

DIRECTING AUXILIARY EGOS and DOUBLES in OPENING SCENES, Getting Started.

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First, I refer my students to standard works on the subject, such as those by Zerka Moreno, Lee Fine, Carl Hollander, Barbara Seaborne, Douglas Warmer, and Adam Blatner. If these prove inaccessible, I set forth how I do it. Most of these sources have been written from the point-of-view of auxiliary ego and double performances rather than the perspective of the one who directs the performance. I aim to fill the gap.

Let's say we have an adult protagonist, call her **Dora**, whose concern is her relationship with her brother. I interview the protagonist Dora as herself. I ask, "What is your brother's name?" Then, "Where in this room do you see your brother **Jim**?" Thereafter I refer to him as "Jim" rather than as "the brother." This reinforces the warm-up, both for the protagonist and for the auxiliary she has selected. We've begun to structure the space on stage.

I ask Dora, "Who here can be Jim?" She points out "him"---or "her." There are no gender or age restrictions on whoever Dora chooses---except in Dora's mind. When, as sometimes happens, no young men are present in the audience, as she hesitates I say "We're gender free." She breathes a sigh of relief and makes the proper choice.

The auxiliary stands, but I hold up my hand to say, "Stay where you are for a moment 'Jim' (not his real name), so that Dora may show you what Jim is like. To Dora I say "Be Jim." I pick up a chair to take it to the place on stage where she imagined Jim (see above) and say, "Take this chair as Jim. Jim, show us how you sit. Dora may protest, "I don't know how he sits, I never noticed." Note that the protagonist is not yet in role, but still speaks as herself.

To get her into role, I ignore the out-of-role comment. I don't address her as (herself) Dora, but continue speaking with the protagonist as if she were Jim. This is how to get an out of role protagonist back into role, by addressing the protagonist as if he or she were actually in role.

"Jim, let us go to some specific time and place where you can show us how Dora sits" (or "stands," or "walks," or "drives") Do not stretch for accuracy. Your aim is to show how you, Dora, experience Jim, and that's what we're looking for anyway. A completely objective report serves no useful purpose here. You are the final authority on Jim in this session (but if Jim were actually in the audience, this would modify our whole approach. Here we've assumed his absence). I continue, "Your impression is above question, for it is how you experience Jim that matters to us." The protagonist feels our support.

When Dora complies, I interview Dora as if she were her brother Jim. "Jim, describe what you look like, so that we can see you." What we seek first is a physical description, as Dora sees Jim. It's much more informative than a photograph. Among possible follow-up questions: "Jim, are you tall or short? Fat or thin? Younger than Dora, or older than Dora? A bit or a lot? What are you wearing? What do you do with your hair? What color is it?" It is quite unnecessary to ask such questions of our protagonist Dora, whom we can see. **But** on occasions when she is in the role reversed position as Jim, we may ask how he sees his sister Dora, which may differ significantly from her self-perception---or the perceptions others in the group may have of her.

I rarely ask psychological questions, such as personality characteristics **or how one feels about this or that**. All such are better answered in action. Of course a beginning auxiliary may ask (Dora as) Jim directly. If I can get a word in edgewise before the protagonist answers, I say, "We establish that in action, in the way Dora represents Jim from

from her role reverse position. I want you (the auxiliary) to discover how Jim is in action." And then I quickly ask another question of the protagonist-as-Jim, or plunge right into a scene setting if I'm ready. If I move quickly, Dora will not feel criticized. The alert auxiliary notes peculiarities and exaggerates them only a little, when he has the chance.

One talented protagonist drew a picture with all the earmarks of a caricature, on the handy flip chart. I responded with my spontaneous reaction, "You seem to be tall, erect, even rigid, scowling. Jim, are you angry with Dora? Dora, speak as if you were the Jim of your picture." Dora, standing by the drawing and fully in role reversal as Jim, speaks for the picture as if she were Jim berating Dora. While the protagonist Dora is in role reversal, she speaks of -- and to the auxiliary her in the 3rd person, as if the auxiliary really were Jim blasting Dora. Of course such an opportunity is rare in psychodrama (though routine in Art Therapy), but the director makes the most of it when it comes up.

Next the usual sequence includes "Where are we?" and "When is this?" Note my use of the present tense. I avoid saying "Where were you?" and "When was this?" Often this turns out to be at someone's home. "Is this the home you two grew up in?" Not that you do anything with the answer at that moment. You file it away in your mind for future reference. If it is the house they grew up in, I take great care in scene setting, which is likely to have a host of precious or ominous special meanings. If one or another of the siblings grew up elsewhere, that is good to know.

I always begin from the outside of any situation and work my way in. "You're standing in front of your home---by the way, where is this? Country or city? Here or abroad? Season of the year? What's the weather like there?" Now we are far removed from the theater itself, or even from the protagonist's immediate world, but we're already in her inner world itself. But the director and auxiliary (silently) note whether this home is a mansion or a shack, a row house or situated on a corner lot, and the 'statement it makes' to passers-by. If in a large building, first floor vs top floor penthouse, an interior rental facing a wall, a single room or a suite. You can see why I don't ask these explicitly, except insofar as the protagonist opens the door.

When the protagonist mentions a place where the director has been (other than locally) I usually say so, and if she asks I answer with a sentence or two---nothing elaborate. It's her psychodrama. If I've never been there, and am curious, I'll ask and be satisfied with a brief answer. It's amazing how useful this can be. The protagonist may feel more at home if I've been there, facilitating bonding (or positive transference, if you're analytically inclined).

Once a protagonist said "Gonzales." I asked, "Louisiana?" She smiled, and I added, "I've been there." I elaborated, "It's on the road between Baton Rouge and New Orleans, isn't it?" In the process we've established without asking directly a lot of valuable information. I may follow up with "Let's stand outside and look at the house---by the way, would that be a dangerous thing to do?" The protagonist laughs, "You might get hit by a truck." I'm conversant with her world.

She says, "It's grown up a lot since then and we have sidewalks now." "Good," I say, "Let's stroll around the house. Tell us what you see." We are walking around the stage, looking at the center, as if the house were there. If we pass garage, storage sheds, barrels, trees, flowers, I ask, "Who takes care of those? Is he (or she)

good at it?" Men relate well to this emphasis, for the common assumption is that the outside is man's job. Women typically see the inside as their job.

We go inside, but I make sure I find out how we get there. Do we knock, or just walk in? Must I be announced? Ring several times? Knock again and again---or have the door open up as I've begun to walk away? How do those inside relate to the outside world. Traditionally people are sociable. Recently they are guarded and much less likely to be hospitable. 'Down under,' in Australia, hospitality rains on visitors from the far country. I participated in a seminar with a young woman, who had just met me, and from my accent saw I wasn't from there. She said "You must drop in on my parents in Rotula and enjoy the hot baths," which I did. How different her world from what we encounter most days today.

Once 'inside' I do not ask for a tour of the whole house (though some people automatically take first time visitors around). When the protagonist pauses for instructions, I say "Take us to the room where the action takes place. Stand in the doorway. What is the first thing you see? Of course it may be a person, which encounter we delay, till we've absorbed more of the context. "Arrange the furniture you need the way it should be. Pay special attention to pictures, especially of family. Who's there and when? Who took the picture? You don't have to ask where the protagonist is. She'll tell you. On occasion you go directly to the scene staging the photo, and changing it, making it the way it 'should be.'

Then I ask, "Where is Jim?" and have Dora represent Jim for a moment in whatever posture or action in which he's engaged. Then I pull Dora out of the role reversed position as Jim, and bring in the auxiliary to play the role. With this kind of process the auxiliary is hardly starting from scratch. He knows plenty on which to build. If it's not obvious what Jim is doing, I ask. Or the eager auxiliary may have already asked for me. Washing dishes, watching TV...etc.

If, as sometimes happens, Jim has a distinctive way of doing this or that, and the auxiliary fails to pick up on it, the director underscores the unique feature, and then the auxiliary does it right this time. If Dora frowns, I'll say, "Role reverse with Jim. Do it his way." If the protagonist moves on, reacting without comment, I know we're on the right track.

If a conversation is forthcoming, I ask: "Who speaks first?" If the protagonist Dora, I say, "Go ahead." If Jim, I call for a role reversal, saying, "Show us what Jim does, and then reverse back. The auxiliary for Jim repeats exactly what he's been shown, and we move on as the situation requires.

Please use the technical words. Avoid the word 'switch.' It betrays your unfamiliarity with psychodrama conventions, and undermines the protagonist's expectations of and confidence in the director. The technical words are: "Reverse, reverse roles, role reverse, and reverse back." The first three are alternate variations, and the last puts the protagonist comfortably back into his own identity.

When protagonists are young and strong I do not hesitate doing this quickly several times. Otherwise, I may have the auxiliary stand behind his chair, while the protagonist reverses back and forth between the chairs at his own initiative. With the elderly and handicapped we must make adjustments, which we do on an individual basis. For example, Dora asks Jim a question, and Dora already knows the answer, the director may cut corners, prompting the auxiliary with "No, I don't. Yes, I do," and "No way." The auxiliary immediately picks this up. Dora may be surprised, "That's just what Jim said." Then I say to Dora, "let's hear your reply."

Or the protagonist may move on without skipping a beat, indicating the director is on target. Under such circumstances the auxiliary may be free to improvise, especially if the director encourages him to do so. I say, "The protagonist will let us know if we get it wrong. When that happens, I call for role reversal so that Dora can give the 'correct version.' Then reverse back, so that the auxiliary can repeat the correction. So we continue.

Experienced directors get a sense when the scene has disclosed what is there. It's not necessary to go on and on. Observers are often distressed that I cut quicky and (therefore) have so many scenes. That's my style. We have ground to cover and must get on with it. Observers have curiosity and may have hypotheses of their own they'd like to pursue. They can do that when they're directing.

I ask the protagonist, "Is this the essence of what went on?" Reply, "Well, we said a lot more." I may press gently, "Is it more of the same?" If it wasn't, we continue with the scene.

Often I'll ask the protagonist before cutting the scene whether she'd like to include something she'd not said before, including how she feels about it. Or perhaps she'd like to do the whole scene over again from her present perspective, knowing what she knows now. This venture into surplus reality may be appropriate if it turns out we've already used up half the time available for action, for in that instance we need to be think about moving toward closure. I don't take this course early in the session because it may distract us from the climax we're working toward.

It enhances the psychodrama when we discover an auxiliary good at improvising in a particular role. Under such happy circumstances I interrupt as little as possible for role reversals. I do call for role reversals when Dora has startled Jim, or has asked a question Jim' cannot readily answer, because he lacks the information.

Some directors get the protagonist a double from the very beginning, but I don't. I wait till I see whether this protagonist actually needs one. Doubles can get in the way of articulate and emotionally voluable protagonists. The director disdains being a double himself in any continuing sense of the word, but when there is no established double, and even when there is he may throw in a doubling comment and back out again. He may prompt an auxiliary in the same way.

The auxiliary is free to ask Dora, "Is that right?" If yes, 'Jim,' repeats it, and we're on our way once again. If not, Dora corrects it, and the auxiliary acknowledges the the correction, just as an official double would do, incorporating it immediately in what he says next.

The protagonist may say, "I wouldn't dare say that." The director replies, "You can say it here and now," and we're off into new and reparitive territory. Or maybe the protagonist says, "He'd never speak to me again." I may force the issue through calling for a role reversal, so that Dora could put into words what Jim's shunning behavior says to her. Reverse back. Take it to another level, where he uses words..

Or the protagonist says, "I can't hurt Jim like that." A director's ploy may be, "I give Jim the ability to absorb the hurt with no real damage." Now go ahead.

Or if Dora says, "He'd slap my face." The director grasps 'Jim's' wrist. "I won't let him do it here." Or if the auxiliary is the burley type, the director may hold him from the back of the chair with both arms, to be even more convincing.

With a few protagonists one may want to risk passing through the slap. We may do this by having the protagonist as Jim slapping the auxiliary as herself in very slow motion. Reverse back. Then the auxiliary does it in slow motion as well.

Or we may leapfrog to the moment when Jim has already slapped her face. "Show us how you imagine you'd respond. (pause) Then what would you do next?"

With the protagonist in her own role, I use various devices to reassure her, "In these situations did anyone ever take your side?" I expect she'll deny that anyone had, or that the one who would've been willing was taken away by moving away or by death. If the latter I'd restore the lost one to life, have her prepare an auxiliary to play the role, and redo the scene with the advocate present. Thus in this 'surplus reality' scene, she receives the benefit of having been protected this time.

A scene from the protagonist's childhood is quite likely, where in the normal course of life the protector may no longer be available. When the loss hasn't yet been worked through, especially when combined with ambivalent feelings toward the protector, we prepare an auxiliary for the role. We set up a scene showing the interaction between the protagonist and the protector to clear the way for the protagonist's internalizing the relationship as an ingredient of oneself. This involves dealing with both the anger and the grief, staging reconciliation based on mutual forgiveness, sealed with hugs. When the protector has become a characteristic of her own, the protagonist gives herself today what the protector used to give her yesterday.

When the director has skilled doubles available, and when one suspects the protagonist lacked protectors as a child, a director may invite a double to the stage, saying, "Your double is here to help you. She's inside you, like an inner voice, the things you may say to yourself from time to time. When the double is right, put the feeling across to Jim in your own words. Often the double speaks more frankly than you would. If so, try them on for size. You may like what that does for you. But if the double is wrong, correct her.

Inexperienced auxiliaries already on stage may begin responding to doubles before the protagonist has had a chance. The director says to that auxiliary, "No. No. You never hear what the double says. The double is inside her." Likewise, when the protagonist leans back to let the double take over for her, directors intervene, reminds Dora, "Jim cannot hear a word the double has said. Unless you say it, it doesn't happen."

I discourage doubling from the audience, raising a warning hand. I forbid anyone coming to the stage uninvited as multiple doubles from the protagonist. This is chaotic and not allowed in my groups. But if someone offers a word or two which proves apt and helpful to the protagonist, I invite the person to the stage to make his contribution legitimate, and then send him back to his seat in the audience. (If the protagonist wants him to stay, I'll let him replace the auxiliary who has been there. It hardly ever happens).

We prefer to handle this as a theater **aside** rather than as a regular part of the scene itself. Some inexperienced directors have the doubles go with the protagonist when the protagonist role reverses. I don't permit this because the double may continue doubling while the protagonist is there in the role reversed position representing someone other than herself. Very confusing. How is one to know at what level the double is speaking? Is the double doubling the protagonist as herself playing the other's role, or is the double doubling the role itself as a best guess of what the absent person may actually say in this or that particular situation?. Much too hard to sort it out. Better to have the double stand silently to one side, and not reenter the action till once again the protagonist returns to her own role. (When needed, directors can supply a word, or echo, to underscore).

I often coach the double, but if I do it too much it would be better to dismiss the double in favor of another double more tuned in, or let the double go and try to get along without one, doubling from the director's position a few times, but not very much. I've seen Zerka do this. The difficulty is that the protagonist gets confused when I also coach the

auxiliaries before them, for it may look like I'm being a double for the auxiliary. Moreover, inexperienced auxiliaries may take my doubling the protagonist as suggestions for the auxiliaries themselves, and err in speaking my words as if they had been intended as directions for auxiliaries in the auxiliary role.

Let's consider one special use of the double, the situation where the double functions as an auxiliary. I say to the protagonist, "Look around the room for someone to be you." Then we bring in the choice as if she were part of the protagonist. I ask the protagonist, "Do you ever give yourself any advice? Let's hear you. If the protagonist hesitates I resort to humor. Do you remember the animated Alice in Wonderland movie, where Alice in soliloquy says, "I give myself very good advice, but I rarely ever take it." The allusion may save the protagonist from the embarrassment of admitting that she doesn't take her own advice either. If the allusion to Alice is outside the protagonist's experience, Jimminy Cricket of the animated Pinocchio may serve equally well. He sits on the shoulder and whispers in the ear.

When the protagonist, as a kind of self-monitor gives her double as the listening part of herself advice, she hears but doesn't listen. After a role reversal, the director says, "Tell your inner monitor how it happens that you don't listen to such good advice. What gets in your way?" This kind of double is integral to intrapsychic scenes, essential to the second half of the psychodrama in bringing us to a satisfactory conclusion of the action.

Routinely I conceptualize in my mind the part-self as a role rather than as a part-self, and try to sell the idea to the protagonist. It makes integration easier. There are too many multiple personalities around anyway. No part-self can exist without the foundation of the whole self. The idea is misleading, implying the brain operates in an additive fashion consisting of independent parts rather than ultimately as a whole.

With many protagonists the God-role is a necessity. The director must shelve his own creed or disbelief. It's the protagonist's reality which matters and claims our respect. Doctor Moreno had no hesitation, for he had his own interpretation and genuinely respected the interpretations of others. Jewish, Catholic and Protestant clergy spoke appreciatively of him at his memorial celebration in 1974. For my own part, in the words of St. Anselm, "God is that greater than which cannot be conceived or thought of." So where is there not a place for that? Don't begrudge the protagonist's use of the word 'God' when that is meaningful to him.. And don't abdicate your responsibility as director to deal with this dimension when it comes up. Put your hang-ups on hold.

But this also means you can deal with this within the psychodrama as you would with any other role. Very few church constituents buy their own denominational view wholesale anyway. How many Presbyterians literally believe Calvin? If they did they would not be struggling over matters of free choice. Don't let your knowledge of official doctrinal positions lead you to believe the protagonist before you agrees, or even knows them. If you are at home in the theological world, you may use this to your advantage in the protagonist's behalf. He may emphasize portions of his faith destructively. There may be other portions he is less aware of that could be indirectly called to his attention for his own growth. One can do this in all sincerity, for in every major religion such variety exists, if we know where to look for it. In my experience, however, such hair-splitting has never come into the psychodrama, for protagonists like everyone else realize we live in a pluralistic world, in all probability fully exemplified in the audience present---who are prepared to make allowances for him.

In actual practice the main obstacle is "Who may play the God role?" We do this without giving the protagonist the task of choosing an auxiliary for God, which many if not most individuals hesitate to take. The director makes sure the protagonist has a double he fully appreciates. The director asks the protagonist whether he can imagine God in the empty chair before him. After all, God is everywhere, isn't He (She or It='the Force')? "Then reverse into that chair and present God's message to you." Meanwhile, the director moves the double into the protagonist's chair to receive the message. "Reverse back." The erstwhile double repeats the message he's just heard, and the protagonist now back in his own role responds. We now have our auxiliary for the God role and it doesn't occur to the protagonist to object. God and man are in the God-role, for isn't the venerable tradition that "Man was created in the image of God." For the protagonist it is a matter of trust. That's getting to basics.

Aside from making the choice easier for the protagonist this has the further advantage of making the auxiliary-for-the-protagonist's-God someone who is thought of as being like oneself. While theologians assume God makes man in his image we therapists know human beings everywhere make God over into their image. If we find a person's image of God untrue to the tradition from which one comes, we see that the protagonist's view has been colored by his depressive illness. The director may seek to modify the cruel and destructive image of God through subtle suggestions such as "I believe God is better than the best person I know. Don't you think so too?" Receiving the affirmative answer, I ask "Would the best person you know ever say something like that? Taking the role of that best person, let's hear what would he or she would likely say? If the best person you know can be so loving, generous and forgiving, can God do any less? This is the way I move the protagonist toward forgiving herself, promoting self-acceptance, which also models reconciliation with significant others.

Auxiliaries and doubles are there to serve the needs of the protagonist, just as the director is. Auxiliaries and doubles, like musicians in an orchestra, must follow the direction of the conductor. If they ignore the director and insist on their own agenda the result is chaos. If the director provides only minimal guidance the psychodrama may fall short of its potential. When directors, doubles and auxiliaries are all comfortable with one another, they operate like a jazz combo, whereby common consent, one or another takes the lead, while all the other players support his spontaneity by common consent support the lead for the time of his distinctive contribution. It is up to the director, however, to maintain a critical eye, for no matter the auxiliary or double's virtuosity, and no matter how impressed the audience may be, for the moment at least, what remains is the impact on one particular person, the protagonist as touchstone of therapeutic good or ill. Directors owe it to themselves and to their clientele to select and train expert auxiliaries and doubles, and sometimes this may be done within the scope of a single session. It's well worth the effort.

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