The Role of an Auxiliary Ego in Psychodrama

Moreno noticed that we do not survive as totally independent beings: we are each at the hub of a social atom and need these relationships as an extension of ourselves, a supporting network. Our very self extends into space and is sustained by these relationships (which is why he called his first major work, “Who Shall Survive?” as he noted that extreme poverty in the social atom was an indication of a threat to the individual’s survival: hence the value of group therapy to isolated individuals). This is especially the case for infants, when parents and others play the role of vital auxiliaries in sustaining the child’s life and interpreting the world to them. Moreno saw that the mother often doubled the child: helping him/her express and manage feelings. Schore’s (1994) researches into the development of the capacity to regulate emotions, and later to self soothe, through the child/mother interaction, demonstrate the psychobiology of this. Moreno recognised the auxiliary as a role (a part of the self/social atom: it was an “auxiliary ego” that might be played by another for us) and as such a container for significant psychological material: the auxiliary role might not simply be a person but an object like a teddy bear or a dream image. Moreno (1975, 17) defined the auxiliary egos in psychodrama as “the representations of absentees, individuals, delusions, hallucinations, symbols, ideals, animals and objects. They make the protagonist’s world real, concrete and tangible.”

Playing Auxiliary Roles:
In psychodrama members of the group play auxiliary roles in the protagonist’s drama. Zerka Moreno (1978, 164-5) writing about the functions of the auxiliary ego in psychodrama, lists these as:
1) to play the role required (whether this be real or imaginary, alive or dead, past, present, or future, an hallucination or delusion) and to do so as faithfully to the perception of the protagonist as possible.
2) to investigate, through the role play, how the protagonist perceives the relationship between him/herself and this role.
3) to interpret the role, expressing how this person/role may be feeling in relation to the protagonist, even exaggerating if this would clarify essential issues between them.
4) to act as a therapeutic guide to greater intrapsychic and interpersonal harmony or, if this is not possible, to a separation from the other.
5) to function as a bridge to assist the protagonist’s return to the social world.
I would add to this list
6) to trust their intuitions arising during the role play and use these until corrected by the protagonist or director.
7) to accept the directions of the protagonist or director.
Moreno recognised that auxiliaries can gain therapeutic benefit from playing such roles. (Casson, 2004, 203-4) See also chapter 8 in Karp et al. (1998)

References:
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