

'The heart of healing': delineation and possibilities of 'Tele' in psychodrama

Motto: 'Complete **Tele** is responsible for a successful therapeutic relationship, whereas disturbed **Tele** is responsible for its failure.' Von Ameln et al (2004)

Subject & occasion

In psychodramas, I regularly 'vibrate' with the protagonist. Often it is that I get tears in my eyes when the protagonist goes through something in the drama. How does this work? What words does psychodrama language have to name this? When is it healthy and helpful and when awkward?

Some prompts from past PD weekends:

(a) In a psychodrama of A., she gets to a point where she tries to express anger by hitting a pillow. I sit in the chorus and feel tears begin to flow. B. sits next to me and puts her arm around me worryingly. I try to signal that I am okay, that the emotion is not mine. Is this coming?

(b) In a psychodrama of C., I am the co-director. When she sets up different parts of herself and engages with them, I notice that I can hardly stand on my feet. I feel very heavy, afraid I will faint, also gloomy. Afterwards, I share my experiences with C. She indicates that she herself was afraid of having these feelings in her drama. Did an unconscious shift from her emotions to me take place here? And was I carrying it for her? Or was this transference?

(c) In a psychodrama of D., I manage to concentrate badly. The theme stays outside me, I participate as best I can, but it doesn't really touch me. Nor does it feel like the core in D. is really coming to the table. There seems to be some kind of 'head-cross' connection missing with her. On the car ride home, others share with me that they struggled to vibrate with D.'s drama. We talk about how different that can be.

d) I listen to teacher E.'s interpretation of the drama's protagonist. She picks out exactly the core of it in my experience. How can she so purely articulate the emotional essence of someone's subject over and over again? I ask her about it and she indicates that she starts through what she experiences in her body, then searches ... for the right words.

In a), it is clear to me that these are not my emotions, but those of the other person. In b), it is less easy to clarify what belongs to whom, what is intuition and what is transference. In c) there was a lack of group vibration and d) I could see as the best practice for me.

Sensitivity & authenticity concern my personal area of focus in this training. From that learning objective and from a formation as a psychodrama professional, I want to understand even better what is going on here.

In this paper, I am going to find out what the value or impediment of such phenomena are for psychodrama. Is there a connection with the mysterious concept of Tele? How does it differ from empathy? With 'felt sense'? When is something Tele and when is transference, outsourcing or projective identification? What exactly does Tele represent? What is the function of this concept in relation to the quality of psychodrama? Is there a relationship with the trait of high sensitivity?

Although the theoretical exploration also fascinates me greatly, here I will mainly look for applicable insights, which can give director, co and members in the choir clarity to enhance the quality of psychodramas.

Search/question (and sub-questions)

What is the value of the concept of 'Tele' for (quality) of a psychodrama?

- o How can Tele be defined?
- o How does Tele relate to empathy and transference?
- o What is the value of Tele?
- o How does Tele relate to high sensitivity?
- o (How) can a director influence Tele (positively)?

Delineation of Tele

For Moreno and Moreno (1975, p. 234), Tele is the cement that holds individuals and groups together. Another description is the process that draws individuals towards each other or pushes them away from each other (Moreno 1937, p. 213). Or the socio-gravitational factor that works between individuals (Moreno 1985, p. 84). This is (also) about empathy from one person to another (Moreno and Moreno 1975, p. 6). Tele-reciprocity can then be understood as the common feature of all experiences of encounter. It is the intuitive 'click' between the participants (Moreno 1956, p. 276).

Other authors (compared to Moreno) interpret this empathy more as a processual event. Empathy then includes not only a relatively automatic emotional resonance, but also an active imagination that engages memory as it brings relevant experiences into processing, evoked by relevant feelings. (Allen et al. 2008, p. 38).

Elsewhere, Hutter (2002, p. 92) speaks of Tele as medial communication and as a sixth sense to be developed for improvised interplay. According to him, the forces between players correspond to Tele. That force concerns a reciprocal force that creates bonding and group cohesion.

For drama, Tele relationships in a group are important channels of informal information and communication (Leutz (1974, p. 20) They are foci of socio-creative cooperation and responsible for the inner cohesion of the group.

Transmission

In terms of differences with transference, Tele can be understood as a reciprocal, reality-based perception, as an objective system of interpersonal relations that is perceptibly present for all group members. Transference, on the other hand, is subjective and attributable to one person. (Moreno and Jennings. 1960, p. 43). The longer a relationship lasts, the more Tele prevails and not transference (Moreno 1947, p. 25). Tele's function can therefore be defined as a group binder, while transference is more of a disintegrator.

Trainable?

Tele sensitivity is said to be developable (Blatner 2009, p. 11) and even trainable. Psychodrama leaders should therefore learn in their training in psychodrama the ability to use psychodrama techniques to develop the protagonists' intrapsychic process work (their Tele-sensitivity) (Hutter and Schwehm, 2009, p. 202). To this end, an important condition is that the director feels enough space to connect with the intuitive (knowing) field to give Tele a chance. This also requires a flexible handling of the form, which often develops as uncertainty subsides.

A conclusion about the above is that it thus proves not easy to clearly define the Tele dimension of psychodramas in objective terms. More cognitive-intellectual publications seek the solution of vagueness in a division into:

- a *Tele-process*: the path to a Tele-relationship
- the *Tele-relation*, which is the ideal-typical result of a successful Tele-process.

Things get exciting in terms of the language used when Krüger presents four steps that would have to be gone through for the Tele-process to succeed (Krüger 1997, p. 80; 2000, p. 67). They are: 1) attraction and repulsion, 2) interaction, 3) integration and 4) agreement on a common understanding and consensual relationship realisation. Particularly striking in the explanation of the first phase is the use of the word 'energetic'. Krüger describes that first stage as: creating attraction and repulsion in a meeting space between the interaction partners with an energetic exchange in an at least temporary common heating zone.

Reflection & interpretation

Although some authors want to strip the Tele concept of its sometimes mystically exaggerated meaning by understanding Tele as a Tele process to a Tele relationship, the most valuable explanation for me comes from Zerka Moreno (2000). She describes Tele as:

'Perhaps Tele can be understood as combining sensibility and understanding. My own interpretation of the essence of Tele is: liking, loving and respecting in one.'

As functions of Tele, she sees: strengthening relationship as an operative principle in healing and setting up islands of safety. Thus, healing can be facilitated relationally. In this view, the difference between Tele, transference and empathy is that transference and empathy involve one-way traffic, versus Tele being two-way traffic. To harness or enhance the power of Tele, it needs to be purged of transference and empathy, cleaned up as it were.

Real answer to my search for meaning of Tele I find in Moreno's statement in which he wonders whether we could be mistaken in stating that the psyche resides in the body. What would happen if we turn this around? And assume that the biological body resides within a sphere of the psyche?

'Group research shows that they find their expression between people, in interpersonal and intergroup relations, travelling throughout the network, sometimes visibly, sometimes not, but often without predictable effects. The energy involved in these streams of feelings and moods which feeds them we assume to be 'Tele' (Moreno 1943, p. 320).

Not only is this an acceptable explanation for observable 'coincidences' that frequently occur in psychodramas, such as, for example, antagonists being chosen on the basis of the stream of emotional knowledge in which they 'vibrate' with the protagonist and, for example, it turns out in retrospect that an antagonist has had exactly such an experience. These coincidences can now be understood as arising from a shared energetic field in which people are (unconsciously) connected and transmit information. Important detailing of this is Moreno's explanation that this energetic field would feed a flow of feelings and emotions.

The implication of this view, is that:

a) People who are sensitive to energy in spaces, in people and between people, have good antennae for Tele in a psychodrama.

And b) that exercises that strengthen connection between group members on an energetic level could contribute to a strong Tele in the group, enhancing psychodrama work and yield in terms of healing.

Applications

Here I distinguish between ways of addressing Tele in individual ways versus promoting or addressing Tele as a characteristic, skill or phenomenon at the level of the working group.

- Promoting individual contributions to Tele within psychodrama (training) can be done by: clearly defining the subject with the group and making participants aware of Tele present and absent (for recognition and awareness). Having a conversation about it through reflection questions. Like: when were you drawn into the psychodrama with your attention, intuition and feelings, and when not? What could that be related to?
- Clarify differences between Tele and individual transference mechanisms through self-examination. Offer reflection tools to purge one's own experiences in terms of transference, empathy and/or Tele after the psychodramas performed.
- Identify who in the group might have a naturally high(er) sensitivity to Tele. These are people who sense the energetic and emotional atmosphere within a group well, who identify as highly sensitive. High sensitivity is an innate and genetically transmitted trait, identifiable by a neurodivergent brain (detectable with scans). Aron concludes that several studies show that certain people are more highly stimulated than average. In an internal sense, people with hsp are more sensitive to emotions, pain, pleasure and other physical and mental experiences. In an external sense, people with hsp are not only more sensitive to sounds and smells and to visual and tactile stimulation, but also appear to take in more impressions, making them more aware earlier and more aware of atmosphere, energy and the number of possible scenarios an environment holds (Aron, 2013).

As for promoting Tele at the group level, programming activities that connect a group at the energetic layer would contribute to group Tele and to the quality of psychodrama. This would involve warm-up exercises, for example.

Conclusions:

- To understand Tele properly, the following image of Zerka Moreno is valuable: a physical body situated in a psychic-emotional field in which people vibrate with each other.
- This calls for adding language that deals with energy into psychodrama jargon, and exercises that do justice to the energetic layer.
- It also seems useful to make Tele actively discussable, by explaining differences with other concepts and promoting reflective questions about it in the follow-up discussions in psychodrama groups.
- There are development opportunities to promote Tele actively in (learning) groups beyond the warm-ups used.
- Some people are more sensitive to Tele than others. Identifying people with a 'highly sensitive' brain, can also contribute to this.

In conclusion

Given the guideline for the limited scope of this paper, not all relevant concepts have been picked out carefully enough here. There is an opportunity to make the reasoning more precise by also defining and including related concepts from psychoanalysis and, for example, the concepts of 'felt sense' or 'the knowing field' in the search for Tele as a key to 'the heart of healing' in psychodrama.

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