

## Chapter 12

# The dynamics of interpersonal preference

### *Commentary*

In this chapter Adam Blatner looks at relationships and the forces that govern them both in a consciously and unconsciously ordered way. Moreno spoke of the psyche as existing between two people. In psychodrama, the therapeutic process addresses what does and does not happen between people in relationship. Tele was his way of describing human interactions from a non-clinical perspective, as opposed to Freud's more reductionist approach. Blatner describes the usefulness of this concept in dealing with people and places due emphasis on the humanistic perspective that was so much a feature of Moreno's work with clients. He develops the concept in a clear and direct way that brings this sometimes neglected area of Moreno's work back to centre stage and shows how it can illuminate the dynamics in a group.

Tele  
*Adam Blatner*

### INTRODUCTION

While Freud addressed repression in the psychodynamics of the individual, Moreno noticed the underlying sociodynamics of groups. He saw that there were interactions which were being ignored and overridden in many group situations which resulted in disharmony and dysfunction. Moreno intuited 'lines' of attraction or repulsion between people, which could be drawn on paper as sociograms representing the 'flow of feeling' he called 'tele'. In this sense, Moreno was an early 'systems' theorist who appreciated that interpersonal dynamics could occur not just in the minds of the individuals involved, but also in a more complex fashion in the space or field between them.

Tele is a term coined by J.L. Moreno to describe 'the process which attracts individuals to one another or which repels them' (Moreno 1937: 213). It refers to the fact that in any group, each individual experiences attraction, neutrality, mixed feelings or repulsion towards and from each of the other people. Yet, such feelings are often not registered consciously and even more rarely openly discussed. The significance of the concept of tele is that it brings these subtle social dynamics into explicit consciousness. 'Finding a name for something is a way of conjuring its existence, of making it possible for people to see a pattern where they didn't see anything before' (Rheingold 1988:3).

The value of the concept of tele is that it can be used by therapists and psychodramatists in their work and their own everyday lives to: (i) become more explicitly aware of interpersonal interactions; (ii) notice tendencies to avoid these awarenesses; (iii) discuss the origins of such avoidances in terms of family and cultural background; (iv) discuss associated feelings of embarrassment, vulnerability, and concern for evoking such feelings in others; (v) explore the underlying reasons for the various telic reactions; and (vi)



help patients to apply the idea of tele in learning how to address all these issues in the group and their own situations.

### HISTORICAL ORIGINS

Moreno developed sociometry as a method for bringing these dynamics into the open. Tele's most precise definition is 'what is measured by sociometric tests' (Moreno 1934:328). Yet, unless one is quite familiar with the method, that definition remains obscure. Moreno's earliest ideas about sociometry addressed the problem of subgroupings formed in refugee camps, schools, and in the workplace by arbitrary assignments from authorities rather than on the expressed preferences of the group members themselves. He noted that when the group could participate in its own formation, greater harmonies and productivity were attained. Ironically, even today this insight continues to be largely ignored.

Sociometry became an instrument of the objective researchers at a time when traditional scientific method had become a value in itself, and because of the phenomenological, subjective nature of tele, they had relatively little use for the term. They generally didn't spend much time working with the groups applying and discussing the results of the testing (Mendelson 1977:84). Thus, tele is often not even mentioned in most of the professional articles and books about sociometry and psychodrama, and even in those where it is noted, it's generally given only the most superficial and briefest of treatments.

However, in practice, the term is most useful, especially when applied by the people in groups in the course of exploring their own interactions. And so Moreno kept returning to the concept because of its implications for group cohesion, the process of encounter and the essential nature of therapy. Also, he emphasised that the applications of tele and its associated issues transcended the clinical context and included all groups in society. Indeed, he even coined a term for his vision of a more socially oriented psychiatry he called 'sociatry', and the psychodrama journal which he began in 1947 was given that term as its title for the first two years (then changing to *Group Psychotherapy*).

### REFLECTIONS ON TERMINOLOGY

Moreno first wrote about tele in 1934 in his major book on sociometry, *Who Shall Survive?* He derived the term from the ancient Greek word for distance: 'Just as we use the words...telephone, television, etc. to express action at a distance, so to express the simplest unit of feeling transmitted from one individual towards another we use the term tele' (Moreno 1934:159; 1953:314). That is to say that one can experience tele with another person when our eyes meet across a crowded room. Tele operates also when people find themselves in close proximity: our sense of territoriality is offended when others who feel like strangers stand too close, and on the other hand, with certain kinds of very positive tele, we want to hug the other person.

The basic concept of tele is intuitively known even in popular culture. For example, in the late 1960s a song included the phrase, 'She's sending me good vibrations', and a slang word current at the time was 'vibes'. A decade earlier, in the Broadway musical, *Gypsy and Dolls*, the hero sings to his girl friend about 'chemistry', referring to the mystery of their mutual attraction.

Some other words which allude to telic phenomena include 'rapport', 'click', 'fit', (as in 'goodness of fit'), 'connectedness' and 'resonance'. But a disadvantage of these terms is that they only address the more positive types of feelings and don't allow for different kinds of tele depending on which role or criterion is involved.

Due to the problems entailed by the introduction of a new term, and perhaps in order to avoid the disadvantages of jargon, some writers in the field avoided the use of the word. For example, Hart (1980) in an article on the postulates of sociometry substituted the term 'affiliativeness'. Nehnevajsa (1956) called tele a 'flow of affectivity between individuals'. Carlson-Sabelli and co-workers (1992) referred to 'bonds' and noted the opposing poles of 'choice/attraction' and 'rejection/repulsion'. Still, considering the host of associated concepts to be described, I think it's best that we stay with Moreno's term.

One source of confusion in Moreno's writings about tele is that he used the term in two senses. More generally, he referred to the entire category of preferential interactions including repulsions, indifference, neutralities and ambivalence as well as attractions. His second usage referred to tele in its most positive and reciprocated form in which case it is often associated with such related phenomena as encounter, empathy and group cohesion. In general use, most psychodramatists speak of it in this latter sense, for example, in saying to a prospective auxiliary, 'You seem to be feeling some tele with this protagonist'.

However, we should remember that the term really includes all kinds of interactions, sometimes mixed, sometimes even negative.

### NATURAL ORIGINS OF TELE

Tele is an extension of the innate tendencies of organisms to show selectivity. Indeed, Moreno (1934:158) alluded to a primordial kind of preferential process even at the inorganic level, such as in the process of magnetism, which involves the tendencies of electrons and protons to attract each other and to repel their own kind. Might this be a precursor? In a psychicalistic system of philosophy such as Whitehead's, even atoms 'experience' each other with a quality akin to 'feeling' (Peters 1966). Although we can measure the relative strengths of these interactions, we have no idea *why* this interactive force operates as it does.

In biological systems, even the most primitive one-celled animal will exhibit selectivity over substances it ingests and what environments it moves towards or away from. Higher animals develop their capacities for discrimination in most life functions: eating, choosing a mate, play, etc. In more social species, this selectivity shows greater complexity in matters of territoriality, the herd instinct and patterns of dominance and submission.

Humans exhibit these patterns also, and more, because of the complexity of the nervous system, our species overlays these instincts with elaborate systems of associations, symbols, images, and emotions. The imaginal aspects of instinctual processes constitute the essence of what Carl G. Jung called 'archetypes', and in this sense tele may be considered a psychological function operating at a fundamental level (Samuels *et al.* 1986).

Preference is a fundamental psychological function (Northway 1967: 46-7), and this applies to all manner of activities: food, music, art, hair styles, clothes, religious practices, etc. Tele is an extension of this: 'Just as man has an aversion-affection continuum of biological feeling within himself (liking or disliking certain foods, odours, etc.), he also has a flow of affection or disaffection between himself and others, be they single persons or groups' (Bischof 1964:364). However, the interpersonal dynamic involving either positive or negative *reciprocity* between persons makes the phenomenon of tele somewhat more complex than mere preference. Reciprocity, a key component of tele, reflects the human capacity to perceive or imagine how others feel about the relationship (Moreno 1956a: 15). The sense of a feeling being reciprocated tends to intensify that feeling, whether it be attraction, indifference or repulsion.

Although the term 'tele' has been applied with regard to objects or symbols (Bischof 1964:366; Starr 1977:6), I think it is an unnecessary dilution of the concept because there is no reciprocity with an object and because the term 'preference' can be used just as well. The point, though is that tele is an extension of

our basic capacity for preference, and as will be discussed further on, it behoves us to cultivate our awareness of our preferences and to become conscious of the reasons for those preferences.

### **PSYCHOSOCIAL FEATURES OF TELE**

Mental functioning includes more than cognition, which involves such activities as perceiving, coordinating, thinking, remembering, symbolising and believing. There is also the category called 'conation', which involves such activities as wanting, willing, desiring, motivation, intention and preference. Conation is more closely associated with affects and feelings, and conative processes emerge earlier in development than cognitive ones. It is clear that tele is primarily an extension of this conative function.

However, it should be noted that as an individual matures, tele begins to include an increasing proportion of cognitive processing (Moreno 1952: 155). In order for tele to be reciprocated, an individual needs to be able to assess the realistic qualities of the other person. This is called 'telic sensitivity' (Moreno 1959a). Here is where role training and perceptual sociometric procedures can be helpful. People need to have some opportunities to explore their interpersonal networks in supportive settings, such as classes dealing with applied social psychology.

Another way to think about tele is that it is the basis of the more spontaneous and informal types of role relationships. These aren't so easily analysed by sociologists, who have mainly addressed the way people relate in 'formal' role relationships, that is, those which can be characterised in terms of their functional expectations, such as parent, employer, team mate, citizen, customer. Informal-role relationships involve those which reflect the processes of peer selection. Groupings at school break-time, in the neighbourhood, those relatives at large family gatherings who break away to chat privately, cliques and clubs, these associations depend on how the group members feel about one another. Thus, while a sociological analysis might outline who are in the formal relations of teachers and students in a school setting, only sociometric procedures could elucidate which teachers or students are more or less popular with others (regarding certain criteria).

Formal relations are determined more by cognitive functions, role definitions, expectations, performances. Informal relations tend to be determined more by conative functions. We may admire someone's skill (cognitive) without necessarily liking that person (conative), and on the other hand, we may find ourselves attracted to someone whom our better judgement warns us against.

In many committees, the actual power of those who are more influential may be based on how well liked or respected they are rather than on their official status. The designated leader in many cases is not the functional leader. In therapy groups, the therapist may at times find that on certain issues or activities another group member exerts more influence than the therapist, perhaps even in a non-constructive fashion.

### **TELE AS A ROLE-DEPENDENT DYNAMIC**

The human psyche is pluralistic, it involves many roles (Blatner 1991). Our tele for others depends on the role relationship in which we find ourselves. This point must be kept in mind. Since tele varies significantly as the nature of the role relationship shifts (Nehnevajsa 1956:62), a person may feel more preference towards another regarding one aspect of their relationship, and that there is less tele in another area. For example, in a group an individual might select one other group member to work on a project but yet be sexually attracted to a different person and seek the company of a third to attend a sports event. The corollary of this is that any statement about tele needs to be paired with a qualifying statement about the criterion: it lacks precision to say that A 'likes' B, though in certain situations that may be where the

process begins. If consciousness is to be raised regarding the nature of that preference, the criterion for that choice must be sought.

Tele also changes according to shifts in needs or context. Lonely people may find that they're less demanding of physical perfection in their prospective dates. Another example would be a traveller in a foreign country who seeks out the companionship of a fellow countryman as the only one who speaks the same language, yet in other settings there would be little else these two had in common.

Not only are external role situations called into more discriminated consciousness: the various inner roles must also be identified. In this sense, a growing sensitivity to one's own tele helps people get in touch with their different 'complexes' or what Rowan (1990) called 'subpersonalities'.

### REASONS FOR PREFERENCE

Reciprocity, as mentioned, is just one of many factors contributing to tele in a relationship. Other variables include the following:

- Common goals, tasks, interests, forms of work or recreation
- Attractiveness (e.g., physical, intellectual, social, playful, spiritual, emotional, artistic)
- Role complementarity (e.g., leader/follower, passive/active, dominance/ submission)
- Role symmetry, preferring someone who shares similar qualities (e.g., wanting another dominant person, preferring someone who is also easy-going)
- Common background, interests, life style or values
- Intriguing differences which seem 'exotic' or refreshing
- Compatible levels of vitality and ability
- Temperamental similarities or differences
- Familiarity based on consistency or duration of association
- Propinquity, physical proximity, those who are close by
- Transference, similarities to others in one's past
- Prejudices, generalizations based on cultural conditioning

(Blatner 1988b: 131)

Each of these themes in turn contains many subvariables which also overlap, shift with mood and context as well as role.

The first variable mentioned, relating to common interest, leads to a further point of discrimination. Jennings (1947) describes two major subcategories of choices: *sociotelic* and *psychetelic*. Sociotelic choices are based on common interests, such as sharing a certain background or having a similar goal, and they tend to be associated with formal role relationships. Psychetelic choices are based on more personal, idiosyncratic qualities and tend to be associated with informal role relationships. Ann Hale notes that:

Reasons given for sociotelic criteria tend to be statements about skill, ease in relating, intelligence, quickness or clarity of the person's style and honesty. Reasons given for psychetelic criteria tend to be statements about degree of comfortability, trust, sensitivity, enjoyment of contact and style of communicating.

(Hale 1981:44)

For example, if a person at a professional conference chooses to attend a workshop because she or he is interested in the topic, her or his relation to the presenter and many of the other people attending the session would be sociotelic in nature. If that person were to choose a workshop because she or he enjoyed the personal qualities of the workshop leader in previous encounters, her or his connection with that leader would be psychetelic.

Psychetelic choices are being made when people group together based on simple mutual attractions rather than any particular role relationship. These occur more readily in relatively unstructured situations, such as at school break-time on a school playground. The value of the distinction between psychetelic and sociotelic choices is that you can more consciously consider which criterion you want to use in a given situation.

Some sociotelic choices are based on utilitarian criteria. The choice of a surgeon for a particular operation might be based on a reputation for technical skill, even if the doctor's bedside manner leaves much to be desired. However, for general care, the choice of family physician might be based on the psychetelic criterion of interpersonal warmth.

On the other hand, there are times when one might decide to affiliate with another person even in situations where there would be negative psychetelic feelings. For instance, you might find yourself organising a political committee with a person whose personality and values differ significantly from your own in order to promote a certain piece of legislation. Socially you would never associate with this person, but practically you need to work together, and indeed, you would seek him or her out because of his or her specific resources or abilities.

### **TELE AND TRANSFERENCE**

One of the most pervasive factors affecting tele is transference, a tendency to overgeneralise on a present relationship based on experiences with similar sorts of people in the past. Transference is a subjective experience, rooted in the individual, and based on fantasy. Tele involves both parties and is in that sense more objective; it is also based more on the realistic elements in both parties and the relationship (Moreno 1959a: 6–10).

In fact, most relationships are a blend of both telic and transference elements. 'All relationships contain a mixture of reality and fantasy' (Kellermann 1992:104). In traditional psychoanalytically orientated psychotherapy, most patients develop some degree of transference, the analysis of which is central to the treatment process. Yet these reactions often are based on real qualities or behaviours on the therapist's part, and to this extent are telic in nature (Holmes 1992:45–6). In everyday relations there are also residues of past expectations which mask the reality of the people involved.

Yet tele is a more general category, one which includes transference, in the sense that the interpersonal relationship includes the reactions of the individuals participating in that field; in this sense, Moreno was a fore-runner of what today would be considered a 'systems' perspective (Moreno 1934:160). From a developmental orientation, tele emerges earlier in life than transference, beginning with the very process of bonding with the parent soon after birth. Transference develops later as the infant becomes able to construct representations of the parent in its mind, and these then become what Moreno might call a 'conserve' which interferes with the spontaneous encounter with what that parent is in the moment.

Positive tele can provoke a positive transference, as liking someone may lead to the development of unrealistic expectations or idealisations. Such interactions, common in romantic involvements, then need to be worked out in time. Negative tele in turn can be magnified into an attitude of hopelessness or hate, especially if the people can find no other roles on which a more congenial alliance can be based.

Countertransference consists of an individual's response to another person's transference behaviour. Although the term is often applied to therapists in relation to their clients, the process is really broader than that. If someone communicates his expectations to you in a certain fashion that generates a role relationship; if as part of your tendency to 'buy into' that expectation, you also feel some resentment or seduction, that is your countertransference. It is related to another psychoanalytic concept called 'projective identification', which might be more easily understood in the language of role dynamics as 'role reciprocity'. Those who fall into becoming helpers to dependent friends, those whose anger becomes triggered by the kinds of 'games' described by Eric Berne (1964), those who react rather than reflect, are caught up in countertransferences. If there is positive tele, that will increase the intensity more than if there is neutral or indifferent tele.

One component of the therapeutic process involves the re-conversion of transference (and countertransference) distortions into more realistic, telic interactions. Yet a measure of positive tele is needed in order to create a healing treatment alliance. Transference hinders the cure; tele acts in the cure' (Moreno 1955:319).

### **DEALING WITH NEGATIVE TELE**

Many problems arise because people repress or overreact to their negative telic responses. Helping people to see how this happens is a useful theme in therapy, along with exploring some more constructive ways of dealing with negative tele when it occurs.

There are a variety of response patterns involved. One of these consists of magnifying negative tele into a hostile attitude, and expressing this overtly as rebelliousness or belligerence, or in any of a number of passive-aggressive fashions. Another response is to be placating or even overly friendly, as if good intentions could magically counter this underlying 'poorness of fit'. Perhaps the most insidious and pervasive reaction is unconsciously to fall into the reciprocal role (as mentioned above in the paragraph on countertransference), which reflects a lack of centring in one's 'real self' (Masterson, 1988).

One of the most common issues in therapy is that of fostering patients' individuation. So many have grown up in dysfunctional families or social systems in which as children their natural preferences were discounted. They were expected to acquiesce to the attitudes of their parents—which is part of normal socialisation, but it can be overdone to a pathological degree in families which are egocentrically manipulative. In such cases, the children grow up with habits of overriding their own feelings, and indeed, using reaction formation and counterphobic defences to attempt to be placating and co-dependently friendly even to those with whom they experience (unconscious) negative tele.

Another group of reasons for ignoring tele is that the culture hasn't worked out ways of dealing with it more constructively. This is in part because such experiences are embarrassing, they go against the pervasive attitude that one should (and can) be friendly with everybody. It's helpful to recognise that this is a cultural convention which evolved to foster harmony through denial, but in the light of the technology of group process, such issues can be addressed through the process of encounter and problem-solving. A corollary to the above is that the lack of a sense of how to resolve the implied interpersonal conflict promotes resistance to awareness of negative tele. Therapists can counter these avoidances by helping their patients to learn some specific principles regarding negative tele.

First, instead of overtly or covertly acting out a hostile response or, on the other hand, being overly friendly, behave in a courteous, businesslike, restrained fashion. Know that any attempts to be self-disclosing or close are likely to be misinterpreted.



Second, recognise that since tele is an essentially intuitive response, it is not necessary to justify your emotional reactions. Thus, beware of tendencies to rationalise those feelings, to build a 'case' of various reasons why it's appropriate to dislike the other person. This only consolidates the negative tele and makes it more difficult to resolve the tensions in the relationship. It often exacerbates them. In other words, negative tele need not be amplified into a transference reaction. There may be nothing wrong with a person to whom you aren't attracted, and there may be nothing wrong with you if someone doesn't particularly like you. This point cannot be overstressed.

A third principle is that although you experience negative tele with another person in one role, it might be possible that other role(s) might be found which could serve as a basis for a more cordial relationship.

Negative tele may also offer an opportunity for personal growth in that one can explore the reasons for a negative reaction, reasons which may involve insights about a variety of transference reactions as well as personal preferences. For example, in a group which has become somewhat established and cohesive, a sociometric experiment may be suggested, as described by Monteiro and Carvalho. They had the group indicate to whom they would like to give a hug. 'Incongruencies, negative and indifferent mutualities were worked through by having the students explain and clarify their choices in successive pairs' (Monteiro and Carvalho 1990).

Recognising negative tele in psychodrama groups can offer some useful directions. First, a person who has negative tele with a number of other group members or with the director should not become a protagonist until the issues which have generated the negative tele have been resolved. A foundation of support might first be developed by seeing if other roles might be discovered which could serve as the basis of a more positive telic connection. Also, conflicts the person has with others in the group might be examined to see if the underlying issues can be resolved. Sometimes the courage a person exhibits in confronting these problems directly and with a spirit of self-examination can shift the group's attitude and promote a more positive identity in the group.

If only the director experiences negative tele with one of the group members, perhaps a co-therapist could take over the director's role and explore the conflict between the director and the client, seeking to clarify the nature of the underlying issues. (They may represent dynamics which are important in the overall group process.) Alternatively, if the co-director has positive tele with the group member in question, the co-director may simply process the role-playing of that person's issue aside from the relationship with the director.

However, not all relations can be satisfactorily worked out. Therapists who have sustained negative tele with certain patients should refer those patients out, and as a corollary, patients should not stay for months or longer trying to 'work through' a transference with someone whom they've never really taken to. 'It takes tele to choose the right therapist and the right partner; it takes transference to misjudge the therapist' (Moreno 1959a: 12). Sometimes, as in individual therapy, certain patients might do better changing to a group with whom they have a better rapport.

Negative tele may often be only part of a complex of feelings, and ambivalence, neutrality and indifference are also telic reactions which are deserving of attention (Moreno 1952:162). Especially worthy of note is the way telic reactions are role dependent, and even within a role, each component may evoke a different interactive valence (referring to a variable strength of attractive or repulsive force) (Carlson-Sabelli *et al.* 1992). Exploration of these component roles in terms of their feeling tones and the reasons for those feelings may lead to significant insights. Another strategy is to expand the participants' role repertoires so that new avenues for relating can be found.

Thus, in appreciating the various aspects of the dynamic of tele, people can be helped to face their unsatisfactory telic situations more directly. They may negotiate the criteria involved, seek or construct

alternative roles which could serve as the basis for a more satisfying connection or more consciously 'shop' for other relationships in which tele would occur more naturally.

### TELE AND GROUP COHESION

'There is tele already operating between the members of the group from the first meeting' (Moreno 1956b: 95). This quote is an example of Moreno using the term in its more inclusive sense—the tele may not necessarily be very positive. A group in which the members have few mutually enjoyable telic connections tends to be unstable. Group cohesion grows in proportion to the growth of tele among the leader and participants. Moreno, using the term now in its more positive sense, wrote that 'tele is the cement which holds groups together' (Moreno 1959b: 1380).

Yet, group cohesion also is related to a number of other factors, such as the urgency of their common need, the clarity of the group task, the norms of the group leader, similarities or differences in cultural values and expectations of the group members, the methods used, etc. A group may become closer because they're faced with an emotionally intense unifying force, such as might happen to a military unit in the course of a battle. Sharing the vulnerability of the human condition fosters identification on the level of the inner child, which circumvents the more superficial pretences of the social faade. Although people often feel that they will be rejected if their more shameful secrets are known to others, in most therapeutic groups, it is the disclosure and sharing of just that level of shame-based imagery which tends to generate a greater sense of trust (Nathanson 1992:252).

When group cohesion develops to a certain point, group members shift in their feeling about their membership in the group from a sense of being part of a mass of individuals to a sense of community. If the group cohesion continues to increase in intensity, the sense of 'we-ness' develops, and the general phenomenon is closer to what might be termed 'communion' (Gurvitch 1949).

A practical application of this principle is that one of the components of warming-up in psychodrama is that of promoting group cohesion (Blatner 1988a: 46). Using exercises which develop the positive tele among the group members while also building their empathic skills, the director structures the session so that people can disclose themselves gradually. For example, working in dyads, the group members interview each other in a given role. They change partners, and repeat the exercise with another role which requires a bit more involvement (Blatner and Blatner 1991). After a number of these dyadic experiences, each person in the group has shared with several others an activity in which some risk-taking and imaginativeness have been required, and as a result feels as if she or he has a number of special connections who will be supportive in dealing with others with whom they are not so well acquainted.

Another application of the tele principle is that in a psychodrama group members play a variety of roles, which in turn allows them to reveal a broader number of facets of their personalities. People can find more criteria for liking one another, and group cohesion tends to be associated with the number of roles which are shared by the members (Moreno 1934: 145).

Another technique for building a positive sense of tele among the group members is to get some consensus about a variety of group norms, such as confidentiality, a willingness to examine oneself, a commitment to deal directly with conflict rather than to keep it to oneself or to engage in gossip, a desire to become more creative and to foster creativity in the others or an openness to allow someone a chance to correct a behaviour which has evoked a negative response. Group norms which reflect superordinate or even spiritual values are especially powerful in promoting positive tele.

In turn, group settings in which the goal is spiritual development benefit from activities which specifically foster group cohesion. Indeed, helping people to encounter each other more authentically

partakes of a spiritual quality which the Jewish theologian, Martin Buber, called an 'I-Thou' relationship (Green 1959:1821).

### TELIC SENSITIVITY, EMPATHY AND ENCOUNTER

People are born with a capacity for tele, but it is diffuse and undifferentiated at first. The capacity for assessing how other people might be reacting, whether they might be feeling a similar sense of positive or negative attraction, or even neutrality or indifference, is called 'telic sensitivity'. When two people have divergent feelings towards each other, such as attraction-repulsion, or attraction-neutrality, this is called 'infra-tele,' and reflects a lack of accurate telic sensitivity on the part of at least one of the individuals (Nehnevajsa 1956:62).

The sense for tele develops with age. It's weak in children and grows with social awareness' (Moreno 1987:344). Children reveal some early forms of empathy in that they tend to react to others' joy or sorrow with corresponding feelings. Also, in nursery programs even young children show preferences among their classmates.

In adolescence, telic sensitivity tends to develop more in those who have the natural gifts of 'interpersonal intelligence'. It should be noted that there is a talent for social skilfulness just as there is a talent for music or athletics, and that while some children are innately more adept, so there are others who are less adept at acquiring these abilities (Gardner 1983: 239). And although there is a distribution of this capacity, Moreno believed that it would be possible to increase telic sensitivity at least to some extent in the majority of people through the use of role-training exercises.

For example, Moreno suggested that people practise 'perceptual sociometry', using the following instructions:

Draw your social atom. Note how you feel towards the various people, and guess what they feel toward you. List the reasons for those feelings. Guess how they're related to each other. Then ask someone who knows you to comment on your assessment, or better, ask the various people in your social network for feedback.

(Moreno 1952:155)

The area of romance offers one example in this regard. Young people often have crushes on others who do not reciprocate the feelings, an example of 'infra-tele'. In a culture which creates a narrow range of criteria affecting who is and is not desirable, people will tend to admire the culturally accepted clichés regarding attractiveness. What if we helped youngsters pay more attention to those others in one's social network who seem to reciprocate a sense of positive tele? Further, we should encourage young people to address a variety of categories, especially those which emphasise common interests rather than some commercial media-driven image of sex appeal. The implementation of such sociometric principles can help young people mature in learning to assess the reactions of others more effectively.

In psychodrama, telic sensitivity can be cultivated by allowing protagonists and auxiliaries to choose one another. Sometimes someone from the group spontaneously gets up to double for a protagonist because of some identification with the predicament being enacted. If there isn't already a sense of a special bond between the two, this kind of activity tends to foster that telic connection. Alternatively, a protagonist may choose a group member to play a certain role, and afterwards, during the sharing phase, it turns out that the auxiliary in his or her actual life experience had a similar situation happen. This seemingly telepathic

connection also arises out of the telic sensitivity of the protagonist who made that choice (usually unknowingly), and again fosters a greater sense of tele among the group members.

Empathy involves an individual's ability to sense into the feelings of another, and the activity of role-taking as happens in the course of the psychodramatic techniques of doubling or role reversal tends to build the skill of more accurate levels of empathy. If the people involved in this process have positive tele with each other, the act of empathy tends to be more effective. While empathy is a one-way process, tele involves both parties interacting with one another (Haskell 1975:32–3). Because of this, in the act of doubling, auxiliaries should verify their intuitive responses with the protagonist and allow their behaviour to emerge through mutual interaction (Moreno 1954:233).

On the other hand, if the tele between a protagonist and an assigned or chosen double isn't positive, it's more likely that the doubling itself will not feel 'right' to the protagonist. If this situation occurs, it's best if the director excuses the auxiliary and helps the protagonist to choose another group member with whom there is a greater degree of rapport.

Accurate empathy is a skill which requires a mixture of talent and practice. Some people are naturally more able to sense into others' feelings. Unfortunately, a certain portion of these gifted individuals lack the ethical component of positive tele and use their ability in a manipulative, perhaps even sociopathic fashion. The point is that while positive tele can foster empathy, and in turn, empathy can foster positive tele, still the two phenomena are not identical.

Some people seem almost incapable of being empathic, because they are handicapped by a great deal of egocentricity. This may be due to a lack of native intelligence, sheer immaturity, a pervasive disorder of relatedness (such as autism) or, more commonly, an overabundance of narcissistic traits. Indeed, it may be somewhat diagnostic to have patients in group therapy attempt to role-reverse and see how effective they can be. Whatever the extent to which they succeed, they will likely create a greater appreciation from those whom they are attempting to understand.

Encounter is an even more complex extension of this process of matured telic sensitivity. It involves both parties attempting to empathise with each other. Encounter goes beyond empathy in that there is an associated opening of one's heart, an act of will, an exercise of imagination and an expanding of one's perspective. It requires maturity and sensitivity. Teenagers in love have a goodly amount of positive tele, a modest amount of mutual empathy, yet tend to be limited in the degree to which they can truly role-reverse with each other, which is the essence of true encounter.

Encounter, a term coined by Moreno around 1914, refers to a process in which both parties sincerely attempt to genuinely meet each other. The encounter group, a fashionable personal-growth activity popular in the late 1960s and early 1970s, lost its thrust because it failed to follow this principle. Mere disclosure, often of angry affects, too frequently led to unresolved feelings; inexperienced group leaders didn't know how to have those involved in conflict resolve their differences through role reversal.

Even more than with empathy, encounter fosters tele, and tele in turn encourages people to risk encounter. Referring to its most positive expression, Moreno noted, 'The scientific counterpart of encounter is tele' (Moreno 1960:17).

### **PROMOTING INDIVIDUATION**

One of the most important applications of the concept of tele is that it encourages people to pay more attention to their own preferences. This in turn increases self-awareness and helps people in their individuation. Karen Horney (1950:17) wrote of the need to develop one's 'real self' as mentioned earlier. One of the most effective ways of achieving this is to help people pay attention to their preferences,

especially with regard to such areas as interests, temperamental styles and imagery. Many people in therapy have little awareness of these dimensions of self-development.

Another practical application of the concept of tele, then, is to have the people in the groups you lead discuss their preferences, including the collectives with which they've chosen to become affiliated, e.g. political, religious, artistic, etc. Have them consider their desired connections, those individuals and groups to which they'd like to belong. Help them talk about not only who is in their social networks, but also who they would want to be included. Talking about how they choose their dates, romantic partners, employment, hobbies and so on, what the criteria were, leads to a gradual emergence of a more authentic sense of self.

Thus, the dynamic of individuation, of helping people find their 'real self' and discover that it can be accepted and enjoyed by others, is facilitated in leading groups when the therapist addresses themes in therapy such as:

- Who is one 'supposed' to admire, based on cultural or family conditioning, versus who one actually feels some tele with. For example, is it okay for a boy to want to be a dancer?
- What did it require to be 'popular' with the other kids when you were a teenager? Was it what you really enjoyed doing?
- If there could have been a club which contained 'your kind of people', what would it be like?

Do sociometric exercises in which group members choose others based on certain criteria, and then allow them to role play or actually enact the activity involved. The activity of choosing should be emphasised, because many people feel awkward about this. They tend to turn to whomever is closest, or wait passively. Fears of not being chosen, the sense of shame when the one most preferred chooses someone else, the difficulty in not accepting a choice which is not preferred, these and other reactions offer a wealth of material for group discussion.

### **FURTHER APPLICATIONS OF THE CONCEPT OF TELE**

One of Moreno's goals was to allow tele to operate more in the organisation of formal relationships as well as informal ones, so that people who enjoy one another's company or complement one another's skills can choose to work on classroom projects, as laboratory partners, or in teams at their jobs. Room mates in a dormitory, committee members, and other groupings should be assigned based on their own indicated preferences rather than some arbitrary criterion imposed by those in charge.

Knowledge of the significance of tele in human relations would also help in structuring community organisations. For example, you might advocate the development of a greater variety of activities and promote the idea of letting children and adults choose their work groups rather than assigning them. To foster individuation, encourage children to discover their own preferences in the home and school (Blatner 1988b: 127-48).

As a group leader, perhaps the major application of the idea of tele is just to use it as a concept, teaching it to the group members so they can talk about their different and sometimes mixed feelings of attraction or wariness with each other. These discussions frequently evoke associations, from childhood onwards, concerning experiences of envy, shame and manipulateness regarding being liked or disliked, being popular or unpopular and daring to seek a more compatible group (Jennings 1950). The role-based nature of tele will help them to sort out these experiences, and discussion of the various criteria which affect their preferences also deepens shared insights about both individual and group dynamics.

## SUMMARY

Moreno discovered that tele is a powerful force at work in the inter-personal field. Having a word for a phenomenon helps people to begin to choose how they want to behave. Enabling people to be aware of this dimension of social interaction has practical implications. Learning to develop positive tele in one's social network promotes individuation, group cohesion, the capacity for empathy and encounter and a context for working through interpersonal conflicts.

## REFERENCES

- Berne, E. (1964) *Games People Play*, New York: Grove Press.
- Bischof, L.J. (1964) *Interpreting Personality Theories*, New York: Harper and Row.
- Blatner, A. (1988a) *Acting-in: Practical applications of psychodramatic methods*, 2nd edn, New York: Springer.
- (1988b) *Foundations of Psychodrama: History, theory and practice*, 3rd edn, New York: Springer.
- (1991) 'Role dynamics', *Group Psychotherapy, Psychodrama and Sociometry* 44(1): 33–40.
- Blatner, A. and Blatner, A. (1991) 'Imaginative interviews: a psychodramatic warm-up for developing role-playing skills', *Group Psychotherapy, Psychodrama and Sociometry* 44(3): 115–20.
- Carlson-Sabelli, L., Sabelli, H., Patel, M. and Holm, K. (1992) 'The union of opposites in sociometry', *Group Psychotherapy, Psychodrama and Sociometry* 44(4): 147–71.
- Gardner, H. (1983) *Frames of Mind*, New York: Basic Books.
- Green, M.R. (1959) 'Chapter 90C: Martin Buber' in S. Arieti (ed.) *American Handbook of Psychiatry*, vol. 2, New York: Basic Books.
- Gurvitch, G. (1949) 'Microsociology and sociometry', *Sociometry* 12(1–3): 1–31.
- Hale, A.E. (1981) *Conducting Clinical Sociometric Explorations: A manual for psychodramatists and sociometrists*, Roanoke, VA: Royal Publishing Co.
- Hart, J.W. (1980) 'An outline of basic postulates of sociometry', *Group Psychotherapy, Psychodrama and Sociometry* 33:63–70.
- Haskell, M.R. (1975) *Socioanalysis: Self-direction via sociometry and psychodrama*, Long Beach, CA: Role Training Associates of California.
- Holmes, P. (1992) *The Inner World Outside: Object relations theory and psychodrama*, London: Tavistock/Routledge.
- Horney, K. (1950) *Neurosis and Human Growth*, New York: Norton.
- Jennings, H.H. (1947) 'Sociometric differentiation of the psychegroup and the sociogroup', *Sociometry* 10(1): 71–9.
- (1950) *Leadership and Isolation*, New York: Longmans, Green and Co.
- Kellermann, P.F. (1992) *Focus on Psychodrama*, London: Jessica Kingsley.
- Masterson, J.F. (1988) *The Search for the Real Self: Unmasking the personality disorders of our age*, New York: Macmillan/Free Press.
- Mendelson, P. (1977) 'Sociometry as a life philosophy', *Group Psychotherapy, Psychodrama and Sociometry* 30: 70–85.
- Monteiro, A.M. and de Carvalho, E.R. (1990) 'Learning through psychodrama and sociometry: two university experiences', *Group Psychotherapy, Psychodrama and Sociometry* 43(2): 85–8.
- Moreno, J.L. (1934) *Who Shall Survive? A new approach to the problems of human relations*, Washington, DC: Nervous & Mental Disease Publishing Co.
- (1937) 'Sociometry in relation to other social sciences', *Sociometry* 1(1–2): 206–19.
- (1952) 'Current trends in sociometry', *Sociometry* 15(1–2): 146–63.
- (1953) *Who Shall Survive?* Revised and expanded edn, New York: Beacon House.
- (1955) 'Psychodrama', in J.L. McCary (ed.) *Six Approaches to Psychotherapy*, New York: Dryden, pp. 289–340.
- (1956a) 'The sociometric school and the science of man', *Sociometry* 18(4): 271–91.

- (1956b) 'Fundamental rules and techniques of psychodrama', in J.Masserman and J.L.Moreno (eds) *Progress in Psychotherapy*, vol. 3, New York: Grune and Stratton, pp. 86–131.
- (1959a) 'Transference, countertransference and tele: their relationship to group research and group psychotherapy', in *Psychodrama: Foundations of psychotherapy*, vol. 2, New York: Beacon House.
- (1959b) 'Psychodrama', in S. Arieti (ed.) *American Handbook of Psychiatry*, vol. 2, New York: Basic Books.
- (1960) *The Sociometry Reader*, Glencoe, IL: The Free Press.
- Moreno, Z.T. (1954) 'Sociogenesis of individuals and groups', in J.L.Moreno *et al.* (eds) *The International Handbook of Group Psychotherapy*, New York: Philosophical Library, pp. 231–42.
- (1987) 'Psychodrama, role theory, and the concept of the social atom', in J.Zeig (ed.) *The Evolution of Psychotherapy*, New York: Brunner/Mazel.
- Nathanson, D.L. (1992) *Shame and Pride: Affect, sex, and the birth of the self*, New York: W.W.Norton.
- Nehnevajsa, J. (1956) 'Sociometry: decades of growth', in J.L.Moreno (ed.) *Sociometry and the Science of Man*, New York: Beacon House, pp. 48–95.
- Northway, M. (1967) *A Primer of Sociometry*, 2nd edn, Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Peters, E.H. (1966) *The Creative Advance: An introduction to process philosophy*, St Louis: The Bethany Press.
- Rheingold, H. (1988) *They Have a Word For It*, Los Angeles: J.P.Tarcher.
- Rowan, J. (1990) *Subpersonalities*, London: Routledge.
- Samuels, A., Shorter, B. and Plaut, F. (1986) *A Critical Dictionary of Jungian Analysis*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Starr, A. (1977) *Rehearsal for Living: Psychodrama*, Chicago: Nelson-Hall.