

STRUCTURES WITHIN THE PSYCHODRAMA PROCESS by Don Miller

1. Like 'show and tell' there are two basic structures, the scene and the sequel.
2. Usually they alternate, but sometimes there may be a series of consecutive scenes before we come to a sequel.
3. A psychodrama session begins with a warm up, which is normally nonspecific. with who shall be the protagonist still unknown. This is analogous to a SCENE OF THE WHOLE GROUP. Everyone, including the director, has an agenda of some sort, loosely held, waiting to see if the time is ripe. We note how others act and react.
4. As the choices narrow down, some topic or person (who may exemplify the topic) emerges. The director centers on that person. As in regular sequel, the director is assessing where the flow is coming from, with whom to channel it, and where to point.
5. He gets into action as quickly as possible, keeping talk limited to a minimum. The first scene is not only a matter of getting protagonist and group rolling, preparing themselves for something to happen, expressiveness at maximum, as the director begins to get his bearings.
6. Typical first scenes a) in the car/ on the street on the way here. If alone a soliloquy, and if not, a conversation to be staged. Did someone come with you, or have you come alone? Is this usual or unusual? Who did you leave behind? How did that happen? Who cares that you have come?
7. A scene is defined by being of continuous time, a single place, an intact cast. If a person's coming or leaving has a noticeable impact on the protagonist or the group, we may have another scene.
8. The director may seek out the impact this has on the protagonist, as he pauses within the scene. Often this becomes a sequel, leading to another scene at the same continuing time and place. Or serve as a springboard to another scene at a different time, place or cast.
9. On the other hand a clue may emerge during the first scene to prompt a director to cut scene without completion and move directly to the next scene, postponing sequel to when we have accumulated material to process.
10. In opening scenes we maximize feeling. They present us with affect that guides the director toward the kind of story which is developing. Emphasis on sensation, including who, how, when, where but not why. Protagonists often add the why unbidden with their interpretation, adding plot to story. Directors want to encourage more openness to alternative explanations, but resistance to offering one of his own just yet.
11. The director is alert to how the protagonist's plot may be working against his goals. The director may decide whether a band-aid approach will be enough, or would the protagonist be better off to strike a new direction?
12. Often there are two levels of desire in the protagonist. There is the goal he thinks he wants, and there is the goal he's getting. Maybe he really wants what he's getting, but he thinks he ought to not want it. The director works toward getting the protagonist's levels on the same level. This is sequel, but if a scene promises to provide an answer, he may set up the scene with that (director) goal in mind.

13. The story is becoming less open. In sequel---or within scene, the director may press for a choice. To fail to face the process is not a genuine choice unless all that one wants in the status quo. If so, what's he doing on stage---unless change is in the wind from external forces, which may be confronted in scene rather than let them wash over him.

14. The director continues to monitor the protagonist's tension and pain. Is he scared, sad, angry, frustrated, or making progress? What side of himself is he featuring? What side neglecting? How social is he? Is he self-indulgent or duty bound? Does he know? How does he feel about it?

15. A transition may be in order. There are a number of metaphors which are suggestive. Which one fits?

Closure

Enacting Metaphors

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.

16. How to use the metaphors of transition? When the choice is between approach or avoid, and one is not content to oscillate between or languish in the middle. the metaphor may sharpen the protagonist's options, and get him beyond square one. He ceases playing the game long enough to decide whether that's what he wants to continue to do.

17. Maybe there's a matter of style. Is the protagonist active or passive? The more active, the more autonomous, with growing self-esteem. Whereas the more passive, the more helpless and dependent, and more vulnerable to loss, the more the prey to external circumstances. Whereas the active person makes his own circumstances.

18. We assume that the protagonist will have gotten what he wants, but for external or internal opposition. We can more readily deal with the internal. What within the protagonist has kept him from getting what he says he wants? Look for "YEs, but--" How realistic is he? Has he lacked commitment?

19. We must begin to think in terms of closure. What can we hope to accomplish in the time we have left, so that the protagonist sees an open door? Have his feelings been respected, accepted, reinforced, shared so far? Is the group on his side?

20. Is he locking himself into a single interpretation? What space is there to move around in? Or has he lacked the will to have really tried something. Maybe the best we can do is help him get on with it.