxiliary, I can then ask the auxiliary for the oldest son how it feels hearing that, and whether he can *take it in* or not.

If he likes hearing it, but still cannot trust it yet, I have the son say a healing response, one sentence at a time. I know you are my father, my only father, the one I am thankful to for my very life. Even when you were not there, even when you could not see me, I've always yearned for you. I feel seen now, and now, from this day forward, I will take you, too, into my heart...forever. A soul movement to embrace happens, following the words. I find out from the rest of the siblings and mother how each is affected. When everyone says they feel more at peace having seen this happen, I know the basic work is practically over.

So at this point I have the protagonist come into the tableau, replacing her double. I then test this as the resolution by asking her to soliloquize about how she is affected. She reports she feels much better, and relieved, understanding more than she ever did before why the turbulence in the family happened after her parents died. She spontaneously chooses to go up to her father, having finished with his oldest son, and tells him something to this effect, I have always felt honored I was your favorite, up to now. But now it has become a burden, not only to me but my siblings as well. I only want a place in your heart for being your youngest, *not* your favorite. I am very happy you have now taken my older brother into your heart. Please, take the rest of us your children in as well, equally!

To that end I had her put the family in a line to reflect an inner solution to the problem. The oldest son stood in line first, next to his parents, then the second son, the first daughter, and subsequent daughters, herself last. Then I had them each say the following:

I'm the first.
I'm the second
I'm the third
I'm the fourth
I'm the fifth.

Here the family has also become the protagonist. Everyone in the family smiles at each other. It is now finished. The client is asked to keep this picture of the solution in her soul. I let her know sometimes, the change she sees here is carried over into her actual family, and hoped that would happen for her as well.

The auxiliaries are deroled by each picturing the role they played in front of them, and bowing to them, as an appreciation to them, feeling honored for the opportunity to represent them.

We can see from this example how going the route of the protagonist's perceptions in a psychodramatic format might never have tapped into what lay beneath. We could have set up a family social atom on the perceptual level with the client in the center. We could have role-reversed with each family member, and assessed the client's relationships with each, finding out where the most negative tele, and most positive tele lay. But without the knowledge of what happened before the protagonist was born, what was going on amongst the other family members, we might not have gotten to this source. What is more, even if it did, the time to get there would have been interminable. This is the advantage in using the Hellinger criterion.

A Quick Summary of the Steps in Utilizing the Hellinger Criterion

The primary advantage for a psychodramatist to use the Hellinger criterion is when an intergenerational pattern or probable family trauma exists prior to the protagonist's life. As in the above example, with a combat experience of the father tied together with the birth of an older brother, a family dynamic was set up prior to the individual life of the protagonist, who was the youngest sister.

If a psychodramatist wants to practice using the criterion, a warmup can be chosen for the group that will focus on intergenerational patterns or past family traumas. One can ask members of a group to become an ancestor, in an action warmup, or simply go around and ask group members what past family traumas they know about going back as far as they know. And how they think it affects them to know that. Or, after a protagonist is chosen, one can also explore that dimension in the initial interview.

Once a protagonist is chosen, here is something of a formulary to use:

The Director's Initial Interview after the Protagonist is Selected:

- The director needs to find out if a protagonist's issue has any precedents in a similar situation in a prior generation. For instance, I worked in psychodrama on my difficulties relating to intimacy and women over a 15 year period. At no time in the initial interview was I asked whether my father had any similar issue. He actually *did*, marrying my mother on a rebound after the girl he loved broke off with him. Would you believe, in my first marriage I did the same thing? In a psychological social atom set up on the Hellinger criterion, to explore that situation, I would have needed to set up auxiliaries for both my parents, the woman I currently was having difficulties with, and the previous woman I still loved. In addition someone also needed to be an auxiliary for the woman my father was still in love with when he married my mother.
- Regardless of what the current issue is, a director can inquire about the family background in order to explore any traumatic events affecting our forebearers. Lists of possible events can be assessed according to the list on page 5. If there are a lot of different events, the director can limit them to ones seemingly most relevant to the issue the protagonist brings. For an example, if a protagonist says the biggest issue in his life is that he has been kicked out of his parental home, and has had no contact with his family for years, the paternal great uncle who was kicked out of his grandfather's family is likely relevant. The protagonist may be asked to put onstage an auxiliary for his paternal great uncle, whether the protagonist knew him or not.
- The director needs to insist the protagonist put up his most significant biological relationships, his natural parents, whether a protagonist feels they are significant to his life or not.

Choosing and Placing the Auxiliaries:

1) *The protagonist chooses people from the group to play each role.* Hellinger recognizes, like Moreno, that the choice of auxiliaries reflects something of either a transference or tele the protagonist has with the people in the group. But Hellinger also says, on his criterion, it really makes little difference. As long as they are positioned intuitively, whoever the auxiliary is will be able to access the role. After being chosen from the group, each stands in front of their chair.

2) *The protagonist goes behind each one, and takes hold of their shoulders, looks down to the floor, and moves them onstage until they find a place that in that moment feels right.* After all have been placed, the protagonist is asked to look over the configuration, and make sure it feels intuitively right. Again, the protagonist is reminded that it doesn't have to make sense according to their cognitive view of them. But he can make little changes in the configuration.

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3) *The protagonist takes his place in the audience,* where he or she can best see what action transpires on the stage. Protagonists are given permission to move to other chairs when they need to be able to see what is going on. But they are not encouraged to stand up and watch, as it can interfere with the telic interplay.

Instructing and Interviewing the Auxiliaries:

- 1) The director instructs the auxiliaries to let go of who they are, and become open to be conduits for the energetic interplay of the configuration. *They are to take stock of themselves, and their environment onstage.*
- 2) They are to let themselves become aware of their *physical sensations*, and their *emotional feelings*, and any *urges toward movement*.
- 3) They are to *report any urges to move to the director*.
- 4) The director then assesses the urge to move to make sure it arises from the telic configuration onstage, and not accompanying anxiety about what they should be doing, giving permission for the auxiliary to act on it if it persists. Coming out the collective unconscious or the common soul, such is called *soul movement*.
- 5) The director then tells the auxiliaries to notice *what* they are aware of onstage, *who* else they are aware of, and where their *eyes want to focus*.
- 6) The director then interviews each auxiliary, one by one, to find out what is happening for them.

Adding soul movement to the Interview Process

After the first impulse to move has been given permission by the director, before or during his interviewing of the auxiliaries, other auxiliaries may move on their own from time to time, even as reactions to what is found out from the interviews. The director may sense tendencies to move throughout the configuration onstage. The director can step back at any time, in the middle of, or after, interviewing all auxiliaries.

- 1) After each soul movement, the director can ask what was happening that the auxiliary made the move he did. It is not always known why the urge to move was made, but sometimes it is crystal clear to an auxiliary why.
- 2) The director can also ask the auxiliaries who if anyone is affected by such a movement, and in what way they are affected.
- 3) If soul movements become rampant, the director can back out and give all auxiliaries permission to go with any soul movements, to see what happens, until that energy peters out.

Experimenting with Making Changes in the Sociometry

The director at some point has to make an analysis of what is going in the configuration pictured before him and the audience. He has to ask himself the questions:

- 1) *Who needs to face whom?* At this point the director needs to turn someone around to face someone else. And he needs to ask the other auxiliaries how they are affected by the change. The top insight Hellinger has into what goes wrong in a sociometric system is that people are not facing each other, people in a family system gone awry cannot really see each other.
- 2) Now, *Who needs to say what to whom?* Sometimes it is clear to the auxiliaries what needs to be said. If so, one can go psychodramatically. Even though the personalities are never clear, often auxiliaries get where their roles are coming from, beneath the elusive personality. Sometimes as director I just go with what is said spontaneously, and other times I try to reframe what is said, to try to get at a way to say it in different words, words that would have more resonant power in the common soul.

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- 1) Otherwise, if no words come spontaneously, the director can use his own intuition to test words out in an auxiliary's mouth. This we can call ***resonant doubling***. The director can ask an auxiliary to say certain lines to another auxiliary, always in a monotone voice, to try out the words. When auxiliaries repeat the lines this way, it becomes clear to auxiliaries and director whether those words resonate or not: by the deliverer's emotions coming through the monotone, and/or in the auxiliary's body cavity, even in the heart of the receiver of the message. In fact, it should also be confirmed by other reactions onstage and in the audience. Words and message should resonate throughout the network onstage, and be felt in the audience as well.
- 2) Then, when words are found that resonate, the auxiliaries may spontaneously reconfigure themselves onstage through ***resulting soul movements***. If no soul movements take place, auxiliaries can still be asked how they are affected by the resonant doubling just conducted. Once clear to other auxiliaries how the others have been affected, soul movements may still evolve into new configurations. More than one healing sentence between auxiliaries may need to take place before things are over, resolved. More auxiliaries may need to say other things to one another before the whole configuration can come together in a way that truly brings peace.
- 3) At the point when healing seems to be taking place, it is ***time to put the protagonist back in his own role and dismiss the double***. It may be important to ask for a ***soliloquy from the protagonist*** about how they are affected standing in their own place, now having further insight into the issue. Or, to otherwise ask the protagonist what it feels like now.
- 4) Then it is wise to help the protagonist ***put auxiliaries in an order*** onstage ***best reflecting the solution*** to the problem until everyone feels better than before. Before dismissing auxiliaries, the protagonist needs to take a moment to savor the solution. Always remember your solution. Come back to it a lot, and savor it!

The Sharing

- 1) There is a time for silence afterward, sufficient for the protagonist and the audience *to take in* all that has happened.
- 2) Then those playing roles onstage are asked if they have anything more to ***share from the roles*** they played, mostly for the protagonist's sake.
- 3) If there is sharing beyond that, talking about how individual group members relate to the work they have just seen, they are asked to share it another time, at a future session. Work on the Hellinger criterion is work at a less than conscious level, and cognitive sharing can hinder the ability of the work to sift into the common soul of the protagonist. Or, if there is a burning desire or need for sharing, in an ongoing therapeutic group, the protagonist may be excused early, to pick up on what was said after they left at the next meeting of the group.