

### The Other Scene Setting Questions

**WHEN and WHERE?** The director looks for a baseline to work from, for "starting from scratch" is hardly an option. What are the 'givens,' the parameters which suggest what may be possible with this client. Ideally we should develop a time-line taking the protagonist's past up to the present, but we haven't the leisure of a biographer or a historian. We always work within the time frame available to us on stage, and can include only those aspects of the protagonist's experience which are relevant to the presenting problem.

It's not only the past but the future which is relevant. Not only objectives and goals, but the protagonist's not fully articulated plan for meeting them. The stage provides an arena not only for possibility but for reality. Not that we are doomed to be 'practical,' for here we can also let our imagination go free into **surplus reality**. The protagonist's problem may be that he expects too little of life as it is that he expects too much of himself. Surplus reality offers acceptance of the whole person, which broadens the arena for his growing. Generally speaking, our use of surplus reality on stage is likely to increase sharply in the second half of the session as we move toward the **positive closure**. Directors strive to be open, and depend on protagonist initiative between sessions to put into action off stage much that they've learned on stage. **CAUTION:** We directors must be careful not to imply the protagonist should necessarily do off stage what he's done on stage. We have enacted an option to inform whatever he does. He is the one taking the risk in life. If he feels he's obligated to follow what we want rather than what he wants, he's done us both a disservice. Besides, it makes it easy for him to show us that we're wrong! His decision, not ours.

The **present tense** must predominate in psychodrama. Not "When was this?" but "When is this?" As for space, everything occurs somewhere. "Where is this? When and where are almost always in the background of our living. The director's task is to increase protagonist of how much the context itself inclines the direction of our actions this way or that. Time and again when the protagonist lapses into a description of a scene where he's been, directors prompt them to imagine it's before them, to represent what's there (even if it's no longer there), to reach out and touch, to taste, to smell---"what is that odor? Do I want to leave, or is it good to stay here?" I've already alluded to conversation in cars on the way to the theater. Likewise I frequently end the session with what we expect may happen immediately after the session. All in the present tense, the locus of our decision-making. Directors use the whole theater and the audience to make every scene real.

**HOW?** For me the answer to this question informs any "why question". Never "Why did this happen?" but "How did this happen?" I often interrupt the protagonist's telling me someone's presumed motivation with "What happens next?" We're always surer of the "How" than of "Why." Postponing 'why' opens the door to what the protagonist has overlooked before, so that in the transition from one scene to another (sequel) we look at WHY based on the feeling climate then. "Because of that" (see spine above) we can see where misinterpretation lies, and come up with a better story than the one we've been living. Putting 'why' into its proper place is necessary, and its proper place is not "first place." As we do psychodrama, when we finally ask and answer why we are in the better position to reach a meaningful conclusion. We have our better story.

Don Miller, PhD

(c) Copyright MMXII