

THE SHOW AND TELL SCHEMA FOR PROCESSING PSYCHODRAMAS

"Show" is a metaphor for "scene" and "tell" is a metaphor for "sequel."

Scene and sequel follow literary usage, the analogy being that the second follows the first---most of the time, but not always.

Our psychodrama tradition emphasizes scenes, and hardly ever mentions sequel. Protagonists rarely notice the passage from one scene to another as requiring a bit of "talk." When directors record their notes of psychodramas they've done, they may list scenes but skim over, as if unworthy of mention, what it is that leads from scene 1 to scene 2.

I have detailed clinical notes of over two thousand psychodrama sessions, all of which remain within the clinical record of diverse institutions. Indeed, I have had to fight medical record librarians and my immediate supervisors, to get them to accept lengthy accounts---till the feedback from others working with the same patients convinced them of their value. A few psychiatrists went so far as to share my notes with their patients themselves when they wanted to make a point.

I am not flaunting my zeal. It was my way of saving effort, for I made the one writeup serve both institutional needs as well as my own, for I intended research and training applications from the start. I do not advise anyone else to follow my example. The inevitable battle probably wouldn't be worth it. My purpose in mentioning it is to emphasize how sequel has been consistently overlooked, at least by me, and no one, least of all myself, noticed.

I was about to ask "Why?" but I restrained myself, for I've told beginning directors again and again not to ask the protagonist "why" but "how." For one thing the protagonist will tell you 'why' without your having to ask, and for another, when the director does it, this invites intellectualization---which is something we don't want.. We strive to get out of our heads and into our bodies, the immediate source of feeling and action..

So I'll answer my own question "how?" in my own way. The way we write process notes what may be identified as sequel is embedded in our account of the specific scenes, or added as supplementary commentary at the end. Should we make extra work for ourselves?

My purpose is to make the kind of analysis which should prove useful to directors, especially beginning directors. I am a consultant to a lawyer who has a life size skeleton propped in plain view in the corner of his conference room. It isn't pretty. Skeletons should have flesh on them. I haven't asked him why.

If I dont ask students or patients, shouldn't I give a peer the same respect? He doesn't have to justify his decor to me. So I speculate. It's more fun. We deal with

life and death issues. It may create a serious atmosphere for our discussions.

The poet John Donne was less subtle. The coffin in his living room serves to remind him of his mortality. Projects dear to our hearts may never get finished unless we face up to our limitations. Have I tarried long enough to evoke your impatience with me? Good.

Sequel refers to the talk that intersperses itself as we move from one scene to another. We directors have overlearned that action is good and talking is bad. If you want talk, you go to defendants of the 'talking cure,' which is almost everybody nowadays, especially insurance companies.

We psychodramatists have to get over our favorite prejudice. We do talk, whether we like it or not. In the slippery space between scenes protagonist and director react to the scene. Both have a nascent notion of where to go next. Inasmuch as psychodrama is a cooperative venture, we confer. We have done something, so what do we do next?

Isn't it obvious that the consideration is uppermost in the beginning director's mind? It deserves far more attention than we ever give it.

Let's review what we've been doing. We've been dramatizing a story. But our story has no script. And we wonder why TV hasn't snapped us up. What we do hasn't even reached the structure of a dress rehearsal, let alone a finished product. We believers in spontaneity are in the midst of our creativity.

Socrates asked whether virtue can be taught. Can spontaneity? We work at it. But wouldn't it be helpful to take a look at what we're doing. The protagonist is in the throes of emotion, the director less so, but one must be tuned in.

The feeling is the criterion of what we've just done together, and projected feeling informs where we shall go next. It may be stretching a point, but beyond the stated or implied contract at action's outset, every time we go from one scene to another we have a reaffirmation or modification of the initial contract, a sort of mini-contract, don't we?

We present a story to our audience. We do so for the sake of the protagonist. It is, after all, his story. But the audience has a stake. We are not there to be entertained, despite the fact we often exceed TV or movie fare in that respect. We are there to be helpful to the protagonist, who in another session, may be of help to us. Indeed, Ira Greeberg's doctoral research showed that the audience also derives therapeutic benefit from the psychodrama performance.

I submit some literary distinctions. Strictly speaking, though we use plot and story interchangeably, plot is not an absolute requirement for a story. A story always answers the questions "what?" "when?" "where?" "cast?" and "how?" but not necessarily "why?" A story has a theme, but a theme doesn't explain the specific progression from one scene to another. The scenes could follow quite a different order and still be faithful to the theme.

The protagonist arrives on stage more with a plot than a story in mind. The

protagonist has his theory on why things happen as they have. The careful director listens respectfully but doesn't buy into the explanation wholesale. If the protagonist grasp of the cause and effect relationships within his story were fully accurate, chances are he wouldn't be on stage. He has his own mplicit script, which hasn't been working for him. The director is a detective whose task it is to help him discover "How come?"

If in the back of our mind we hold the distinction between plot and story, we will more readily discover what has gone amiss. In this we provide a service the protagonist has been unable to accomplish for himself. In the short run, the director may work out a band-aid for the protagonist's problem. It may work. But what happens next time, when the director and psychodrama group aren't handy? We have only succeeded in making protagonists dependent on us. This may serve our financial needs, but we want something better for our protagonists. We like to think we're a cut above those who dole out drugs in response to symptoms.

The stark fact is that the protagonist has to 'grow up' and get on with his life rather than ruminate in his miseries. Murray Bowen, among others, has defined autonomy as the goal. So far, so good. Agency is essential. But add to that integrity. Beyond insight and nirvana, there is integration, that is, to become whole. Isn't that the highest goal of healing---to be made whole.

We go beyond this crisis or that, beyond sheer temporary survival, to a life worth living, providing full self-realization and satisfaction for ourselves and others. It's not too much to ask for. We have a lifetime --- or what's left of it, to do it.

Before the warmup to a psychodrama session our expectations are nonspecific. When we step into the theater, we become at least dimly aware that we bring a personal warmup of our own with us. How urgent is it? Can it wait? We vary between 'now' and 'later.' Meanwhile, everyone else is in the same boat. What do I want for them? What do I want for me?

It's delightful to experience a cohesive group at work. I'm very impressed with hospitalized teens at work. Back home the same teens were notorious for their self-centeredness---at least from a teacher or parental point-of-view. Who would recognize them now? They care for one another. Very healthy. They have learned that psychodrama works, and they want to see that everyone gets a chance to be protagonist, even if they have to wait for another session. Unconsciously they take into account how long someone has been with them and how soon they may have to leave. When that happens, the group must be inside the individual, to cope with the chaotic world outside.

The director likewise has an agenda, which he must hold loosely. Maybe as a backup if all else fails, which it wont. The main exception to the rule is some disruptive event at the residence halls where the patients live. One does not ignore the elephant in the room. We confront 'him' at once.

The 'elephant' may also be in the director himself. We don't live in an ivory tower. Things happen to us. A baby drowns, our house burns down, someone is

having an affair, a spouse asks for a divorce, or deserts the sinking ship, a doctor diagnosis cancer, someone we know goes to jail, or is killed in an accident. It is not wise to let personal tragedy dominate the session. If there's no other way, we leave someone else in charge, and make a brief explanation when we return..

But it's entirely appropriate to lay out what half the people there know already, not in the sense of attaching blame, but in frank acknowledgment that we directors know first hand what pain is. Often this is quite enough to free us to get on with the session in behalf of someone else. Such things have happened everywhere in the group. Each one is engaged in surviving, and when it is foreseeable, more than that, excellence. The sharing conclusion of every session reinforces our connection with the human condition.

I disdain canned warmups. What the group brings to the table is quite enough for a long time to come. As one person or another speaks, note how the act and react. As our choices narrow down, some topic or person---who exemplifies the topic emerges. The director centers on that person. The warmup resembles a sequel in advance, heralding the transition from presence in the theater to participation on the psychodrama stage.

The director assesses where the protagonist is coming from, with whom to channel it, and which direction to go. He gets into action as quickly as possible. He doesn't risk the protagonist's talking away his warmup. Otherwise he may end up with nowhere to go, nothing with which to build the emotional state where healing --- rather than merely talking about it, can take place. We maximize emotional expression, except on those occasions when the protagonist is hot to trot, and must be calmed down a little. Getting him into action is the best way to do that. For the emotional flood to be a catharsis, one should get the whole story into full perspective. Catharsis is more than ventilation. It is integration.

Typical first scenes occur in the car on the way. Their conversation likely provides an indication of what the protagonist is looking for. Directors notice the spontaneous sociometry of the group. Who comes with whom? Who is left behind? Is this usual or unusual? What groups are there within the group? Not that the director must ask out loud, but it should not escape his attention. Your being here is important to someone? Should we stage that? If worse comes to worse, we can fall back on a soliloquy. To me, the least desirable option.

We define a scene as having continuous time, a single place, an intact cast. If a person's coming or going has a noticeable impact on the protagonist or the group we may need to resort to another scene. The director may seek out the impact this has on the protagonist, or it may come out from his double, which the protagonist affirms or negates. Otherwise we may have a mini-sequel within the scene, which allows us to resume the scene at hand, or to serve as a springboard to a different time and place. The rationale for the tangential move should be obvious to the group, who may be frustrated at the change. A sentence of explanation may be sufficient.

But when the necessity for cutting and going elsewhere is in accord with the

initial contract, the director does so without the hint of a sequel. The alternative scene is not a sequel, but the natural progression to where we were already going. Some directors, and I am among them, shift rapidly between scenes. If I have a question, and a handy scene is likely to hold an answer, I'd rather see the answer in action than slow down the action to ask the protagonist. Not everyone agrees with me. Alert protagonists have had to stop me on occasion.

In laying out a story, we avoid simultaneity. Audiences can't cope with it. Besides, what protagonist can be in two places at the same time? Here a sequel is a necessity, while we sort out the matter. Perhaps I should set forth the functions of a sequel.

1. To telescope reality. Making decisions often takes time, and demands movement. Beware that a lapse in time doesn't make the story drag. In scene setting initially the protagonist describes in detail, but the moment may come when one passes over the widely known with barely a nod. A war or a depression may have enormous social effects, but such are peripheral to some stories. I lived through the depression but we always had plenty to eat. Millions were out of work but my father worked three days a week all the way through, and I had him the rest of the time to myself. It never came up when I was protagonist.

2. Scenes are nourished in conflict, and end in disasters, some much worse than others. The protagonist faces a dilemma. Highly motivated, he must do something. I had a roommate in college who said, "Don, let's do something ---even if it's wrong." He had a way of proposing what I already wanted. The sequel sets the stage for the scene to come, in words so brief they hardly qualify as a conversation.

3. The sequel is an aftermath, showing us the shaping the protagonist in response to the disaster. There has been a reason for the battle. And there is an enticing prospect, a 'hook' that inclines the protagonist one way rather than another. Remember it. It may turn out to be a symbol later.

4. In short, the protagonist reaction prompts his decision. He regards the scene lived through as the cause of the next step to be taken, which follows naturally as the effect of the receding scene, and depending on the course of the even, establishing the cause for the next scene. To suggest, or establish a cause/effect relationship, acknowledges the plot.unfolding.

But beware, the same story may admit equally reasonable ways of accounting for what happens, that is, as the same story with a different plot. This is exactly what happens in a courtroom. The prosecution sets up one story, while the defense counters with a plausible story. If the prosecution's story is not overwhelmingly persuasive, and the defense story may just possibly be true, as the accused tells it, then the jury must acquit. If neither prosecution nor defense can come up with a believable story, the jury will invent one and base their decision on that. Let's hope that the prejudiced have been weeded out with the voir dire

My point is that the sequel may mold the scenes like plastic. The protagonist

can do that and work the scenes against himself. Or the director can take the same factual basis in the scene and in accord with another plot, make it work for the protagonist. We take for granted a self-serving slant in self-portrayals, but protagonist sequels may suggest the opposite, and account for much of the protagonist's suffering.

Let's take a look at conflict. It intrudes into nearly every scene. Our protagonist wants something. So why doesn't already have it?

1. His greatest obstacle may be himself. Opposition from within. As the comic strip Pogo concluded, "We have met the enemy and he is us." This is a very severe handicap, but it is one directors welcome, for it invites an intrapsychic confrontation. We're quite at home with those.

2. The protagonist may already have it and not know it. See the Wizard of Oz. The wizard's wizardry was based upon his motivating them to discover it for themselves. All he had to do was validate their discovery. Here is where the director builds self-esteem, gives small tasks with graduated difficulty, so that with increasing increments of success, the protagonist plunges ahead into doing what he thought he never could do.

3. The obstacle may be external circumstances. We don't face them all at the same time. We take them on one at a time, with a little help from a friend, and lo, they're all gone. The director may have the protagonist line up a series of chairs. We've already moved from sequel to surplus reality scene. The director may have the protagonist personify each external circumstance, making dialogue possible with available auxiliaries, after protagonist has established the identity of each with role reversal. Of course the protagonist has a double with him cheering him on. Watch out for the "yes, but" phenomenon. The protagonist has long frustrated helpful friends. So, if you can, arrange for the 'yes' possibility to come from the protagonist himself first.

There may be at least two levels of desire. There is the goal the protagonist thinks he wants, and there is the goal he's getting. Is it barely possible, deep down, he prefers the goal he's getting? One reason for such a perverse preference may be that the protagonist may think he ought not to want what he wants. The internalized parent-figure may be at fault. He may think he ought not have what he wants because he doesn't deserve it. He's not good enough! Who says so may be a way of tracking down the internalized hindrance.

Another way of failing to resolve a dilemma may be found in the protagonist's longing for the status quo. What the director observes is how the protagonist pulls the covers over his head, or presents himself as a tragic figure doomed to vacillate back and forth between 'a rock and a hard place.' What a pity!

The director may take the protagonist off stage, and have his peers mimic his behavior. This can lead to a break-through discovery, noted in sequel. The director resists discussing, preferring to put the protagonist in action back on stage. Or if the necessary skill is simply not in the protagonist's role repertoire, a series of

peers taking his role on stage may broaden the protagonist's perspective. The director puts the protagonist back into the stage scene, without discussion, to do it any way he wants. I've told protagonists to do it wrong---which turned out to be better than they had been doing.

The director continues to monitor the protagonist's pain and tension. What does the affect tell you? Remember that biological affects serve as signals. Is the protagonist (I go round the circle) sad? angry? or frustrated? What side of himself is he featuring?

Take approach and avoidance issues. We know that the tension between two approaches is nearly always resolved as we step toward one of the poles, and simultaneously the pull of the opposite pole becomes weaker.

Avoidance-avoidance dilemmas drive a protagonist out of the scene. He may choose to engage in another game.

But approach-avoidance is the more common situation. We have already been talking about it above. More of this when I deal with 'crossroads' below.

If the protagonist has substantial opposition, and he triumphs over it, think of what this will do for his self-esteem. A disadvantage has turned into an advantage after all---even if the achievement was accomplished in surplus reality.

I can appreciate why some may prefer the word "transition" to sequel. What prevented my embracing it was the fact that the word 'transition' has been more frequently associated with large chunks rather than small increments. The large chunk of transition calls for a scene. Here are some surplus reality scenes which lend themselves well to transitions:

1. Let's take in *the view from the BRIDGE*, as symbolic of the middle zone. Therefore BEFORE THE BRIDGE, in the sense of prior, takes into account the role fatigue stage. BEYOND THE BRIDGE is the last stage, after one has reached the other side, where one is caught up in new roles, completing the transition. From the bridge we VIEW THE FLOW. We grasp the process, but like Heraclitus, we never step into the same river twice. In viewing from the bridge we understand that the old has been washed away, and one embraces the new.

2. *The View from the FERRY (or boat)*: Suppose you were to look to THE BANK BEHIND to discover the swift current had taken the launching dock out of sight, and you looked ahead to find the dock where you were headed had been swept away. You'd gone too far to ever go back, but where may you land on THE BANK AHEAD? Resourceful directors use whatever is at hand to intensify the effect, including chairs and persons. Our doing it together enhances the experience, and doing it improves on thinking about it or even talking about it.

3. *The View from the PEAK*: This makes CLIMBING UP the first stage and CLIMBING DOWN the last stage. The phrase 'Climbing down' is especially provocative, suggestive of the constant and ever dangerous pull of gravity, which requires our full attention if ever we're to return to bring a glowing account of where we've been. More than that, to share what we've seen, perhaps to inspire others

to make their own climb, or if that cannot be, then to experience vicariously what the view from the peak may disclose to them. We cannot remain at the summit, but for a long moment, we stand in the presence of ETERNITY, as our ancestors stood on Olympus or Sinai. From the panoramic perspective one grasps essences which underlie the flow of existence.

4. *The View from the CAVE:* We've covered this in *Generic Psychodramas*, after Campbell and Vogler, in the image of the INMOST CAVE, where one encounters the SUPREME ORDEAL. Viewing from within the cave we encounter the SHADOW, the dark recesses of the self. The last stage here ushers in a new identity. No wonder the traveller is thrown so forcibly on her own resources, for who else can make the decision for her? What is right for one is wrong for the other. We may look and learn, but we live and learn better. When I finally return to the ORDINARY WORLD to enrich it as I've been enriched, I do something no one else can ever do in the same way.

5. *The View at the CROSSROADS:* For my father, carrier of light artillery in World War I, the decisive shift in perspective came as he watched Big Berthas drop their lethal load in the midst of soldiers at the crossroads. This is sure to have its counterpart in recent history for veterans of Viet Nam, Iraq, and Afganistan.

In his essay, *The Will to Believe* William James submits a variation of this view in his posing a fork in the road rather than a crossroads. That makes the choice no easier. I paraphrase from memory:

Suppose you are on foot, caught in a blizzard, and at last you come to a fork in the road which you have been looking for, but now that you've arrived you cannot remember exactly what the directions were. If you make the right choice, there is a cabin several miles ahead, stocked with food and fuel. But if you make the wrong choice, after many miles the road ends at an old avalanche, where you can go no further. But by then it will be much too late to turn back. You couldn't survive the return trip. Don't think of staying at the fork waiting for someone to come along. You've been walking for hours and haven't seen a soul. Not to choose has the same effect as making the wrong choice. Would you not, then, make a leap of faith, taking one of the roads, based on the possibility it may be the right choice, that you'll survive after all, rather than to make no choice and perish, just as if you'd gone down the wrong road.

In this way James justifies the spiritual person's will to believe. Blaise Pascal had a similar argument called *the divine wager*: When I balance the possibility of infinite gain against finite loss, the wiser choice seems obvious.