

The Satten Refinement

Dorothy and Mort Satten have suggested a refinement. Choose the double from the beginning and let him stay there all the way through. When the director calls for role reversal, the double slips into the protagonist's vacated chair and the auxiliary stands aside. This aids the double's growing identification with the protagonist, and the protagonist can more readily picture himself over there when his double represents him, for the double mirrors the protagonist to himself. Likewise the auxiliary can concentrate on identification with the protagonist's other, making improvisation easier if it's called for. This works better in mature groups, where we can take the traditional approach for granted. Beginners have enough to do to integrate traditional practice..

Self-Presentation

The role of the protagonist requires self-presentation. The cleansing and shaping of identity is what our psychodramas are all about. But without the protagonist's active participation it won't work. In one sense there is hardly a time on stage when the protagonist is not presenting himself. If the protagonist has not been getting positive feedback inside and outside the theater, we find, of course, that he's not self-satisfied and looks to the director to help him improve his social presentation. People in business, the diplomatic service, and acting hone this into a fine art. In our role training capacity they welcome our skill, but what the director can offer is far better. He can even get better results than those who do it all the time, for he is not limited to the interpersonal level, but includes that layer below the surface which may be the root of the protagonist's difficulty.

A defense lawyer's team may use **the chair back** directly with the client or with a witness. We set up two or more chairs, one behind the other. This is not something done in court, but in preparation for ultimate presentation in court. The attorney says to his client, "pretend you are in court, let's have you tell us, as if we were the jury, what you'd like us to know about your life situation and in particular the charge against you." This is easy, and clients or witnesses respond readily. We make no comment, but have him slip behind the front chair to say aloud, as if to himself (soliloquy), what he doesn't want the jury to hear from him. What is it he'd rather they didn't find out? Of course this profoundly affects the quality of his surface presentation. and it is often transparent to the listener. Hardly anyone, let alone the client on the witness stand, is as good at this as they think they are.

Our affect and nonverbal behavior disclose more than we imagine. Professional actors (and politicians?) probably do far better than the rest of us, and aside from practice effect, they may have had more talent to begin with. Here's how they do it. They identify with a real model somewhere (even one they can't remember) and pretend that's who they really are. Sounds like method acting, doesn't it? They give careful attention to the reactions of others, that is, the way others mirror ourselves back to us. So they modify their presentation accordingly.

Our own toddler and preschool experience functions in a like manner. We are in the process of developing our **social atom**, that small group of those closest around us---usually family figures, but often inclusive of a few others as well. These few significant persons form a template for our subsequent interpersonal relationships, for we expect others to be like they have been. In animals like the "grey legged geese" it's as if we'd been imprinted by the first figures on our immediate horizon after birth. Fortunately for human beings we can operate more flexibly, and we're more likely to do so when we're conscious of our social atom and come to an awareness of how much we bring into every encounter. This allows us to grow beyond our origins.

To return to the "chair back" example above. We have the client slip back into the next chair behind the second one, and reflect aloud on what he said to the two chairs before him, and focus fully on the discrepancy between them. We say, "Tell us how you feel about that. What do you hope to do now? Let's return to the first chair and try again." At least that's one option. Of course we come dangerously close to rehearsing, but the difference is it comes from him, not us. He can honestly say, if the prosecution were to ask, that we have not rehearsed him, that we have not put our words into his mouth. We can chair back in the absence of client or witnesses as the team seeks to grasp our client's story better, for we believe authenticity is the defendant's best defense.