

Concerning Three Way Interaction on the Psychodrama Stage

The proper approach would be to go through the thousands of psychodrama sessions I have summarized in my files, but it would hardly be finished in time for the present generation, so if you don't mind I'll come forth with what comes to mind as I ruminate on the subject.

As background, let me refer you to Freud's Oedipus Complex, and to its elaboration by the neo-Freudians---all of which has been detailed by Patrick Mullahy. In my own first exposure to the system about 60 years ago, what stood out to me is that there are both positive and negative oedipus complexes, which both genders go through, but in reverse order, For males the positive precedes the negative and is resolved through replacement with the negative form. This involves letting go of the initial attachment and replacing it with an attachment to the parent of the same sex.

For females the complex begins in the negative phase, to pass over to the attachment to the male. This is the version the average person in our culture remembers. I suspect that the above may be the version that Otto Fenichel puts forward, but I can no longer find my copy to confirm it. There is a competitive angry aspect I'll not introduce here. Do I need to say such complexes are a part of normal developed, typically resolved without a ruffle, except by some of our patients?

Very early I passed from the above Freudian theory to the more general rendering understood by therapists at that time (1960's). They covered it nicely as a cross generation attachment to one parent at the expense of the other parent. Jay Haley has so expressed it. This avoids the analytic jargon and opens the door for everyone else. Also it's recognizable as a frequent clinical phenomenon, which may serve to bypass the unconscious, if the therapist is so inclined.

I fell under the Moreno influence about 1961, and did psychodrama on the basis of psychoanalytic theory. Very shortly I discovered I didn't need Freudian theory anymore, and graduated to structuring sessions in accord with the psychodrama method. Techniques profit from use within the context where they originated, though nearly all therapists already use some of these in their professional practice without knowing their source. Eric Berne acknowledges this; Fritz Perls doesn't. I'm confident you'll agree with me if you choose to go on to certification in psychodrama, sociometry and group psychotherapy.

My clientele outside hospitals led me into Marriage and Family Therapy as well. There I became acquainted with the writings of Murray Bowen, who devotes considerable attention to triangles, offering a way of coming to terms with a familiar clinical situation. I discovered my contemporary, Carl Hollander, already knew Bowen. Carl has been an excellent source for putting the two fields together in Colorado, while Chris Farmer has been doing the same in Britain.

How good it is to find an alternative to the common uncritical medical and psychological reliance on individualistic assumptions. I warn you that you are at risk of being swallowed up in this culturally determined point-of-view which limits the range of our effectiveness. You'll never be what you might have been unless you venture 'outside the box.' Other cultures can help if we let them.

But indulge me with one disclaimer. Bowen assumes healthier development comes with the attainment and full expression of one's uniqueness or maximum differentiation. But I believe that apex should be redefined in terms more socially and culturally inclusive. Even Bowen has been scathed by the individualism of his time and ours. To pare off the social and culture context is a distortion which continues to plague us professionally and personally. Diagnostic categories notwithstanding, we are not interchangeable with those sharing the same labels.

Role Reversal

This is arguably psychodrama's most important technique. Of course Moreno didn't invent the concept---only how to deal with it. Not to minimize that achievement, for it is like inventing the wheel. Why is it not universally used in therapy? I suppose too many among us hate getting out of comfortable chairs, or off couches, to stand up, move about, and act in a capacity other than one's own. Yes, we can avoid action in therapy, but what a waste. If I were cynical I'd suggest that the seditary talky approach takes longer

and is more financially rewarding to therapists, subjecting the patient or client to more suffering which some assume develops character. As Maxwell Smart says, "Sorry about that."

I believe that the role reversal we experience in growing up is another way of conceiving conscience development. If you have experience with small children, you'll realize we are not born with a conscience. Indeed, if you have sustained contact with criminals, you've observed that many of them seem devoid of conscience also. I should put quotes around the word, because we often deem someone devoid of conscience, whereas they have different versions of right and wrong than we do, and suffer genuine guilt when one behaves other than in the culturally proscribed way.

Draw on your experience with movies, TV, plays, and novels. Everyone uses key words such as 'role' and 'self,' without realizing that many others don't understand them in the same way you do. To skim the surface of Moreno's view, I show a variation you may not have encountered in your academic course work. If you haven't noticed, where dictionary and scientific assumptions prevail, we find both orthodoxies and transient fads. The second half of the last century offers many examples.

Moreno distinguishes among three level of roles; psychosomatic, psychodramatic (fantasy). and psychosocial roles. The last of these is what most people mean by 'role.' They assume that a role is like a suit of clothes, that one may put on and take off at will. For them the 'self' lies behind the various roles we take. Goffman is an exemplar of this view. Even therapists who know better (like RD Laing, David Winnicott, Jay Haley) often distinguish between a 'true' and a 'false' self. This is how protagonists think too, and as a psychodrama director, I go along with it on the stage, for I'm committed to taking the protagonist's perspective on the way to arriving at more satisfying and fulfilling life choices beyond the theater.

Likewise Moreno, in terms of using the psychosocial role, distinguishes among 'role taking,' 'role playing,' and 'role creating.' As the above, these too represent a process view. However, one does not inflict debatable theoretical views on clients who have bigger fish to fry. You are not so lucky, especially with regard to the relationship between the role and the self.

The role does not really disguise the self (even when the protagonist thinks that's what he's doing). Rather the role articulates the self. The role is there first. The self arises by interaction, reflection, and social validation. The self is not something inside the body. The responding body, observed from without and experienced simultaneously from within, **is the self.**

While analysts distinguish among conscious, preconscious and unconscious, the self is there as a whole. Neat distinctions between what the self knows or doesn't know are unnecessary, which is for the better, for the boundary, if there is one, is fluid at best. One cannot be conscious of it all, but who-one-is necessary includes the unacknowledged aspects of the whole self. With interaction what has been 'unconscious' becomes 'conscious' as needed, without all the spatial metaphors.

Note the consistency here implicit in the progression from psychosomatic, to psychodramatic, and to psychosocial roles. Note how well role taking, role playing, and role creating follow a like sequence. How different this is from a common sociological concept of role. There, in the conveniently stable society, the growing person faces proscribed roles, to which he must adapt. He still follows the role taking, playing and creating Moreno sequence, but how often does he go the whole way? Spontaneity and creativity are seldom alluded to in the traditional sociological model.

Doubling (quoted from my publication elsewhere)

The antecedent for doubling in the psychodrama method is in the mother/child relationship. I speak of 'mother' in the sense of the 'mothering figure' (regardless of the biological facts). Indeed, here mother may be a man or an older sibling. If you don't remember, or haven't observed, note what happens as the involved adult relates empathically with the infant. The baby's every emotional expression constitutes a clue to what's going on. This is a cue for the mother to mirror back to the infant what the infant has been showing, her whole demeanor implying full acceptance. At the same time providing the necessary language. We welcome the baby into our world which becomes his world too. Winnicott calls this "good enough mothering," a

minimum which holds a culture together. Conditions are not always ideal. That's where our doubles come in to give the adult what the child may have missed. As our protagonists absorb it all, they are more likely to behave differently, and on leaving the theater fit into the culture at hand and get what will satisfy them.

Role Reversal Arrangements for the Psychodrama Stage

1. **The Family of Origin=** calls for 3 chairs arranged in a triangle facing inward. a) If the grown up child is the protagonist, the other two chairs are his original parents. If one of the parents has died, the director ascertains whether this is recent or remote. If recent, change the scene.

If remote, where one parent is living and the other has died. the auxiliaries are not yet on stage. As usual put the protag in a chair to be the absentee, and after setting forth the identity. choose a protag and get the two chairs occupied

"With which one do you want to begin?" "Father." "With mother present or absent?," "Does an actual unfinished scene come to mind?" If so, clear the stage and stage the scene.

Some directors may want a double chosen from the beginning. This is convenient for developing a protag self figure. But if the double is chosen first, this may cut out the best person for one of the auxiliary roles. If a double seems necessary, he/she may remain in the audience till needed. Even though in the audience the double is warming up to his role.

2. **Sibling variation=** If protag is being/has been raised by one parent in the absence of another, and shares household arrangement with a sib, this is also a three way situation.

3. **Nuclear Family=** Here the protag is a parent, together with the significant other. I more than one child to fill the remaining chair, doing scenes in sequence is called for---unless a real scene comes up. Then we clear the stage and proceed as usual.

4. **Outside the above families=** Is this person from the original social atom or not? If not, which absentee from the family does he/she represent? How did this come to be? Preparation or expectation? This applies to adults. On the other hand if it is the protag, as when one has been deserted or orphaned, the degree of belongingness should be explored. And what protag wants.

5. **Marriage Counseling=** Any of the above may shift into this. This may call for inserting who the 3rd person represents into the third chair, and moving (either with reality or SR scene) interaction with the protag, first of all in the absence of the others. Whatever seems appropriate, with both spouses present, one may be in the audience temporarily. In such situations we have two protags. Adjust accordingly. Maybe both will require doubles. They may face one another, but if this is to be workable, remember the rule, that the other hears only what a protag brings into the scene.

One way for the doubles to face each other directly, (which they may not do otherwise) would to have them function as mirrors for the two protags.

6. **The Satten Shift=** is too complicated for these situations, except as detailed under marriage counseling.

7. **Step by step=** a) **If all 3 chairs are filled, as with the protag and two auxiliaries, RR as usual between the protag and one of them.** (RR= role reversal, or 'reverse roles').

b) don't call for a RR involving the other on stage UNTIL the protag is in his own chair. Then have the protag RR role with the second auxiliary (representing the other real person).

c) To whom does this person (now played by the protag) speak? If to the other aux, let the protag supply the words, keep the other aux from hastening with a response to give protag a chance to return to his own chair. This slows down the action.

d) **A better route,** to be explained in advance, would be for the protag to 'double' for each by moving back and forth to the space behind each chair. As if the protag really were a double. he/she repeats the input. After a few passes like this. send the protag back to his own chair to comment to each (aux) in the presence of the other, and let them improvise in character. Only the beginning. Go to a reality or surplus reality very soon.

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