

The Sociometric Vision

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I WOULD LIKE TO CONSIDER SOCIOMETRY in a variety of contexts. Let us begin by considering the use of sociometry in the workplace, which has been something of a neglected area in recent years. This discussion will lead me to an exploration of the current role of the sociometrist and the current status of the sociometric movement in light of our current practice. Ultimately, such discourse will evoke the question of the sociometric vision: What is it, and how do we realize this vision from where we are today?

At this time, when the most common milieu for group psychotherapy is the synthetic group, it may seem a bit unusual to think of therapy as taking place within a naturalistic group, and more particularly, within the ongoing process of an individual's everyday life as it unfolds within the matrix of the great number and variety of groups of which he or she is naturally a member. However, therapy in such natural groups is the very essence of what J. L. Moreno called *in situ* therapy; therapy where the individual is, *in the midst of ongoing life*—in the home, the school, the club, the factory—all the many places where life is actually lived. Actually, such *in situ* therapy is both philosophically and historically central to Moreno's establishment of sociometry as an *action* science with global concerns. Indeed, if "the truly therapeutic procedure cannot have less an objective than the whole of mankind," then therapy must be brought into everyday life, not confined to synthetic groups.

A Note on Sociometry

Some background may be helpful. Sociometry, in its widest sense, can be thought of as being composed of a number of interpenetrating dimensions. It can be thought of as a philosophy of life and as a philosophy for living, as a theory of man alone, and as a theory of men in groups (or a theory of society), as a methodology for exploring man and society and their interrelationships, and also as a therapeutic praxis that attempts to help man reach a higher level of personal humanity and interpersonal synergy. This praxis is all the more embracing if it reaches out to meet

man where he is, not confining itself to the limited reaches of the therapist's office or the confines of the synthetic group. Indeed, a tradition of utilizing sociometry in the midst of life itself is at the very heart of Moreno's original conception of sociometry.

Sociometry in the Workplace

In this view, the use of sociometry in the workplace is simply an extension of the principle that sociometry, in all its dimensions, can and should be used where life itself is actually lived. Life in the workplace is not (or at least, one hopes it is not) a discrete dimension of man's everyday life experience. On the contrary, it is central to that experience. In fact, by virtue of this centrality, the workplace is an altogether appropriate setting for the practicing sociometrist to engage in his craft. It is the replacement of the synthetic group by the natural group, a return to focus on life where it is actually lived. Here, indeed, therapy might take place in the midst of life itself. Toward this end, the consulting industrial sociometrist may come, in many respects, to operate as a sort of human relations specialist in residence. To this task, he brings a unique perspective theoretically, philosophically, and pragmatically; moreover, he has in his repertoire a set of intervention techniques that can be used in the ongoing situation. We are familiar with many of these techniques through the creative efforts of the many extraordinarily talented sociometrists in our midst, individuals such as Bob Blake, Joe Hart, Ann Hale, and Tom Treadwell.

The Role of the Sociotherapist in Situ

Now the role of the sociometrist in the workplace is—at least, at first—that of an analyst. Yet, he is not merely the analyst of the invisible social structure; he is also the analyst of an invisible sociometric structure, the pattern of positive and negative interpersonal feelings that lies beneath the surface. At the very heart of the matter, he is an analyst of the degree of discordance between the formal social structure and the sociometric structure and of the resultant tension that derives from such discordance.

In as much as this role is central to the whole business of doing sociometry in the natural setting, perhaps this mode of analysis should be explicated a bit more fully. The essence of the matter is the premise that there exists not one, but two social structures: First, a formal primary social structure that comprises official roles and patterns of behavior and association; second, an invisible but equally real infrastructure, a *sociometric* structure, which consists of patterns of interpersonal attraction and re-

pulsion—in short, the socioemotional structure of the group.

Moreno theorized that the greater the degree of discordance between the official social structure and the sociometric structure, the greater the degree of invidious social conflict and tension. To conceptualize this, particularly in terms of its application to the workplace, the following hypothesis emerges: Social conflict and tension increase in relation to the degree to which an imposed pattern of relations violates the naturally occurring socioemotional structure of the organization. In fact, this hypothesis has been proved many times by sociometrists, both in the field and in the laboratory.

Accordingly, it is the first job of the consulting sociometrist to articulate the formal social structure of the workplace and to make visible its invisible sociometric structure. Toward this end, the sociometrist has a set of methods, the tools of his trade. The first of these tools, the one most successfully used for decades, is sociometric cartography.

Sociometric cartography consists of making maps, or sociograms, that depict the socioemotional patterns of relationships that exist within a group. These patterns exist regardless of whether the group is a family, a community, or a cohort of workers, although different units have different levels of complexity. It is a mistake to think of these patterns as being fixed. In fact, they are in constant flux as strains develop between both the sociometric structure and the formal structure and within the sociometric structure itself. Thus, this tool for analysis is quite appropriately a guide for action as well.

From Analysis to Action

Sociometric structures unfold in the course of ongoing events. As events unfold, the sociometrist must quickly be able to shift roles, for he is not merely an analyst, he is also an actor. A sociometrist in the workplace is not there to chronicle events as some type of detached sociohistorian. No, he is there to intervene, to act, to transform the pathological relationship into a synergistic one. A sociometrist endeavors not simply to record the situation, but to change it.

It is of paramount importance to recognize that the industrial sociometrist is more than a detached observer or an academically pedigreed consultant who is removed from the ongoing situation. In fact, it is at the moment when the sociometrist turns from detached analysis to become a participating actor that he moves from the role of disinterested analyst to that of the full-fledged sociotherapist.

What, then, is a proper role for a consulting sociometrist? In my view, he is, first and foremost, a sociotherapist. He works in situ, in the nat-

ural setting, in the workplace, in the midst of life as life unfolds. Yet he works not only as an analyst but also as an activist. He is the activist of the group itself. Specifically, the sociometrist must guard against being—or being perceived as—the agent of the formal social structure (concretely known as management). His stance is a neutral one with a commitment to the reduction of discordance between formal social structures and the sociometric structures that lie buried beneath the surface.

Methods and Techniques

Naturally, questions must arise as to what methods and techniques the sociotherapist uses in attempting to resolve problems that manifest themselves in the workplace. To a large extent, however, the sociotherapist does not use methods here that are different from those in other situations, although certainly methods are inevitably tailored to suit an individual setting. Nonetheless, I think there are several “constants.”

1. In applying the principles of sociometry to any setting, the sociometrist enacts the roles of analyst *and* actor, theorist *and* therapist, but does not himself dictate the goals of action. Rather, he is a facilitator who enables the group to achieve its own goals more effectively.

2. Action is based upon the sociometric analysis of the group and individuals in the group. This frame of reference is, in effect, a constant.

3. The sociotherapist uses *all* the methods available to him that are appropriate to the situation; for example, psychodrama, sociodrama, role training, action sociometry, and so on.

4. The group can and should be used as cotherapist. The sociometrist is not a therapist in isolation—rather he is a coactor who, through enacting a directorial role, endeavors to arouse others to be agents of therapeusis.

5. Goals are determined by the group through group processes. This may be straightforward, and it may entail conflict—but either way, goals derive from the group in toto, not from the sociometrist.

6. The sociometrist proceeds on the basis of action hypotheses that are subject to empirical testing in the situation. This, too, is a constant.

At the same time, in applying the principles of sociometry to the work setting, the sociotherapist must recognize that group members (for example, factory workers) often present themselves in a multiplicity of roles, such as wife, mother, computer operator, friend, all at once. This is intrinsic to the in situ setting. In the work setting, however, a group member's primary role will often be perceived to be that of “worker” in isolation from the full role cluster. Yet these other latent roles must often be elicited, or properly warmed up to, before any meaningful action can

take place. This is because the sources of conflict typically lie *between* these latent roles and various individuals or *within* the individual's full role repertoire itself.

The sociotherapist recognizes that the group can and must provide a crucial foundation of support for the individual. Consequently, group processes and individual behavior are seen as being intrinsically related. We must remember that the sociometrist, regardless of setting, attempts to narrow the discordance between formal social structure and the sociometric structure by bringing the formal social structure into congruence with the underlying socioemotional structure of the group or community, *not* vice versa.

The Emergent Role

It should be clear that what is being discussed is not the so-called use of sociometry *by* industry, meaning the use of sociograms and socioanalysis in the service of management to boost the goals of production and profit. Rather, a very different concept is being suggested. According to Moreno's view, the sociometrist can effectively act as both analyst *and* actor. Thus, it is possible to work toward a revolution of cooperation in which it is not presupposed that what is good for the worker is bad for management.

I have been suggesting, therefore, that we enact the role of sociotherapist. Yet this role most surely is not established; indeed, in a very real sense, ours is an emergent role, one that we are creating as we go along. To be sure, we are guided by some general principles and have established a substantial body of knowledge, but we are constantly discovering new principles and enlarging upon our basic knowledge as well. And yet I wonder if we dare to go forward.

In order to answer that concern, I believe that we must take a hard look at ourselves, that we must understand where we have come from, and that we must discuss and explore where we are going. To do this adequately, it is necessary for us to explore, albeit briefly, the so-called institutionalization of the sociometric framework.

We must remember that sociometry is not just a science (or even a theory or philosophy), but, in a historical sense, it is a social movement as well. In this view, we cannot help but recall Moreno's dictum that "a truly therapeutic procedure can have no less an objective than the transformation of mankind." It is interesting how close in spirit this is to Marx's belief that "the point is not just to understand the world—the point is to change it." In both cases, the emphasis is not on the scientist or philosopher as observer, but rather on the scientist as *actor*. This represents a fundamental and dramatic shift from the positivistic or empirico-analytic tradition. In a

broad sense, it reconceptualizes the role of the man of knowledge.

We must also bear in mind that all social movements develop along a fairly predictable pattern that can be analyzed separately from the objective of the movement. If we take as our premise that sociometry can be conceptualized as a movement that has as its object the radical transformation of mankind, it becomes readily apparent how much our movement has in common with utopian social movements dating back to antiquity. Certainly, the methodology proposed for transformation is uniquely modern (that is, the redesign according to scientific principles), but the objective is as old as the first utopian schemes.

In the course of history, some utopian movements go somewhere and others are flashes in the proverbial pan. The early impetus depends, in some measure, on the existence of a charismatic leader and an identified "moral" problem. Generally, when sociologists look at the common form of social movements (as distinct from their substance), it is apparent that social movements progress as follows: Typically, there is first a moral crusader who steps forward to try to ameliorate a social problem (in our case, we may see this as the disparity between formal social structures and man's socioemotional needs). Subsequently, an ideology that explains the structural sources of discontent develops, along with an alternative view of reality and a plan of action (this is where the development and elaboration of sociometric theory fit). In the next phase of a social movement, participants mobilize resources necessary to sustain a formal organization. They reinforce charismatic leadership with managers and administrators; they make alliances with other groups, they resist co-optation, and they avoid conflict within their own ranks and thus maintain the commitment of members over the long haul. If this is successfully accomplished, it leads to a fourth and final stage called institutionalization, the process wherein the movement's beliefs are accepted and its goals embodied in stable organizations.

Now let me connect this to the sociometric movement more specifically.

To begin, one would be hard pressed to describe Moreno as anything other than a charismatic leader. Those who knew him will need no convincing, and those who did not might consider the statement: "There is no controversy about my ideas. They are universally accepted. I am the controversy." There is no question that Moreno was controversial, and, from the point of view of giving impetus to a movement, perhaps this was helpful. Few would deny that Moreno's fundamental ideas were disseminated and absorbed into the very way we think about social relations today. And yet, if we remember how social movements develop, before too long a developmental crisis ensues. If the movement is to survive and grow, several things must then happen: An effective formal organization must be devel-

oped, one that reinforces charismatic leadership but is not dependent upon it; intergroup alliances must be made, dissent minimized, co-optation resisted, membership commitment sustained. In a general sense, to accomplish this, a certain degree of bureaucratization needs to emerge. For a social movement to endure, these are all necessary.

I would like to make several observations. First, Moreno's sociometric theory was conceived during a historical moment when the political climate and the scientific *Weltanschauung* were ripe for the expression and articulation of the scientifically grounded study of human relations. This development paralleled the development of empiricism in academic sociology and was equally consistent with the search for empirical groundings in psychology, especially as a countervailing force to the more speculative and untestable psychoanalytic formulation. Moreover, the emergence of scientific social planning gave implicit legitimacy to an ameliorative, proactive approach as long as it could be said to be scientifically grounded. Indeed, the utopian impulse was not dead; rather, it became clear that to maintain its honor it needed to be wed to the ever more powerful scientism in the social sciences. The moral problem of human freedom (remember the roots of spontaneity, *sua sponte*) were now seen to be amenable to a scientific solution.

So the movement was born. The time was right, the intellectual vision articulated, the leader charismatic. In its next crucial phase of development, a social movement progresses toward institutionalization. Let us look at this phase with respect to the sociometric movement.

We all certainly recall that, during the earliest phases of the sociometric movement, sociometry was used as a tool for both analysis and change in a variety of institutions and organizations. While the early sociometric findings were presented in a technically elaborate way, such findings were both implicitly and explicitly linked to plans for intervention and remediation. The extensive data on the Hudson girls' cottages presented in *Who Shall Survive?* are illustrative of this. It is important to remember that Moreno argued compellingly that the purpose of these methods was not merely to bring to light the previously obscure socioemotional infrastructure of the group but rather to increase the correspondence between the socioemotional infrastructure and the formal social structure. Sociometry was action-oriented toward intervention and change.

If we are to understand what happened to the sociometric movement, we must consider several points. First, I believe that the sociometric movement was "done in" by the very scientific paradigm that initially provided the culture for its development. If it is true that sociometry held a certain appeal to the academic community because of its empirical grounding in the observable and the measurable, it is equally true as the empirico-

analytic or positivist paradigm achieved hegemony in the American social sciences. It became increasingly apparent that the action-oriented interventionism of sociometry was dissonant with the emergent paradigm. In fact, as the social sciences stretched even further to identify themselves with the physical sciences (hoping thereby to achieve some stature or legitimacy in the scientific community), it became increasingly necessary to purge sociometry specifically, and social science generally, of the interventionist impulse. This tension resulted in what I have elsewhere described as the bifurcation of sociometry—the stripping away of its technology from the philosophy and theory in which that technology was originally grounded.

Further, we need to recall that a social movement—and I am thinking specifically of sociometry here—must, if it is to endure, accomplish a host of tasks. It must reinforce charismatic leadership with managers and administrators; it must make intergroup alliances while avoiding co-optation; and it must avoid intragroup conflict while maintaining the commitment of those who identify themselves with the movement. How has sociometry fared with respect to these? I suppose that, at best, one would see sociometry's success rate as mixed. I think that the bifurcation of sociometry is illustrative of co-optation, co-optation of the scientist as activist by the currently dominant community of scientists as observers. But there is even more to this matter than that. I think that if we are to get the full picture, we must look at our own professional society, ostensibly the organizational embodiment of the sociometric movement. If it is true that the academic community has absorbed the technology of sociometry while ignoring its theory and philosophy, it is also true that many practitioners have lost sight of the broad theoretical and philosophical concerns of sociometry as they immerse themselves in psychodrama as a psychotherapeutic modality. How many researchers, theorists, philosophers are there among us today? Some, to be sure, but I think too few. We have contributed to our own myopia.

Have we been successful in making intergroup alliances? To a limited degree, perhaps we have, albeit with agonizing debate. Is it possible to forge such alliances without being consumed by groups larger than ourselves? In light of the history of our movement, I believe we would do well to exercise caution. To maintain the philosophic and theoretical integrity of our movement while forging alliances with others will not be an easy task. Yet, if we as a movement are to survive, this would appear to be a necessity. Have we been successful at avoiding intragroup conflict while maintaining the commitment of those who identify themselves with our movement? No. One would be hard pressed to see this as one of our strong points. Perhaps, in a movement that esteems individual creativity and spontaneity, this goal is unrealistic. If we cannot avoid conflict, however,

surely we can do better at resolving it. Our movement today is notably fragmented. In America alone, we have the American Society of Group Psychotherapy and Psychodrama (ASGPP), the Board of Examiners, and the Federation. Of course, that ignores the tremendous diversity that prevails on the international scene. We are indeed quite splintered, and we certainly have not maintained the commitment of our membership nearly well enough.

The contemporary situation is characterized by several competing strains, strains that have their roots in the history and development of our movement. One such strain is embodied in the current professionalization of practice concurrent with the obfuscation of purpose. To put the matter simply, I believe that we are investing enormous time, energy, and resources in developing a more professional organization and image and a more professional practice, while losing sight of the purposes that are the substance and soul of sociometry. It is not that the two are necessarily incompatible, but it is far too easy to let the veneer of professionalism hide the fact that we are in danger of losing our direction.

This is related on some levels to the general neglect of social action that characterizes our contemporary practice, and it finds expression in our frequent failure to ameliorate the dissonance between the socioemotional structure of a group and the formal social structure. As we have become increasingly immersed in the technology of psychotherapy and psychodrama, we have too often lost sight of the fact that all of our praxis is not the simple production of catharsis but rather the transformation of the formal social structure. The purpose, after all (at least in Moreno's view), was to change the world. We need to go outside our synthetic groups, which was the point of my earlier discussion of sociometry in the workplace. I believe that it goes even beyond that.

For example, let us take our role with respect to the current human tragedy precipitated by the AIDS crisis. Too often and for too long, the role of the health care provider has been to wait for the afflicted to come to one's office, the safe sanctuary where treatment could be professionally and antiseptically provided. But it is all too apparent that that role is no longer adequate. One cannot possibly wait in one's office to treat the suffering while ignoring the social reality that exists in the community outside. It is not enough to lead groups for the ill while the ostensibly healthy perpetuate the social conditions (prejudice, homophobia, and the disposability of certain categories of people) that contribute to the spread of the disease. Do we not, in fact, participate in a collective sociodrama of neglect when we give up our proactive, ameliorative role? I am convinced that this cannot, must not, be the price of our professionalism. If we give up our philosophy, we have, in fact, lost our movement and rendered ourselves no

more than a collective of technologically sophisticated, and quite marginal, group therapists.

This leads me then to the broader question, which I think we must ponder. Where are we going and how do we get there? As we celebrate the centennial of Moreno's birth, what baggage do we want to carry with us into the future? That, ultimately, is a question not just of history but of vision.