

PSYCHODRAMA ROLES AND LIFE STORIES

The 28 Plot/Situation System opens the door to beginners, who may approach particular psychodramas or screen plays globally, and come up with a few likely options to represent every one of them. If an audience of three or more were to take the matter a bit further, perhaps they could reach a consensus on how to classify the beginning, middle and end, topping-off the whole process with their collective judgment which of 28 possibilities provides best fit.

On the other hand, protagonists who have presented themselves deserve more. We've seen the roles they play as they interact with a cast whose action reciprocates theirs. As we experience such stories, we recognize ourselves and those about us living out own versions of similar themes. In this section we consider where a more careful analysis of roles may lead.

The word 'role' comes from the French *rotula*, that is, a scroll which rolls and unrolls, like a script for a theater production. But roles have not been limited to those who stand before the footlights. You and I are engaged in roles -- daily!

You may have heard someone speak of role-playing as if it were something bad-- sort of a con, something to hide behind in order to exploit the unwary. But we look at roles differently. **We cannot not-play roles.** Consider your roles at home: have you parents or children there? Maybe a spouse or lover? Consider the place where you work: if you are not the boss, you're sure to have one, and colleagues whose tasks dove-tail with yours. You've been to school, or maybe you're still going: this brings in teachers, secretaries, clerks, staff and students. Vacation season calls upon our playing the role of guest or host, traveller, gourmet, waiter or patron. At the market, you buy, sell, or window-shop.

Are any of these roles bad? No, although they can be done badly. Is taking a role like putting on a suit of clothes? We do dress up for some roles, such as police, soldier, nurse, clown -- or just as predictably, to 'join the Easter parade,' or to receive an award. Characteristic dress signals anyone who needs to know what they may expect of us, and where uniforms are not required, the place where we're found, and the demeanor we show provides a ready basis for interaction with us.

Does the role disguise the self? The role does much more than that. The role **presents** the self, and those instances where the intent is conceal more than to reveal, this too presents the self, perhaps in the role of salesperson, gracious hostess, international spy or weary listener. The role I take is a statement about **who I am and what I do.** Moreover, the roles we take involve us with each other. Indeed, how could I play most of the roles I play without someone to play the opposite role with me?

Of course there are roles we may, if we choose, play alone, such as **physiological roles**, the role of the eater, sleeper, and -- is there an infant at home? crier. No baby can survive in those beginning physiological roles for very long without a caregiver at hand. Even a hermit requires a world which is willing to let him be. What about the role of homeless street person? How do you feel about taking the bystander role? So even here one role makes the other possible.

Less obvious are the **psychodramatic roles** of life, unless you are in tune with children, who need not cover-up their pretending. So the little girl rocks and sings to her dolly without involving you at all, unless she knows you well enough to invite you into her play, or to ask your opinion. Of course you join in, with pretend seriousness, supplying band-aids for babies who hurt themselves. When she's just a bit older, looking out the classroom window with-out even seeing the beauty of the day, in the midst of a daydream, she still plays psychodramatic roles, but does so more subtly. Psychodramatic roles are fantasy roles, which call for special characters, such as ghosts, leprechauns, spirits, demons and gods. Are the roles of psychodrama psychodramatic roles? Yes, indeed.

The auxiliaries represent your cast in their absence. You take them to where they have been, will be, or may never be, as if it all were happening in the present moment on stage. The audience is a more kindly world looking on, the double a more outspoken self, and the director the one who can be trusted to hold everything together -- just for you.

The roles which immediately leap to mind are **social roles**, which at least at first, were there before we were. These are roles we learn to take. Perhaps we've already begun with them as **the father, the mother, the sister, the brother**, when we were involved in the psychodramatic roles of childhood. But now they've lost some of their concreteness, and we're a bit unsure as we feel our way into the role of **a father, a mother, a sister, or a brother**. Of course, each of us is one gender rather than the other, which cuts down on the probable roles by a half!

Social roles begin with **role taking**. We deliberately copy the models at hand, and monitor ourselves closely to see how well we're doing. At last the skill is overlearned, and we do other things at the same time, or we vary the way we do it, this way rather than that, little concerned with how well we may be performing, and much more concerned with what we may accomplish through doing the role.

When others react to us, their roles depending on our roles, and we see ourselves reacting to them, we know the role belongs to us. The role I've taken is me, and I'm free to be me in the role.

I have arrived at the stage of role development known as **role playing**. The way I play the role is no carbon copy of the roles I've seen, even though it may bear a kind of family resemblance. Nevertheless, it's now mine; it's who I am. The role is me.

When I am ripe in the social role, having long since taken it, having fully played it, I may now move beyond the role, making it a platform for **role creating**, coming up with something new, and just as adequate -- even more so, than the role replaced. Perhaps I've put two or more roles together; the combination constitutes an addition to the culture. New roles are always emerging in complex cultures. Where there are so many people, and technical knowledge grows, specialization is inevitable. I grew up in a small town. There were not many roles, and we played a lot of them. Most of these were readily replacable. If we couldn't get one babysitter, there was always another to be found. Look at the roles in a large society. Not just a cook, but a short-order cook, or a gourmet cook.

Don't think of the roles you play as a straight-jacket. One who has occupied a role for a while has earned the right to do what he can with it. When one has earned her wings as role player, then she can look around for what needs to be done and improvise a way to do it. If it works, it will catch on. Of course there are roles with requirements not readily met: the millionaire, the suave continental lover...etc.

If you are an old hand at psychodrama, you recognized, of course, that the above reflects the view of Doctor J.L. Moreno. Other views are possible, but I shall not review them here, except incidentally in the interest of clarity, and I shall identify them as I do so.