

Considerations on Closing the Psychodrama Action by Donell Miller, 2012

This begins with the warm up. The director has noted the nonverbal behavior of the person who has emerged as protagonist. More than anything said, this indicates his emotional state. With director and protagonist on stage together, they negotiate a contract---which is a lot less formal than the word 'contract' itself sounds. And sometimes it is so subtle, only a few are aware of what's happening.

The director's whole attitude reflects his acceptance of the person beside him. What does the protagonist want from the session? If he's been a regular, both have a more realistic notion of how much may be done in a little over an hour. The psychodramas which have impressed the protagonist give hope of what he may obtain for himself. He may expect a dramatic catharsis, and regard that as if it were the sole evidence of success. The director asks how he feels about the emotional expressiveness he's seen. This may be the time to modify what the protagonist presumes is realistic.

Long before coming to the stage the protagonist has tried to "solve" his problem on his own. The director wants to hear what hasn't satisfied the protagonist. That may or may not get us into immediate action. Some are not yet willing and would rather tell than do what still embarrasses them. Either way the director supports the protagonist's pain.

The "solution" may seem as clear as day to observers. Chances are his peers have hastened to tell the protagonist where he's 'wrong,' and hasten to give him good advice, but more often than not the protagonist may feel they don't respect him. He has 'good reason' to follow the course he's been following. The director's task is to bring out the so-called good reason, and then to show his **appreciation for the attempt**. Then the protagonist feels **validated as a person**. Now he's convinced the director understands him and is fully on his side. Very likely this may be the crux of the difficulty, **WHY** the protagonist repeatedly does this rather than that (which seems more promising), but we **do not say so out loud**. It's too early to interpret (=criticize). We don't know enough yet, though we have clues, which the session as it progresses put to the test.

Back to the contract: The **director doesn't agree to tell him how to change other persons**. He points out that 'the other' isn't on stage in person. "Our effort is to bend what we may do in **RESPONSE** to the problem they present for us. "Who's right and who's wrong is beside the point. The group is not a jury to make that decision for you. Besides, even if a judge were to rule in your favor, would you be any better off than you are right now? Are you a better person, and the other lesser, even if you're right?"

The director asks **"Is this a relationship you want to keep?"** If not, let it go. But if it is, you must become aware of what you want from the other, and what the other wants from you. Maybe you can't answer that at this moment. Our task is to help you tap into the emotional dimension. Let 'reasons' be an afterthought, which reasons normally are.

"We review how you've been functioning and then explore your picture of the situation. Consider that the 'other' may see things quite differently. Do you know the other's perception? Have you asked?" (But maybe the other doesn't know either). Several role reversals, maybe in surplus reality are called for. As we step onto the stage, our way of reconstructing the situation informs us of the contract to be reached.

Once we review the protagonist's present view, and then explore available options in action, we have access to the full range of psychodrama techniques, especially surplus reality. 'Rehearse' the future feared, or wished for, or what is considered likely. You may start and end with whatever is the protagonist's preference. Then look for the protagonist's nonverbal indications he's done, and then ask if he is. The audience does the rest through sharing.

seem devoid of conscience also. I should put quotes around the word, because we often deem someone devoid of conscience, whereas they have different versions of right and wrong than we do, and suffer genuine guilt when one behaves other than in culturally proscribed ways. Draw on your experience with movies, TV, plays, and novels. Everyone uses key words such as 'role' and 'self,' without realizing that many others don't understand them in the same way you do. To skim the surface of Moreno's view, I show a variation you may not have encountered in your academic course work. If you haven't noticed, where dictionary and scientific assumptions prevail, we find both orthodoxies and transient fads. Those who've seen a half century can easily cite numerous examples.

Moreno distinguishes among three level of roles; psychosomatic, psychodramatic (fantasy). and psychosocial roles. The last of these is what most people mean by 'role.' They assume that a role is like a suit of clothes, that one may put on and take off at will. For them the 'self' lies behind the various roles we take. Goffman is an exemplar of this view. Therapists who know better (like RD Laing, David Winnicott, Jay Haley) distinguish between a 'true' and a 'false' self. This is how protagonists think too, and as psychodrama director, I go along with it on stage, for I'm committed to taking the protagonist's perspective on the way to arrive at more satisfying and fulfilling life choices beyond the theater.

Likewise Moreno, in terms of using the psychosocial role, distinguishes among 'role taking,' 'role playing,' and 'role creating.' As the above, these too represent a process view. However, one does not inflict debatable theoretical views on clients who have bigger fish to fry. You are not so lucky, especially with regard to the relationship between the role and the self.

The role does not really disguise the self (even when the protagonist thinks that's what he's doing). Rather the role articulates the self. The role is there first. The self arises by interaction, reflection, and social validation. The self is not something inside the body. The responding body, observed from without and experienced simultaneously from within, **is the self.**

While analysts distinguish among conscious, preconscious and unconscious, the self is there as a whole. Neat distinctions between what the self knows or doesn't know are unnecessary, which is for the better, or the boundary, if there is one, is fluid at best. One cannot be conscious of it all, but who-one-is necessary includes the unacknowledged aspects of the whole self. With interaction what has been 'unconscious' becomes 'conscious' as needed, without all the spatial metaphors.

Note the consistency here implicit in the progression from psychosomatic, to psychodramatic, and to psycho-social roles. Note how well role taking, role playing, and role creating follow a like sequence. How different this is from a common sociological concept of role. There, in the conveniently stable society, the growing person faces proscribed roles, to which he must adapt. He still follows the role taking, playing and creating Moreno sequence, but how often does he go the whole way? Spontaneity and creativity are seldom alluded to in the traditional sociological model.

Doubling (quoted from my publication elsewhere): The antecedent for doubling in the psychodrama method is in the mother/child relationship. I speak of 'mother' in the sense of the 'mothering figure' (regardless of the biological facts). Indeed, here mother may be a man or an older sibling. If you don't remember, or haven't observed, note what happens as the involved adult relates empathically with the infant. The baby's every emotional expression constitutes a clue to what's going on. This is a cue for the mother to mirror back to the infant what the infant has been showing, her whole demeanor implying full acceptance. At the same time providing the necessary language. We welcome the baby into our world which becomes his world too. Winnicott calls this "good enough mothering," a minimum which holds a culture together. Conditions are not always ideal. That's where our doubles come in to give the adult what the child may have missed. As our protagonists absorb it all, they are more likely to behave differently, and on leaving the theater fit into the culture at hand and get what will satisfy them.

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Role Reversal Arrangements for the Psychodrama Stage