EXPLORING ROLES

THOSE WHO DO NOT HAVE POWER OVER THE STORY THAT DOMINATES THEIR LIVES, POWER TO RETELL IT, DECONSTRUCT IT, JOKE ABOUT IT, AND CHANGE IT AS TIMES CHANGE, TRULY ARE POWERLESS, BECAUSE THEY CANNOT THINK NEW THOUGHTS.

Salman Rushdie

Thalia, muse of comedy, holding a comic mask. Marble, first half of the 2nd century AD, Louvre, Paris.

STORIES TOUCH A DEEP CHORD IN US ALL.

We each have our own and may never fully know another's. Yet in the telling we can come to know each other and ourselves more fully. We can make connections, share our experiences and build community.

Through playing roles, we can take risks and explore new territory. Through using our imaginations we can try out new approaches and scenarios. We can experiment with different endings and experience how they might feel. Then perhaps we can dare to try them in our lives?

THINK OF A CHARACTER

- ANY AGE - EITHER SEX - AND IN ANY CIRCUMSTANCES

How do they speak?

Like a rebellious child
even if perhaps their chronological age
is considerably more?

Are they angry?
Do they speak like a critical parent?
or are they caring and sounding more like a nurturing parent?

Or are they excited
like a free and creative child?

Can you picture them?
How do they hold themselves?
What gestures do they make?

All your answers to these questions will give you 'clues' to your character's 'ego state' - that is, what aspect of their lives they are being reminded of and re-experiencing as they speak.

Now, try telling the story! Act it out. What happens? Try this with someone you've never met before. Try it with someone you know: work together and develop the stories.

Ratchaburi Shadow Puppet Museum, Thailand. Image: Mr.Niwat Tantayanusorn/Wikipedia

'In Horne's house' Richard Hamilton 1981–2. Etching, engraving and aquatint on paper. (Tate collection)

EACH OF US, AS WHITMAN WRITES, DOES "CONTAIN MULTITUDES". CONTACTING THE JOSTLING CROWD OF INNER SELVES, GIVING THEM A CHANCE TO SPEAK AND TO ACT, CAN GREATLY ENRICH OUR LIVES.

Julia Cameron

The idea of different language for different ego states was put forward by Eric Berne in *Games People Play*, still a bestselling psychology book since its publication in 1964.

The more awareness we have the more control we have over the roles we act out, and the more we can use them to give our lives richness and variety.

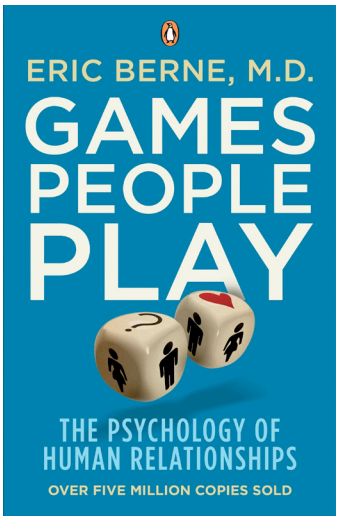
Being able to realise more of our own potential helps others too, as we live, work, and create our communities. So have fun creating your characters, trying out their responses, noting other's reactions.

You can build on this exercise to observe your own interactions with people in your everyday life. How often do you take control, share control or give over control? Does this happen willingly and consciously? What other choices could you make? And what would happen if you did? Sometimes, when you are helping someone else, do you notice that this can be a way in which you have more control than them. Is that what you want? Or what they want?

Your increased sensitivity to questions like these will enable you to know when not to 'help' so that you may consciously empower others to help themselves. And when practical help is needed the more choice we can give the recipient the more power we are allowing them to have over our actions on their behalf. This enables them to experience the Adult state for themselves, a small step towards Berne's ideal attainment in our dealings with others, towards loving community.

A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO THE IDEAS OF ERIC BERNE

TO BE AT PEACE WITH OURSELVES,
WE NEED TO KNOW OURSELVES
Caitlin Mathews



Berne, in *Games People Play* (1964), proposes that we all enact roles and games in our social interactions. He defined a range of Parent, Child and Adult roles that we take up according to the situations we find ourselves in and our own history.

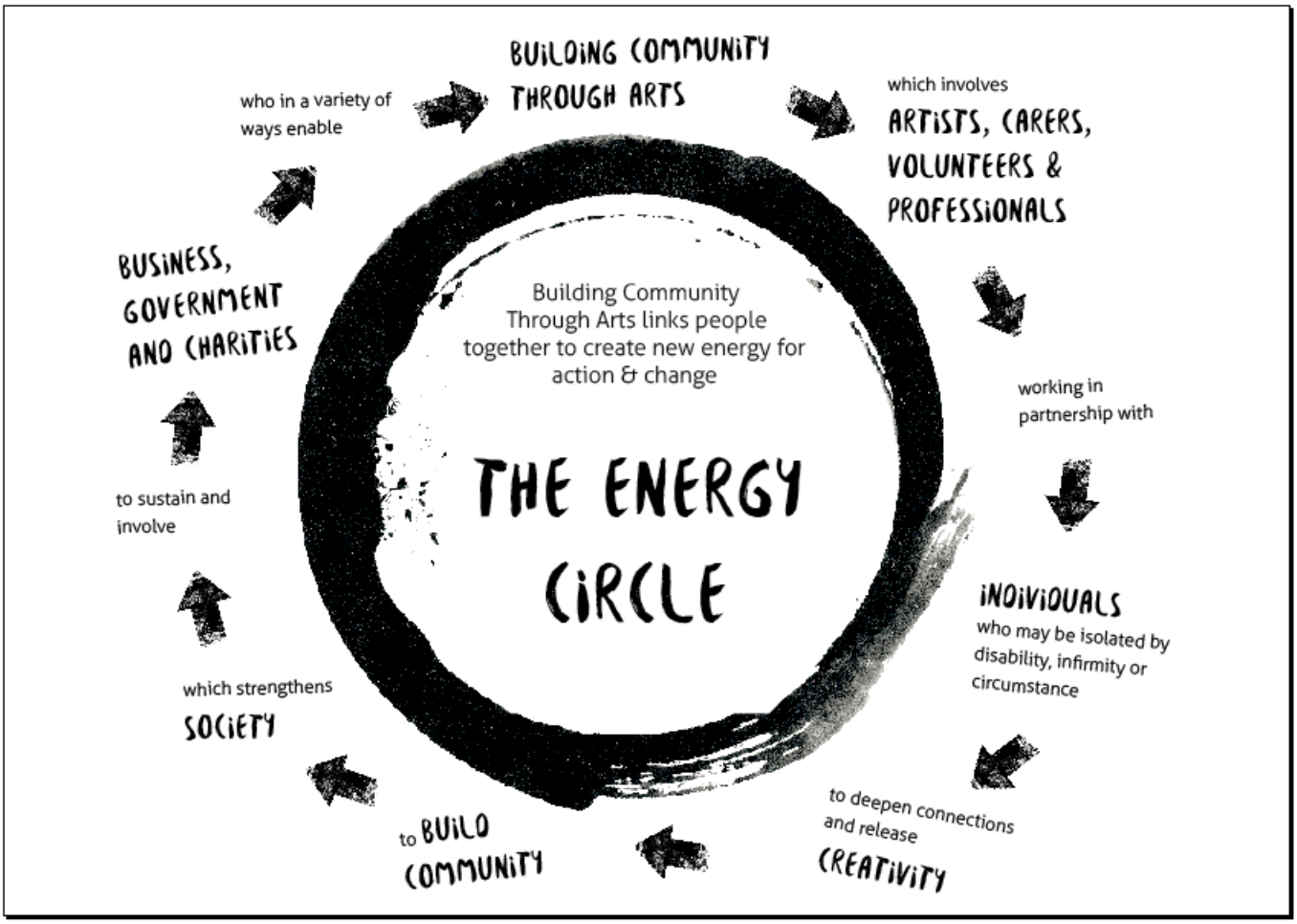
These 'ego states' are roles such as 'Rebellious Child', in we might speak from a feeling of powerless rebellion or contradiction. This can be seen as a re-enactment of childhood feelings of rebellion that perhaps could not be properly expressed or addressed at the time. Alternatively we might go into our 'Free Child', a state of going without hindrance into the expression of any emotion or action that we wish. Another role is that of 'Adapted Child, ' in which we become obedient and 'good' despite perhaps now having more power to choose than we are aware of.

The parental roles include the 'Nurturing Parent' - when we feel a situation needs our loving care. Or we might set off as a 'Critical Parent' when we think we need to exert control over a situation. These different parental states often reflect our early experiences of being parented.

Finally, we might enter the responsible, balanced and aware 'Adult' state, which Berne advocates is the ideal for our interactions with others. However we can continue to draw on the other roles when they are appropriate. Having awareness helps us tell when the 'game' we are playing is going to be productive. For example, we can choose to be free and creative in community with another, when the aim is to just enjoy and create without any inhibiting sense of responsibility or judgement. This sense of creative freedom is vital in the early stages of any creative work. With conscious awareness, the creator can occasionally step into the 'Adult' role to check the validity of their actions and to think of the implications and results.

ABOUT BUILDING COMMUNITY THROUGH ARTS

Building Community Through Arts (BCA) was developed as part of Kew Studio's outreach work in a series of projects from 1993 – 2002. Toolkits and programmes have been recently updated and are presented as a set of free tools for use by anyone wanting to develop a community using arts workshops and encounters. Visit kewstudio.org/explore-creativity for more.



© 2015 Building Community through Arts - an outreach programme of Kew Studio Ltd.
St Luke's House, 270 Sandycombe Road, Richmond TW9 3NP
www.kew.org Email bca@kewstudio.org
Charity No. 1047199 Company No. 270912