

REALITY AND ILLUSION IN PSYCHODRAMA,
an AS IF avenue to Art and Science

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You are invited to venture into theory for good practical reasons. The director who enjoys a clear grasp of theory comes to choice points prepared. Whether he heeds its guidance or not, he meets outcomes in accord or out of accord with the theory's predictions. Thus ongoing experience leads to confidence in the theory, a modified outlook, or evidence that something's amiss. This filtering process protects our public from our making the same mistakes year after year, and gives our calling the respect it deserves within the professional community.

Don't worry. This is not a treatise on metaphysics. Traditional positions, such as materialism, idealism and positivism, fail to commend themselves to this context. But if we expect our protagonists, especially our hospitalized patient population, to make adequate contact with reality, we owe them a thoughtful prior exploration. A lowest common denominator reality just isn't good enough for healthy growing. Reverse roles with the patient. "How can I trust fantasy when it has let me down? How may I be sure that the newly emerging belief is not another delusion?"

To begin with, fantasy is not the opposite of reality. In popular usage reality is often confused with the physical, as if concepts were somehow less real than concrete objects. What may be regarded as real depends upon a shared point-of-view (and that includes the sharing portion of the psychodrama session). Objectivity in science is another such shared point-of-view, but reality can hardly be limited to the objective. Does one need to assume a disinterested spectator stance in order to confirm someone else's perception? Indeed, in the area of interpersonal relations an honest "interested" commitment to the other should improve accuracy, whereas "disinterested" distance invites error.

What may we say to the patient for whom escapist fantasy has been a snare? Tell him that (at this stage in his life) fantasy kept secret may disorganize him (lead to dis-integration). Fantasy shared is safer for him, because it gives someone he trusts "an opportunity to react to what you've shared." All of us require this kind of interaction to keep from straying too far. However, fantasy-in-action (psychodrama!) offers the highest potential for integration. What a joy it is to have a patient present a hallucination, reverse roles with it, have an auxiliary represent it, take a stance toward it, discover parallels among his own thoughts, and put it in its proper place where it will not endanger his relationships with others.

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In popular usage the word "illusion," like the word "myth," has come to mean falsehood. What a loss! An illusion is not a delusion. Truth and falsity apply to statements, not to the content of sense experience. There are many possible ways of describing experience. different but equally true. But however I represent my experience of something, I can't reproduce the world as it is or as how it may be correctly seen. Drawings, or even photographs, do not reproduce the object referred to. The point may be clarified by considering primitive art or children's drawings. Such are no less adequate representations for primitives or children than a commercial artist's skillful presentations are to the average person. Even the latter are two-dimensional representations of three-dimensional space. Let us call that "virtual space" in order to distinguish it from the broader space within which the art work itself exists, and also to distinguish it from the object "out there" which suggested the picture in the first place. The modern adult who finds himself pleased with the commercial artist's drawing has learned to read foreshortened lines as indications of three-dimensional space, while primitives and children have not yet learned how to de-code it. In such virtual spaces we have created illusions, which "artist" and public have found mutually satisfying. Sculpture is even more compelling. Watch how people reach out to stroke it, when the museum guard isn't looking. This is illusion, a healthy reaction, not a competitor with reality, but something which operates in the service of reality.

In his The Problem of Form in Painting and Sculpture Adolf Hildebrand offers an analogy to set forth the relation between reality and illusion:

"Let us imagine total space as a body of water into which we may sink certain vessels, and thus be able to define individual volumes of the water without, however, destroying the idea of a continuous mass of water enveloping all." (p53)

This can hardly be a foreign concept for the psychotherapist. Therapeutic space, whether analyst's couch or psychodramatist's stage, offers a holiday from judgment and responsibility in the service of therapy. Ordinary life frowns on that, but the moratorium or amnesty is provided so that the patient can get himself together. All this takes place within reality, and though distinguishable from it, is itself real. The creation and/or appreciation of illusion is a satisfying way of taking the world. It is a vital part of the way the world is. How sad that so few therapists revel in what the arts offer or commend them to their clientele. Are not psychotherapy and psychodrama healing arts? Why not make contact with all the arts in guiding the patient to a richer, healthier life!

It has become fashionable to distinguish between right and left brain. Let us group together "reality" or the AS IS with left brain, literal, linear, concrete fact. And let us group together "illusion" or AS IF with right brain, metaphorical, fiction, poetry, and art generally. Both groups represent and resemble, but which resembles better depends on what you're looking for. AS IF seems to require a frame, something to mark it off from usual discourse or the environment (such as the wall the picture hangs on, or the stage set off from the audience).

A sanctuary is a particular kind of space, and especially so at a particular time. The Holy of Holies calls forth a strong reaction in the person's relationship with space and time. This doesn't require immediate collusion, but it has to have been there in an individual's experience. As one confronts the situation there are expectations of the self and others in mind. One is not emotionally neutral; his orientation carries with it a feeling. Now we may speak of transparency.

It is because illusions clue us into something that we move beyond the vehicle. Something grasps us. The illusory character (AS IF) fades out and I face a stark reality ordinary AS IS would have allowed me to ignore. So powerful is the impression at times that in psychodrama I may remind the protagonist who hesitates, "this (auxilliary) isn't really your mother." This may provide the permission needed to express something on the verge of being expressed, and thereby carry something more with it into the protagonist's awareness. The result is not equal to the event referred to (if it's the past) or currently felt in a different context, but something to inform the protagonist's activity henceforth. It unblocks his "stop-upped-ness."

Recently we worked with a ^{hospitalized} protagonist [at the state hospital] ^{and} who balked at pretending. The director nevertheless prodded and cajoled him, completing the psychodrama, but we haven't been able to get him to come back to the theater. With the wisdom of hindsight, and out of respect for his paranoia, we now know it would have been far better to abbreviate the psychodrama at that point. The patient needed to be taught that there is a safe AS IF space on the stage available to him when he is ready to make use of it. Some years ago another patient had been coming to psychodrama for a long time, but drew back from the protagonist role. She did give permission for us to represent her on stage with an auxillary. We portrayed her situation with her in the audience. As she became restless, I offered her the opportunity to double herself and other roles. Later I had her reverse roles with the auxilliary playing

the other, let the auxiliary return to the audience, and then finally reversed her into the role of herself there on stage. Despite her paranoia, she made no objection for now she was fully warmed up to playing the role herself.

The protagonist role, the role of oneself on stage is oneself, of course; but it is oneself in a very special kind of situation, immersion within the AS IF play world. Is this necessarily regressive? Have we not here a mature form of playing? Not simply playing games, but being creative. Art would seem to give one more freedom than social games, because one is given more leisure to find a point of presentation than a game can offer.

Psychodrama is more than a therapy. It is an art which amplifies the therapeutic function. We warn beginning directors against being too theatrical, that is, treating psychodrama as if it were show-business. But psychodrama is theater, and more than theater. What is the relationship of psychodrama to the arts? The nearest relative is drama, of course. It's not quite fair to judge psychodrama on the basis of the same criteria by which we judge a play, for the psychodrama "swallows up" the dramatic aspects in the service of its own distinct purposes.

Opera affords an analogy here, for it too swallows up other art forms such as drama, music, even the script as literature, and sometimes ballet. Criticism of the supporting arts to the opera can be done, and often is, but that's hardly fair to the supporting arts and may be quite irrelevant to the wholistic impact of the opera, for its ingredients have long since become transparent, if it's a good performance.

But there is something for the director to learn in considering the arts related to psychodrama. Note that literary narrative normally moves in the past tense, moving its public toward the present, whereas drama begins in the present and moves toward the future. The characters are shown making commitments (or failing to make them, a commitment by default), and then undergoing the consequences. No effort is made to present the characters in their total complexity, only those aspects related to the future coming to pass before our eyes. In Feeling and Form, Suzanne Langer

writes, "Persons, too, in drama are purely agents -- whether consciously or blindly makers of the future. . . . The future . . . gives importance to the very beginnings of dramatic acts i.e. to the motives from which acts arise, and the situations in which they develop; the making of it is the principle that unifies and organizes the continuum of stage action. The theater creates a perpetually present moment; but it is only a present filled with its own future that is really dramatic. . . . As literature creates a virtual past, drama creates a virtual future. The literary is the mode of memory; the dramatic is the mode of destiny." (p307)

Thus the director and the protagonist bring the psychodrama to its fulfillment. The audience needs to be clear ^{that} form is to be held in suspense, for not until the psychodrama is over does the psychodrama art form exist. Leaving before the play is over is even worse manners in a psychodrama than it is in the theater. It is more than a comment on the psychodrama; it is an accusation against the protagonist's life. That the final scene of a psychodrama is so often a future projection represents good artistic intuition as well as appropriate therapeutic practice.

A word about the relationship of words and action. Again, Suzanne Langer writes

"Gesture is older than words and in the actors' dramatic creation, too, it must be their herald. Anyone who starts with the words and then hunts for the appropriate gesture to accompany them lies to the face of art and nature both." (p316)

Of course Langer has the rehearsed play in view here, but there is still a message to the psychodramatist. To counter protagonist tendencies to narrate the director may call for nonverbal expression. When he gives permission for the words later, they will count for much more. In literature dialogue is reserved for the high points. Psychodramas which are very "talky" suffer both as art and as psychodrama.

Some directors go overboard in their quest for props, forgetting that the theater of Shakespear managed very well with a minimum. Indeed, even a table in a psychodrama can become more of a hindrance (to role reversal) than a help. Crisp scene setting suffices. This is a convention of the psychodrama which serves the purpose.

Such conventions, well established in audience experience and expectations, are facilitative. In Chinese theater audiences are accustomed to having stage hands move props about while the curtain is up and the play is underway. The Japanese stage allows an actor to step out of his part and address the audience, such as the lead in the play Stop the World, I Want to Get Off. But beware. Conventions develop slowly. Don't let your quest for originality or verisimilitude fly so flagrantly in the face of audience expectations that you break the theatrical illusion. That would be as gauche as an actor who breaks role on a Broadway stage.

Back to the relationship with reality. Art is not purely and simply self-expressive, as Freud and Jung would have us believe. Quite as much as science, art is an activity that is carried out in a society. It implicitly takes the Zeitgeist into account. Certain artistic forms are possible and desirable when the public has reached a certain minimal level. We may even think of reality implicit in art in that some forms are (considered) better than others. Better may be defined as a consensus of competent observers -- quite as much as a group of schizophrenic

patients in therapy may nonetheless provide a reality anchor for its individual members.

Because I see psychodrama as an art form, I regard it as susceptible to artistic improvement. It has possibilities that go beyond drama itself. What I have in mind is the cumulative effect on the veteran psychodrama participant. I am afraid that many people break away at the very time maximum benefit may be had, just because they and the director hold a narrow concept of psychodrama as therapy in the narrow sense of the word. Whatever enriches the personal life and affords one an avenue for enriching the lives of others is healing, whether as prevention or as "cure." What a resource psychodrama could be for hospitals today, if they only knew it! And what a resource for the general public. Psychodrama can do for the public all a soap opera can do, and much more besides.

Many scientists regard reality as that which exists independent of observers, but this is to set forth as fait accompli that something can exist independent of all observation. But for me (let us say) X is not a thing-in-itself, but only in relation to someone's perception. X (Berkeley notwithstanding) may exist without a person's being-there but not-as-X. What was X recedes into the matrix of potential for the person to perceive later. Alteration in the meanwhile requires no specific explanation for all is in process anyway. What requires altering is the concept with which I refer to what was X (or that which I perceive as having continuity with my-X). To be strictly accurate X should have a hyphenated pronoun attached to it, together with time/place identification. Admittedly that would involve some redundancy, but redundancy is the price we pay, when needed, for clarity.

To speak of the potential VS the actual is to distinguish between the (as yet) unobserved and the observed. Every actual is a potential and some potentials may graduate to actuals, given the ongoing process. Thus the distinction is always relative to the observer's starting-point, his point-of-contact with X.

If we oppose Appearance and Reality, we deny the reality of appearances. For me appearances are real. What does it mean to say they are not? The distinction between reality and appearance betrays a reductionist bias. Also the concept of role (Goffman...et.al.) which separates one's behavior (say, in public) from what he/she really is -- like the clothes one wears. But surely what one wears and what one does in role (Moreno) express who one is. I concede, of course, that a role can be

used to veil one's intentions, but wouldn't this be a matter of inadequate communication? Inevitably one takes a stand with regard to the experience of that which appears to him, but it nonetheless continues in process. We may stop sending or receiving and remain stuck where we were when we stopped, disregarding subsequent behavior; but I don't see that we ever get beyond a succession of appearances. Hopefully the latter satisfy us more than those with which we began our acquaintance.

To say that water is really H₂O is simply an exchange of viewpoints, the purposes of the common man VS those of the chemist. The chemist viewpoint is to be preferred for certain purposes, but H₂O is (normally) a meaningless expression for the kindergarten, whereas "water" is what's real to him or her.

The perceptual apparatus (even when extended by glasses, microscopes, telescopes and amplifiers) is selective and relative to our perceptual (or conceptual) capacities and experiences. By common consent we build worlds, using language in consistent ways. Within a culture we often cannot imagine things as otherwise in any compelling way. Living within a culture we are committed to a viewpoint (standpoint) such that certain distinctions lay a reality claim upon us and others don't (in the spirit of William James's "live options" from The Will to Believe). Reality grasps us, unless doubt invades to drive it away. Whence comes doubt? Is it not a rift in the assumptive world of one's culture, a rift which has come to exist for (and maybe some others as well) despite the competition of the shared world? I can discount my doubt by offering others' perceptions in preference to my own, or I may insist on my own and risk alienation, perhaps, from those who see me otherwise and who matter to me. To say something is "really so" is to offer a new standpoint to replace an old one. The new standpoint may or may not come to be shared, and this has its modifying consequences.

The psychodrama stage is a time/space with different parameters from those generally recognized, but it overlaps in so very many ways with our usual worlds that we easily relate what happens on stage with what has (or has not) happened, what could (or could not) happen. That is to say, I take a stand toward my off-stage life and carry something of that stand with me when I leave the stage. What blocked me off-stage has been removed on-stage, the meaning of which stays with me as I leave the stage, with the effect of unblocking me off-stage as well. Conflicts often result from barriers we've created in our viewpoints. If we enlarge the viewpoint, the barrier may fall. As a result of our psychodrama experience we are free to give permission to ourselves to let the barrier go (or maybe I discover a needed con-

straint which wasn't there before). In any case what has changed has been something in my imagination. Something with such palpable consequence is surely itself real. But where, then, is the distinction between fantasy and reality? For me, fantasy has operated in the service of reality; it insures and protects reality. (The reader here may recognized I've borrowed language from Schafer's "regression in the service of the ego," but I disdain using the word "regression" for I question whether one ever actually goes back).

Those with hospital experience may hasten to question: what of pathology, delusions and hallucinations -- which in some cases lead directly to homicide? The problem is not with feelings and imagination per se but with relationships. Given a "bad" history of relationship, one embraces conceptual furniture in the light of his private data, while excluding as untrustworthy data from others, with the result that one (so he believes) "improves" the private world (by integrating within that restricted area) at the cost of distancing oneself from public viewpoints. The situation snowballs when public reaction confirms ones emerging impression of the public's untrustworthiness. Thus every attempt on the part of others to reach out may be processed in terms of the private structure, such as to discourage more reaching out. So the private process moves further away from points-of-contact which include public-intent as known by the public.

In 1935 Kegan Paul, London, published the second (English) edition of H. Vaihinger's The Philosophy of As If, an event which failed to attract the notice it deserves. The subtitle of the book reads "A System of the Theoretical, Practical and Religious Fictions of Mankind." He advocated what must have seemed paradoxical behavior: Grant impossibility, but act on the assumption that possibility exists. This is to take an unreal condition as a standard for judging reality. Here in the process one sets forth the impossible case, then sees what necessary consequences flow from it, then matches something else with the necessary consequences by its analogy with the impossible case. He calls this the "fictive judgment." We treat X as Y even though it is not Y. What he affirms is a connection between two propositions, not their reality. For example, "If the circle were a polygon, then it would be subject to the laws of rectilinear figures." Goethe's idea of plant and animal archetypes is another example.

Vaihinger complained that hypotheses and AS IF fictions are often confused with one another. One may state an atomic theory in such a way that its object is potentially observable. That would be a hypothesis. But the version which regards matter as

consisting entirely of tiny indivisible particles without extension is AS IF, for infinitely small indivisible particles can never be observed.

Vaihinger took the disinterested spectator viewpoint of science for granted, and this is where I must regretfully part company with him. From where I stand the distinction between AS IS and AS IF depends entirely on where the speaker is standing. All of psychodrama may be construed of AS IF, but within the psychodrama we have enactment, definitely AS IS (at least in intent). In re-enactment, which brings into public view what was hitherto private, are we into AS IS or AS IF? When we take the further step into surplus reality we are into AS IF par excellence. But where is the borderland? What of future projection? AS^{IS} or AS IF? Some future projections are more fantastic than some surplus realities. I know that Moreno considered future projection a surplus reality technique, but I seem to see a difference of degree. In what I'd call the surplus reality scene I'm freer to change at will than I am in a future projection. For example, in surplus reality I may speak with the dead. I cannot do this in future projection (unless I am thinking of a literal Heaven as a committed religious believer).

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The parentheses above calls to mind a convention used by Heidigger who places within brackets something which they cannot and/or choose at the moment not to analyze, for they are out for bigger game. Interest is more how the bracketed fits in with the larger picture. The early behaviorist use of the "black box" was the same kind of thing. The practice is much more general than these, however. Don't we all have finite time/space within which to operate, and therefore find it not practical to analyze everything. I bracket this or that on the basis of cursory impression and give priority to my examinations elsewhere. So is there not a sense in which this too is AS IF? I have treated the bracketed AS IF its inner articulation did not matter. Perhaps it's too much to say that it doesn't. I don't know, but my guess is that it doesn't. Otherwise I'd give it priority. Perhaps the bracket or the AS IF may be construed as a promise I'll get back to it later. Do I promise because I regard the bracketed as more important or as less important? The answer differs with different persons.

We use bracketing in psychodrama too in the director's selection and delimitation of scenes. One glosses over this and moves into that. Protagonists usually accept the director's brackets and make them their own, but if a protagonist can't he says so and the director must respect his right.

The distinction between process and content may be useful in conceptualizing what

happens through the interaction between psychodrama and the world beyond the theater. Moreno often said that surplus reality is more real than reality. Let's see what this can mean. The more important things happening in psychodrama, as in psychotherapy generally, are process matters, which it is the business of the director and the psychotherapist to "bring in." Often the content of the discussion is like cards in a card game. The content simply gives the process a chance to manifest itself, and it is the process more than the content which matters.

Likewise, what in a psychodrama is more likely to carry over beyond the stage is the process more than the content. It is the way things are being done in psychodrama rather than what has been done. Conclusions of psychodrama sessions are necessarily tentative. We do not require the protagonist to necessarily follow through with where he ended up on stage. For example, a student at a European workshop ended up back with his wife, ending their separation -- much to my surprise. Later he confessed that this is where he had thought I had wanted him to go (for the record, I hadn't) but now, contrary to my "wish," he had decided against the relationship with his wife. Should I have emphasized that we never told him to follow through with the reunion with his wife to which we'd come on stage? My not doing so had allowed him to rebel at my expense and at the psychodrama's, thereby realizing our larger purpose. What he'd gained from the psychodrama without realizing it was permission to determine his own future in a freer way. The surplus reality interactions with the wife and with the girl friend had afforded him a glimpse of possibilities. As a result he had experienced (a trifle delayed) the feeling differences. He made his choice outside the theater, though while the workshop was still in progress.

AS IF opens doors through psychodrama beyond Art and Science to religious and quasi-religious conceptualizations. Building upon Moreno's profoundly intuitive Word's of the Father, we may develop a concept of Presence. Some psychodramatists shrink from the possibility, but there's much to be gained from a dialogue on the subject, if they will take the perspective AS IF, even though others may take the perspective AS IS. This keeps the doors of communication and progress open, and provides a foundation for my next paper.