

Preface to Psychodrama

Time constraints often lead those introducing psychodrama to "talk about" rather than "show" it. We prefer showing our method through doing it rather than merely passively speaking of it at a distance as spectators do. We involve the whole person. A brief reference to neuroanatomy may not be out of place.

Our brain has two hemispheres. One side features the concrete, literal, linear or measurable. The other half is intuitive, which features the artistic. Abstractions are left sided, processes, especially human interactions, are right sided. Of course we use both sides all the time. There is the corpus callosum wiring in the middle between the two halves. Directly below lay the reptilian brain, the old brain, the main seat of the emotions. Beyond the brain is the autonomic nervous system, consisting of two parts, the sympathetic and parasympathetic, which function reciprocally. The sympathetic is the instant reaction to emergencies, the parasympathetic is conservative, the basis for sleep and sex.

At the outset of the psychodrama session, psychodrama directors tune into what your immediate reaction to any provocative input. It's on your face and in your posture before you open your mouth. Your unconscious is in full sway. Consciously you may---or may not, be aware your emotional display till after you've responded. Alone out in the wild the sequence is not "I see a bear, I'm afraid, I run." Rather "I see a bear, I run, then I'm afraid." It should have greater survival value, unless the bear runs faster than me. Perhaps you held yourself back, also a response woodsmen recommend, who are less likely frozen in fear and have experience in keeping themselves alive. In any case, not to panic serves to open the door to a better course..

Everyday in every way we are living stories which answer the questions, WHO AM I, WHO ARE YOU, WHO ARE WE, and WHO ARE THEY? We answer such questions through story telling and story listening. Such provide background with its cast. Good story tellers avoid answering **Why?** too soon, for it is basic to the plot and in allowing the story to develop makes it more interesting. When actors ask 'why' at the action's beginning, directors answer "We'll see. First we must have the background. The answer could be there." When drama directors hear the professional actor ask "What is my motivation?" (which translates as 'why') the best answer is "Do it, and it will find you."

Likewise, we discover our answers sooner when we move onto the stage into improvisational action. We may be characters in a story, playing someone else's story, as in a play. Most never risk venturing beyond the audience. but suppose you were to choose the play and those about you volunteer to construct your characters.

I challenge you to face the fact that you are everyday and in every way living out a life story. The more active you are, the more ready you may claim the story as yours. In casual conversation we speak stories about others. We do it every day. We challenge you to step into another's story, see what it means to be someone else, and finally put yourself on stage in order to learn what it means to be you.

On Fridays at 630 pm some of us may become characters while others become protagonists. We may construct a new version of an old story, as in a Bibliodrama, or better yet, another version of your own story, as in a psychodrama.

To observers this seems to be a dress rehearsal for a theater production, They imagine we are following a script. We have no verbatim script. We build one on the spot, and decide whether to own it or not as we choose. The writer of the play "Six Characters in Search of

an Author" showed the chaos that results when no one knows how to go about it, probably not his intention in presenting a tragic-comedy. On the other hand, done psychodrama style, protagonists escape criticism through total group acceptance. Directors protect the protagonist's story, for it turns out to be the group's story too..

You'd like a definition of psychodrama. When the session's over, you'll have one of your own. To begin by telling you what psychodrama is not is half the distance to saying what psychodrama is. In presenting psychodrama to the general public and to college students we **show you** what psychodrama is.

Psychodrama is not drama for 'psychos', whoever they are. The Alfred Hitchcock movie gave the public a title for the degenerate the public fears lies dormant in each persons so confused and unable to function they require a therapist's professional help. Totally unfair. I feel safer on a mental ward than on the street. If you've seen the movie, you know there is no psychodrama in it. Fellini's Italian movies use the actual word 'psychodrama' inaccurately and carelessly, but at least without ominous implications.

The English prefix "psycho" comes from the Greek **psyche**, which is best translated as **soul**. I can live with psychodrama as "soul drama," which lacks the negative connotations that have accumulated with 'psycho' or 'psyche,' The trouble is that language meanings do not stand still. Have you noticed that? Soul is a word which includes, body, mind and spirit as a whole. But the for many soul is something that we **have** which survives death, a kind of disembodied spirit. But soul is **who we are**. The word has faded badly from its original meaning. During my life time of reading the King James version of the Bible I frequently encountered the word soul. But in the modern translations during your life time they have translated the word as **self**. I can cheerfully live with that, but so often self is contrasted with mind. And also we read of a false self and a true self. That invidious distinction pulls the self out of sight beneath the skin.

I know that persons often seek to misrepresent themselves for the sake of public acceptance, a putting one's best foot forward to be what we think would make people welcome us. We don't want them to know our **shadow**, which we barely know ourselves, so let's keep in under wraps, and peek in on it only when it's safe, in the presence of persons we know we can trust.

We hear of **role playing** as if it were something 'bad' or 'unauthentic.' From my viewpoint we **cannot not play roles**, for our every move has its role or roles. What I do is who I am. Others may say, "He's beside himself" or I may claim "It's not me" or "I wasn't myself then." As I see it we are who we are. We may choose to "own it, that is, take responsibility"---or not. Who I am is not static, but a continuing process, even though, from moment to moment, we tell ourselves that we are and have always been the very same self. The down side is that we hate to leave behind what we want to hang onto, but the upside reveals a continuously unfolding present in process, which yields to our choosing.

What impels us to do this rather than that? The usual answers, **motivation** and **intention**. Motivation is a push from the past. Intention is the pull from the future. When we focus on the past everything looks inevitable, as if none of us under the circumstances then could have known otherwise than to do what one did do. Many scientists approve of complete **determinism**, forgetting that determinism includes their own experiments, and indeed their life stories. Nobody lives as if strict determinism were so. Debates contrast determinism with indeterminism, This is a 'straw man' an easily demolished alternative. The fact is we all more or less freely choose from among a limited number of options.

Psychodramatists refuse to be victims. We are not the passive prey of our pasts. We are agents of our own destiny, far more than we ever take credit for. Though we occasionally move into a protagonist's past in psychodrama, we make it present. This is no literal rendering of what happened, as historians try so hard to do, for no one really knows what actually happened. Ask those who were on the spot. We have different versions which may more or less agree, but the version that matters, and the one perspective from which we work is the protagonist's memory (which never remains fixed anyway). We seek relevance, which often surfaces forgotten episodes. Again, we don't concern ourselves whether or not it's the way it really happened. What matters is the protagonist's version, which is what he lives by. This is his present and as present is subject to modification, despite whatever the past may have been..

The present moment is like a clearing in a field, not literally like a knife edge separating the past from the future, eliminating the present altogether. On the contrary, it is the present which we can be sure of, beyond the vagaries of past or future speculation.

With our view of the present, which I believe is indeed the common view, we may reflect upon our intentions prior to acting on them. In psychodrama we need not be stuck, for we can try out one avenue after another on stage and come to an informed choice. The director asks, "What do you want?" The director asks himself, "How come the protagonist doesn't already have it?" The protagonist shows the answer without being asked directly.

It's convenient to distinguish between **belief** and **desire**. Desire is what we know that we want. Belief has to do with whether we may be able, or allowed, to get it. There is a kind of cost appraisal. **What are we going to have to sacrifice to get it? And if indeed we follow through, will what we get be worth it? Can we keep it? What will that cost us? If I fail, what is plan B? No plan B, then who am I now? Can I live with that?**

We do not live in this world alone. Whatever happens, what are the consequences for others? I must take responsibility for that, and especially if I don't, what reaction toward me will this calls forth from others? Do I want that? I don't have immediate access to all the information the above requires. Rather than risk making unwarranted assumptions, hadn't I better be in touch with others, especially those directly affected. Do we matter to one another? That calls for cooperation.

This is the merit of group work. We have a room full of reactors, advocates, and advisors. In a cohesive group there will be no enemies, but our friends are capable of representing our opponents, so that when we act our foes do not take us by surprise. Consider the power of the collective. The protagonist does not have access to the expertise of the leader alone, but all who, sooner or later, share with him.

They greatly expand the world of the protagonist's belief, so that intentions he finally chooses to follow will have a much better grasp of reality than the unexamined view. As Socrates has said, the unexamined view is not worth living. My view is that I should take charge of my life rather than passively let the world take charge of me. I have a vote in the process. Indeed, I may hold the deciding veto. The final product is the fulfilling and fulfilled me, as the world, seen and unseen, is my witness. I seek completion. I hope to find it, but whatever the case, much of me will follow after me, like ripples from stones thrown into a pond. Let's say we bequeath our "spirit genes."

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