

COMMENTARY. . .

Double Vision: Moreno and Dostoevsky

The role of the double in psychodrama was certainly one of Moreno's most valuable contributions within the psychodramatic process. Becoming an extension of the protagonist, the double provides a more spontaneous self to compensate for the protagonist's deficits of the moment. An effective double can intuit what it is that the protagonist may need to express when he or she seems to be blocked in the needed action or verbalization. The double should provide the protagonist with a positive role model, by acting out or verbalizing what the protagonist might wish to, but is presently unable to, carry out. In that way, protagonists can use the role modeling as a stimulus that can then liberate their actional behavior.

Of course, the psychodramatic double properly functions only to serve the needs of the protagonist. In assuming that role, the double must subsume his or her personal agenda and become fully psychologically entrained with the inner world of the protagonist. Conversely, a misguided double, for example a person who is playing the role to try to direct the protagonist toward what he or she thinks the protagonist ought to do or who is trying to impress the group in some way, can be potentially harmful by leaving the protagonist with feelings of inadequacy. The psychodramatic double is only as effective as his or her own level of sensitivity and therapeutic and personal maturity.

All of this, regarding the positive versus the negative potential of the double came to mind recently when I was reading *The Double*, a short novel of Dostoevsky, his second published work written in 1846. In stark contrast with Moreno's therapeutic focus, Dostoevsky's idea of a double is a character who directly competes with the protagonist, a comparison that is both interesting and instructive.

The protagonist in the novel is Golyadkin, a civil servant in an office in St. Petersburg. It is obvious from the start that he is a man with great insecurities and has significant difficulties in successfully playing the expected roles in his personal and professional lives. Rather than trying to address his problems, Golyadkin rationalizes his behavior. He avoids confronting his own role-rigidity and lack of spontaneity by taking an exaggerated pride in what he sees as his personal sincerity and refusal to wear social masks. As the story

unfolds, we see that his limited spontaneity and inability to work on it sow the seeds of his own self-destruction. He does consult a medical doctor, aware of his anxieties, but although the physician provides him with a placebo drug, his primary message to Golyadkin is to enjoy life, that is, to become more spontaneous.

One evening, following a particularly difficult and humiliating social rebuff, Golyadkin suddenly finds himself face-to-face, to his great shock and dismay, with a man who is his exact physical double. This new Golyadkin even has the same name and does the same line of work, although the two are not related. Golyadkin, a man plagued with social and professional fears, is immediately terrified of all the potential embarrassments and confusion that this new interloper could present in his life. At first, the junior Golyadkin presents himself in a sympathetic way, and the protagonist has a momentary sense of relief and the hope that the situation might yet resolve itself in a positive way. However, things quickly begin to go very wrong. For example, the protagonist's long-time servant does not seem to recognize the difference between the real Golyadkin and his double! The role confusion he had intuitively feared is coming to pass, as his own role identity is being threatened. Things go from bad to worse when the next day the double shows up as a fellow employee in Golyadkin's office, even working in the same department. This new Golyadkin excels in all the skills that the protagonist lacks. The charming and self-centered double soon insinuates himself into the favor of the true Golyadkin's colleagues and superiors, threatening his professional survival. In line with Moreno's idea, this double has all the needed spontaneity that the protagonist lacks. But, instead of supporting the protagonist, this double is strictly out for himself, and even seems to take a sadistic satisfaction in outplaying his other in every role situation.

This encounter crystallizes the dual potential of the psychodramatic double. Will the double, with all of his or her gifts of spontaneity, which the protagonist may be lacking, use those gifts to serve the protagonist? Or, will the double be so self-oriented that, consciously or unconsciously, he or she may misuse the role to meet his or her own needs?

Dostoevsky's character can be seen in different ways. Does he represent Golyadkin's divided self brought into a separate role through his imagination? Is Golyadkin mad and the double only a hallucinatory vision? That the reader must decide.

Dostoevsky's realistic style of writing in this work is also reminiscent of Gogol. In Gogol's story "The Nose," the main character awakes one day to find his nose missing and learns that his nose is going about town disguised as a civil servant. The nose is also a kind of double. Furthermore, the idea of giving an active role to a body part or inanimate object is also very psychodramatic.

Poor Golyadkin desperately needed a double with exactly the positive qualities that the new Golyadkin possessed, but one that would have helped him to grow. We each have our own internal "doubles," the parts of ourselves that are in contrast to our normal persona. Those parts of the self may be called on in life's challenging situations that demand that we rise above our usual norms and draw from our reserves of spontaneity. If those parts of ourselves are too neglected, they can become atrophied, and that is precisely when a psychodramatic double is needed to bring them to life. That is the beauty of Moreno's double because the double is the one who is committed to helping the protagonist to realize his or her best potentials.

In the end, Golyadkin endures an increasing reversal of fortune, losing all of his professional and social status to his greedy double. For the denouement, Golyadkin undergoes a final humiliating role reversal, when, having ultimately been driven to madness, he finds himself being taken to an asylum by the very doctor whom he first consulted for support.

Double trouble? Psychodrama directors, take note.

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The 35th Annual Conference of the American Art Therapy Association

The 35th Annual Conference of the American Art Therapy Association, *Creative Fire: Identity, Passion, Professionalism*, is to be held November 10–14, 2004, at the Town & County Hotel, in sunny San Diego, California. We welcome proposals for papers, panels, workshops, poster sessions, advanced practice courses and performance art. Please follow the guidelines found on our Web site <arttherapy.org> or access <American Art Therapy Association2004 Conference Call for Papers and Proposals>. For more information, contact the American Art Therapy Association, 1202 Allanson Road, Mundelein, Illinois 60060, or telephone toll-free 1 888-290-0878. We look forward to expanding our interdisciplinary dialogue in San Diego.