

Chapter 1, Transitions

Drifting is dangerous. Get on course.

The proposal below, accepted for presentation at the annual meeting of the American Society for Group Psychotherapy and Psychodrama in 2009 at St. Louis, prompted this book. The first four chapters here offer a 'quick fix,' as an immediate guide through a difficult situation. Then, when you've taken what you already know or can easily absorb to its limit, we hope you'll *Finish Your Story* to discover how helpful the 24 Story System can be, if ever again you find yourself to be protagonist or director adrift in life.

"Adrift mid-session? A 24 story compass puts you on course. Directors stage the protagonist story to reshape it mid-way to a realizable positive outcome. We've reminded you of 24 familiar story patterns, named after transitive verbs, to show how reversible active, passive and reflexive roles cope with approach-avoidance dilemmas. Sequentially ordered aggregate affects attract similar stories, steering us by alien plots to dock at destiny's harbor. We select shipmates to focus on story beginnings, stage what happens next, and close with a sharing that ties up loose ends. Then we discuss how this voyage guides treatment, supervisory and research styles of the future."

Missed it? No problem. Just 'Finish Your Story' anyway.

Stage One, Role Fatigue

We begin to move toward role transition with the onset of role fatigue. "What psychotherapist has not had clients, their guard up, declare at the outset, *Don't expect me to dwell on the past. That's over and done with*, showing that the past, far from over and done with, retains prominence in the speaker's present. What's more, the past unfinished blocks an authentic experience of the present. Persons who have been members of ongoing group therapies or psychodrama groups have seen proof of this time and again before their very eyes.

If ever directors run out of structured warm-ups---we hope it's soon! they can nearly always find a protagonist by simply placing an empty chair on stage and inviting each person there to imagine someone in the chair with whom you have unfinished business. Rosemary Lippitt described this as the auxiliary chair technique (*Group Psychotherapy*, 1958). Accumulated unfinished business invites the emergence of a transition process.

The theme appears in dreams, where death clears the stage for

new life. In traditional cultures ritual Rites of Passage facilitate the process. This calls for moving out of everyday involvements in going where the usual 'persons, places, and things' cannot distract one from the task at hand. Radio, TV, beepers, and cell phones are forbidden. Noteworthy persons have done this for themselves, such as Moses, Jesus, Jonah and Oedipus. The flight from Ninevah led Jonah to a ship for Tarshish, but also to the belly of a great fish, who vomited him out at Ninevah nevertheless. This is reminiscent of a man who fled India for the safety of London because an oracle told him it was his fate to be killed by a tiger, but on reaching London he encountered a runaway tiger from a circus, meeting his death there anyway.

National Training Laboratories provided sensitivity training groups of strangers who refrain from speaking of their vocations, education, or residences. Doctor Moreno showed another way to accomplish the same end when he brought a newcomer to an ongoing group. The man introduced himself as, let us say, Dr. Jones, whereupon Moreno awarded everyone present with honorary doctorates, introducing each in turn as Dr. Adams, Dr. Brightman, Dr. Carter...etc. By chance only one other person in the group had an earned doctorate already. I find it refreshing to see Yale bulletins and British catalogues listing male professors as *Mister* rather than *Doctor*.

When I taught group psychotherapy and social psychology I routinely asked graduate students to take Kuhn's Twenty Statement Test, posing the same question each time, *Who are you?* We write twenty answers as quickly as possible. Well over half the answers alluded to group identities, such as *Republican, Jew, Woman, Irish, Afro-American, Catholic, Italian... etc.* I elicited perceptions from alternate perspectives: *Who am I when I am not one of those?* May it not be that some old role I habitually identify with has long since become dysfunctional? What would happen if I were to let it go?

Have you discovered already that the world you've been living in no longer has a claim on you? Are we where we are out of sheer inertia? Here's a personal example: As a child I'd never put anything on top of a Bible, but now I don't hesitate to stack them. A shift of perspective has come to me over the intervening years, making it more like a charming book and less like a book of charms. I don't regret the change. I'm in a far better position now to appreciate it.

We smile at the Linus blanket, but not at the real tug-of-war and tears between the child who must have it, and the embarrassed adult

who can't stand seeing the child dragging it around. Sooner or later disenchantment takes place, so let them enjoy what David Winnicott calls their *transitional object*. Is the child's need for the blanket basically different from adult attitudes toward the nation's flag?

For disillusioned college students of the seventies, they're both just cloth. Does reality reside in the object revered, disdained, or simply appreciated for its usefulness--or forgotten for the lack of it? Rather the meanings we ascribe constitute our reality.

Disillusionment often opens the door to a more realistic appreciation later. How many of those who say they love the Bible ever read it, or who salute the flag know very much of our national history? How often this very veneration stands in the way of healthy growth! Witch hunters are recruited from those who will not allow let themselves imagine alternatives. See Eric Hoffer's *True Believer*.

The sobering side of this whole matter I find in suicidal patients, whose trust had been betrayed. Or what is worse, when they themselves turned out to be what they said and believed they were not. The suicidal seeks to slay the inner betrayer, as if death wouldn't take the rest of him too.

On a somewhat less ominous level, the protagonist who wants to 'get rid of' that part of self which gives so much trouble has yet to learn that the shadow side of self must be heard if one is ever to be whole again." Of the several persons I've known to have ended their lives in suicide, I grieved for three, who provoked my own growth.

One thing stands out clearly in the opening transition phase, that there is need for a change. The old way of succeeding no longer succeeds. Odysseus, king of Ithaca, with his army, joined Agamemnon in the war to rescue Helen of Troy. They required ten years to subdue the city, and the Achaean heroes returned home --- all except Odysseus. Another ten years pass and still there is no word.

Meanwhile, nearby noblemen have come to the palace as suitors for the lovely Penelope, for they are sure Odysseus must be dead. But she remains true, sure he'll come back to her. Suitors presume on her generosity and hospitality, corrupting several servants, as they continue to hover about her. Now that he has reached maturity, their son Telemachus, travels about in search of news of his father.

Most of Homer's *Odyssey* shows Odysseus striving to return home but continually being frustrated because Poseidon, the sea god, bears a grudge against him. What Troy could not do to his army,

attrition on the return voyages did. Odysseus has been separated from his men. He visits Hades to discover they have not survived, and he meets mother there who tells him what has happened in Ithica during his absence. Odysseus alone is left. He continues to receive the favor of the goddess Athene, and an old friend in the king of the Phaeacians. Odysseus arrives at the palace in disguise, and no one recognizes him---except a dog, which convinces Telemachus who he is. Father cautions the son not to break his cover till the proper moment. Impatient suitors jump at the prospect of a contest for Penelope's hand in marriage. The disguised Odysseus outdoes them all, blocks off their retreat, and with the help of his son (and the goddess Athene) slays the suitors. Intercession of the gods prevents civil war, Odysseus reestablishes himself as king, husband and father.

A happy ending, but if Odysseus had gone home in the same old way he'd have never made it. The underdeveloped side of himself came to the fore, skills more feminine, and the quest for romance more than battle. In Campbell's *Hero's Journey*, after the *Supreme Ordeal* the hero encounters the threat of the feminine. Unless the hero integrates the other gender within, he won't survive, so this is what he does. The result is a wiser, better put-together human being, with many more resources at his disposal. William Bridges outlines what heroes must learn on their journey home. He said that (page 52) *Life's second half demands of us*

- 1) that we unlearn the whole style of mastering the world that we used to take us through the first half of life,
- 2) that we resist the longings to abandon the developmental journey and refuse invitations to stay forever at an attractive stopping place,
- 3) that we recognize it will take...effort to regain the inner 'home.'

Life is quick to put the lie to the assumption that the second half is just a replay of the first. What of those who didn't get going till nearly everyone else had already quit? We know nothing of the Biblical patriarch Abraham till he began his journey at age 70. Moses, too, was well past retirement age, tending his father-in-law's sheep when he experienced the call to liberate his people. Handel was 57, broke, recovering from a stroke, when he accepted a commission to write choral music for a benefit performance. He wrote the *Messiah*, the work for which he'll always be remembered.

Look at George Burns, who earned his reputation as straight man, playing 'second banana' to his wife Gracie Allen through

most of their married life. Long after she died, and his close friend Jack Benny had also died, he rose to stardom as the featured actor in a series of films, and became a household name to a new generation. The point is that George Burns and none of the others did it in the same old way.

It isn't necessary to suppose that Homer had all these ramifications in mind when he wrote the *Odyssey*. Art is such that its message goes well beyond the messenger. Greek culture, or more specifically, the heroic code, moves through the story. Pride (**hubris**) brings down from the gods of Olympus a twisting of human judgment that leads to downfall (**nemesis**) of the offender, deep sorrow and tears, which restores what has gone out of balance.

When Odysseus returned home, he'd been gone so long that he was not recognized for who he was. Those now in charge of the house of Odysseus failed to extend hospitality to this apparent beggar, and thereby brought catastrophe on themselves. The breach of honor had been punished and balance was restored. We'd do well to incorporate the spiritual insight of the ancient world, and make hospitality our policy. One can never tell who the stranger may be. One day it may be you, as it was for Odysseus! In the language of psychodrama, role reversal reigns.

Moving from Role Fatigue to Exploration

In *Group Psychotherapy and Psychodrama* 1980, pp 185-191, Alton Barbour and Zerka Moreno provide us with action and sociometric interventions to deal with role fatigue:

1. Redefining what is seen.
2. Exploring the role psychodramatically...from the perspective of the significant other(s) through role reversal.
3. Expanding, reducing or eliminating the role as indicated.
4. Reassessing role expectations.
5. Re-evaluating role performance
6. Considering alternative roles.
7. Training for alternative roles.

The Second Stage ROLE EXPLORATION

Mobilized Stories 16, 17, and 18

When role transition moves according to pattern, a first phase concludes and a middle phase begins when one lets go of the old role, and quits patching it. That phase of life is done.

But one does not ordinarily embrace what takes its place. A great deal must happen first, and it happens during this period. Not in the same old way. These are, in fact, uncharted seas, so far as life experience has gone. This is not a good time for straightforward goal-directed behavior. If we leap into that, we'll miss something important. Even though others may help, we make the final decision. Our life stories are not carbons of anyone else's. When I finally come to a decision, and set out in a new role, another beginning phase of life. How often the graduating have smiled indulgently at the venerable university tradition of calling graduation *commencement*, but the older wisdom prevails. Four swift years with graduation the goal must give way to that larger period of life, for which it is the starting-gate, not the end of all our labors. In the political arena some call this a neutral zone, a *place off-limits to partisan advantage*, where we are free to interact without others presuming firm commitments have been made. It is a hiatus between letting-go of the old and taking up of new commitments.

We do not suggest that this is a serene and peaceful season. On the contrary. Not quite knowing where we stand with respect to others frustrates them and escalates tension within us. A focus on relationships weighs against any impression that this stage features private contemplation. Indeed, observers scrutinize our movement and debate among themselves which direction we'll likely take, so that they may be ready when the decisive act comes.

But allowing time and space for exploration is in the common interest. The freer we are from coercive input while undergoing change, the less likelihood of reversals later. We own goals we've freely chosen. Exploration poses danger but offers opportunity. Temptation abounds. Values are put to the test. We discover who we are and where we want to go. Our lives are on-the-line.

This is the crucial factor in temptation. Whether we break this or that rule is quite beside the point. Rather our behavior defines who we are, and with whom we may join in community. What is implicit in Genesis 3 becomes crystal clear in chapters 4 of Luke and Matthew's gospels. Jesus was in the process of self-discovery, resolving the issue of who he was not and who he was. As the mother said to the tempting stranger in the movie *Moonstruck, I know who I am*.

The role transition middle period invites opposite errors:

- 1) We take it too fast, ploughing through full tilt, straight ahead.

no pause for breath. But if we fail to face our mistakes, we are doomed to repeat them. We've 'blown' the chance life has given us to make a new start, and exchanged one deadend for another.

2) Or we take it too slow. It may be that we've known so much pain, we hesitate to venture out again. We've come to enjoy our period of limited accountability, and wish this unexpected second adolescence could last forever. But the clock is ticking. While I wait opportunities pass me by. Never again may I get another chance like the one slipping through my fingers. Was this not the point of the parable of the wise and foolish maidens?

Some people have known all their young lives they're destined for Harvard, Yale, or Princeton, but I was not among them. When I found myself a student at one of the halls of ivy, I felt definitely below standard, when I walked into the common room for the first time. Here huddled in corners were groups of earnest persons, puffing pipes, and engaged in deep discussion. *'I'll never be like that,'* I sighed wistfully. I wasn't. Four years later I had my graduate degree, and there in the common room sat those very same persons, puffing pipes and engaged in deep discussion. Afterwards I learned that watchful authorities had seen the same thing. They set forth a decree that one must complete the final degree within ten years, and then get out to face the world. There are limits!

The function of the special world of the Hero's Journey is to give space to death and rebirth. We psychotherapists conceive of it in terms of disintegration and reintegration. The Hindu god Shiva plays the role of destroyer, making room for creation. Out of vast emptiness which constitutes enlightenment, we discern a transparent character of everyday illusions. seeing through them our new reality.

Many persons prefer to cut the second stage as short as possible. Here are a few practical suggestions:

- 1) set up a regular time and place for complete privacy. Extend its usefulness in keeping a vigil associated with your next rite of passage. Give yourself plenty of time.
- 2) *What do I really want,* were everything to go my way?
- 3) What would remain unfulfilled if life ended now?
- 4) Keep a journal. Review what you've written. Try constructing an autobiography. It may be easier to follow reverse chronology, that is, move from the present, step by step, into the past.
- 5) Then write a future!

Sometimes life arranges our middle zone for us as we get away to school, or get divorced, or find ourselves in hospital, rehab or prison. For Martin Luther the monastery served as conduit between the carefree pursuit of law and pioneering the protestant revolt. Daniel Defoe's Robinson Crusoe also had a longer middle period than he'd expected. These are life-cycle transition tales.

Rather than depend upon life's 'accidents,' those already moving through the second stage may choose dramas and psychodramas as more readily available short-cuts via the medium of imagination. My colleague asked those who came to our workshop to pace a time line of their lives, marking with chairs high points along their journey.

We have the 'surplus reality' technique of future projection. One may play the role of survivor writing one's own eulogy aloud, or better, as a significant other in one's life (a spouse or a child) reminiscing with another at my wake what life had been like for me when it ended so abruptly.

We may role play ourselves as John Donne, who kept a coffin in his living room to remind him of the transiency of life, or any other historical or fictional character in a group. Someone may role play Socrates, for example, prompting protagonists to see the full implications of their words and their deeds for the road ahead. Keep the Hemlock out of the reach of children.

A word of caution for directors: You may want to keep a low profile. Don't speak of spirit guides to the uninitiated. The news cited how a public figure's imaginative constructions had been seen as seances, cult extremity or personal pathology. What's worse, the public, innocent of the interpretive character of all reports, received the 'news' at face value, to the glee of political opponents.

One may choose an animal, an owl, a weasel, a fox or a porcupine, while other members of the group react. If this turns out to be helpful, one may take the animal along after the group is over. Children have found inspiration in C.S. Lewis' lion *Ashland*, or for that matter, the Disney *Lion King*.

Inventing a rite of passage can be a group project, which we may invite others to participate in, and go through ourselves. Suppose you missed a traditional rite of passage. You can redo the past, and have it after all. One of my students missed her doctoral commencement, and she seized the opportunity psychodrama affords to do it with us there, something the conventional rite wouldn't have offered. At the

end she said she'd chosen the better way!

As for the suggested vigil, we do that too. Directors at times resemble hypnotists, suggesting to the warmed-up protagonist that first one hour passes, then another, we see this, we hear that, we smell specific odors, we taste familiar flavors, our bodies grow heavier, lighter, dense or ephemeral, et cetera. If we are sufficiently informed, and verbally artistic, we may reconstruct for the receptive a native American experience without the peyote.

3. Role Transformation, The Third Transition Stage

featuring **Rebirth, Renewal, Recovered, Rediscovered**

To find an opportunity indicates a readiness to make a new beginning. Unlike the first stage of role transition, when circumstances grab us by the collar, forcing us to acknowledge the obsolescence of our roles, we take the initiative, ushering in the third stage, calling forth the vitality and spontaneity of the new.

Up till then, we seemed to those about us to be in another world, neither doing anything nor getting anywhere. Observers focus on externals, and sometimes persons in transition do too, but we believe the inner signals finally get us moving. Daydreams and night dreams hint at what the future holds. Consider how Jacob's famous ladder dream at Bethel on the way from his childhood home in Beersheba to Haran (Genesis 28) punctuated his first role transition. Also the dreams of the butler and the baker, which Joseph interpreted while in prison (Genesis 37) presage role transitions for them. Most of all, note the consequences of Pharaoh's dream for Pharaoh, for Joseph, for Egypt, and ultimately for Israel (Genesis 41).

As for daydreams, nearly everyone has heard the recording of Martin Luther King's *I Have a Dream* speech, which served not only the role transition of an individual, but also of a nation. How many calls to vocation have daydreams anticipated long before the day of decision? Moses acted impulsively, slaying the harsh Egyptian taskmaster, but it was a deed for which there had been a long warm-up, while Moses grew up in pharaoh's palace. He fled safety and security to establish a new life for himself with the daughter of the priest of Jethro. Then again wandering thoughts would not let him be during the lonely hours when tending his father-in-law's sheep. The intriguing burning bush represented a culmination of his inner life, and

the transition into a role which changed the course of history.

We may not have heard of Freud, but for his *Interpretation of Dreams*. What would've become of Carl Jung without the crucial dreams which altered his life course? I don't suggest that we interpret dreams in terms of some underlying theory, which we bring into our dreaming for confirmation. Psychodrama directors review manifest dreams on stage, and in that special world, to redream it in action. It tells us where we've been and where we're headed, although we may not realize this till much later, when we discover how it showed us the way. In Moreno's chance encounter with Freud at the Vienna Medical Society, he characterized their different approaches to dreaming. If I may paraphrase Doctor Moreno, *You interpret dreams. I teach people to dream again.*

Rarely does a single drama or psychodrama cover the whole 'Hero's Journey,' or even a full role transition plot, but the directors' awareness should include all three stages: Don't gloss over the unfinished past. If it hasn't gotten to you yet, surely it will. I've yet to meet any patient at the outset of residential treatment, who hadn't felt the impact of role failure, which precipitated coming to the hospital in the first place. We ask *What brought you here?* till they get annoyed at hearing the same question from all the 'pro's.' I routinely open my one day workshops for professionals in training with that very same question, and follow it up with *What do you want from this experience?* and *What are you prepared to do to make it happen?* Thus I set the stage for role transition at every training workshop. How dare we set out to learn directing without deep personal involvement and risking the protagonist role ourselves?

Try This First

The path leading from the middle to the end stage of role transition requires that we risk doing something ("even if it's wrong"). When I was a teen our next door neighbor approached each new task with *Well, I'll have to get my tools together.* The process of getting the tools so absorbed him, he never got around to completing the task. He failed to follow through, letting the magnitude of the task prevent his taking things one step at a time. It may help to shift focus from the goal to the process of reaching the goal. Now if you are ever to be a practitioner, you must follow the route of the apprentice, and find daily satisfaction in that, if ever you are ever to reach your ultimate goal. For better or worse, this is how I happened to collect academic

degrees: I was interested in what I was learning and applying it along the way, when suddenly, it seemed, the university had no more degrees for me, and kicked me out. I couldn't stay away. I came back to teach.

Gordon Allport called it *The Functional Autonomy of Motives*, whereby the means we use become ends-in-themselves. If we overdo that, we'll have another role transition to make. Resist the siren song of another route which might conceivably be a better way. Another route may take you there too, but there is no way of telling which is the better route till you are well on the way. All too many end up without having really tried anything at all, for they were always changing direction.

But to find the energy to keep on going, use your imagination to advantage. Ask yourself, what's it going to feel like when I've done it. Look to the spontaneous role playing of children. They visualize themselves as practitioners, never apprentices. Why not! Don't you deserve your daydream?

If you find yourself stuck, it may be well to ask yourself, What is it within you that undermines your resolve, casting doubt on your plans? That goes to the heart of the matter, and it should be on every director's mind. Remember the Magic Shop framework. See the Approach-avoidance chapter. Magic shopkeepers ask, *What do you want? What do you expect it to do for you?*

Less directly, one manages to discover how it happens that 'customers' don't already have what they seek. What got in the way? What made this so formidable an obstacle? Directors refrain from saying so, but chances are it wouldn't be 'a big deal' for someone else. What is the first thing to be done in overcoming the obstacle?

To Facilitate Role Transitions

We ask, *What has caused me pain, or has messed up my life? What roles require revision or replacement?* I must let go of what doesn't work. When I do, what are the interpersonal consequences? I shall feel a lot of pressure to continue as I have been. I must resist this, and present myself as already a firm new self, who will not accept being treated as I once was. How do I do this? I find new role models, or find new aspects of those I already have. How have others handled what I face? What may I borrow from them?

Question the assumption that one should identify with others

globally. Not only is this impossible, it is undesirable. I've directed hundreds of psychodramas where protagonists have ambivalent feelings toward parent-figures. So have you. Some protagonists reject outright all the parent-figures stand for, while others feel some compulsion to whitewash what they can't accept.

We raise the question, *What may I borrow from several models? You can pick and choose, you know. There's no obligation to buy out the store.* I have the protagonist address the auxiliary playing the parent figure, saying, *I want this specific trait, quality or characteristic of yours for mine too. Is that OK?*

Auxiliaries indicates that of course it's OK, and hand over something which symbolizes the gift the protagonist wants to own. That done, I have protagonists list those traits, qualities, habits and practices they don't want. If it turns out they already has some, we work out a way to symbolically hand them back. Then I reverse the protagonist into the role of the parent figure, and prompt them to give permission to refuse these unwanted characteristics. This isn't hard to do, because the parent-figures rarely want these either. When protagonists return to being themselves, they hear the parent-figure auxiliaries even more graciously letting them off the hook. If the milk's sour, you don't drink it. I tailor the collection to the protagonist's wishes and needs, and then introduce a scene where one makes practical use of something obtained. Such role training goes beyond most psychodramas, but it is essential to the third stage.

Reactions that don't work

I give up. Maybe I think I'm too weak, or others just don't understand. If I do things the same old way, maybe I'll have better luck next time. Why should I hang in there? Indeed. Maybe they were only half listening. Maybe they have an investment in my remaining as I've been. Maybe my self-presentation, having been unexpected, was unclear to them. *What if I have their attention, and can lay out what I want from them, and say what I'm prepared to do to encourage their doing as I hope they will?—and it still doesn't happen?* Some people need me, and care little what happens to me, just so long as it doesn't interfere with continuing contact with me.

But there may be others who'd be glad to be rid of me, and would say so, if they dared. But is getting out the only answer? After all, who needs them? But what if I do, at least a little? They remember who I

was, before my role transition, not who I am now. I may show them there is a new me. If that fails, at least I've tried. I've given them the chance to know who or what they are saying 'no' to. Now if they know, and the answer is still 'no,' it's their loss, isn't it?

Suggestions for Directors

Our process encourages us to focus on current interaction with the long term people of our lives, and compare these with the interaction with new people we encounter, including colleagues and peers in residential treatment settings.

This will shore up our self-presentation and heighten awareness. We will not let life stonewall us or steam-roll over us. We seek and hear out feedback, to balance it over against the feedback we remember so very well. We resolve never to rely on too few sources. How are we to make new roles stick? Directors help protagonists explore how new roles fit in with their lives, and provide practice in integrating them.

Newcomers in our lives take us as we seem to be. They update initial impressions if our performance doesn't resemble our billing, but consistency invites satisfaction. The good in life is abundant. Sharing in no way diminishes the supply. Indeed, it increases it.

Those among us directing psychodramas at residential treatment settings may construe work with inpatients who stay long enough to be protagonists more than once, or return frequently as

1. Entry drama analogous to role transition stage 1 = **Role Fatigue**.
2. mid-hospitalization dramas = stage 2, **Role Exploration**, and
3. to prepare the actor for leaving the drama, = stage 3, **Role Transformation**.

Likewise, our perspective may be applied to outpatient growth groups, and private practice settings too. Perhaps we establish time markers for the inside/outside distinction. So stage 1 is the **baseline** exhausted as treatment begins. I see it as the frayed script. Stage 2 comprises the climactic scenes of catharsis and insight. I call it the counterscript. Stage 3 provides the working through and practical planning for **life beyond therapy**. Often this requires a counter-counter script.

A Role Transition Presentation

When I offered a seminar on role transition at a Federation conference years ago, I did a warm-up you may wish to try

sometime. About twenty persons came. Some were working toward certification, and others had already reached the practitioner level. All were experienced in psychodrama. There was no need to review the method. I introduce myself, then say,

Warmup

'In a moment we'll find out who you are, but first I'll tell you how I usually work. I shall take responsibility for structuring our session, but within that structure your input is welcome. I show, then tell. I believe that our best learning takes place as we involve ourselves with each other. We aim to develop a sense of community which opens doors for all those willing to participate, so that what we do here should be directly applicable to your treatment groups back home. What do you want us to call you? What does that name make you think of? What two words identify you today?' That done, I ask, *Where are you in the role transition process?*

- 1) What isn't working?
- 2) Are you separated from someone or something that used to work for you?
- 3) Do you feel lost? Are you not quite sure what route to take?
- 4) If you've committed yourself to a new role, how do you feel about it now? How is it working out?

'Don't answer yet. You're going to have an opportunity to share your answers with each other, as they come up naturally within this group warm-up.

Everyone stand. I want you to distribute yourselves as evenly as possible to the four corners of this room. That means about five persons to each corner. You'll learn more if you seek out persons you do not already know. If a corner has too many people, let latecomers go to that corner which needs more people. We're going to explore your time line in terms of

- 1) way back long ago, 2) recently, 3) the next step ahead, 4) what you see coming over the long haul. The four points are **way back, back, ahead, and way ahead**.

Where you are now is your **way back corner**. You have five minutes to tell one another how it was for you back then. You'll need to move along quickly to give everyone a chance to speak."

Five minutes pass.

"I'm sorry to have to call 'time,' but we've a lot of ground to cover. I want each group to move clockwise to the next corner. If you're facing the center, that will be to your left. This new corner for your group is the **back corner**. Tell one another the important role you've played recently. How has that been for you? Again, you have just five minutes to get around your subgroup."

Five minutes pass.

"By now you have caught on to where we're going. So once again let the groups move clockwise to your **ahead corner**. Take five minutes to tell one another what's coming up for you right now, and how you feel about it."

Five minutes pass.

"Let the groups move clockwise to your final destination, your **way ahead corner**. You have five minutes to tell one another how you believe it will all work out, and how you feel about that."

Five minutes pass.

"Let the groups move clockwise to return to the corner from which you started, what is the 'way back corner' for you. Your task is to choose one person as protagonist candidate. Choose two if you cannot decide between two lively possibilities. Raise your hands when you've decided. (In this way the groups all know how the other groups are moving along. It prompts them to make quick decisions, which serves the purpose of our exercise better). When all the groups are done, I say

"Return to where you began today's session. Let's have the possible protagonists come forward to stand facing the group in a straight row about here. (indicating mid-room to allow for space behind them).

"Each person tell us what you'd work on if you were protagonist. If someone from your group wants to add a comment which may help us make up our minds, do so in a single sentence, but first raise your hand and to get the protagonist candidate's consent.

"Now that we've heard from all the candidates, let's have the candidates---no one else---close their eyes. You in the audience with your eyes open, stand behind your first choice for protagonist.

Meanwhile I move into the space the group has left. Now I face the protagonist candidates and the group which has distributed themselves behind them, saying

"The one with a slight plurality may not be the final choice for the whole group, so I ask for your total silence in considering each possibility as we reach group consensus.

Here's what I do get the whole group behind one person. I gesture to those behind the person with the least support to stand behind someone else. I take the hand of that candidate and lead him or her to the rear, indicating *you are to choose among those who remain*. I follow the same process of elimination till one candidate has widespread support. With gestures I invite those backing the 'runner up,' together with the 'runner up,' to stand behind the group's choice for protagonist. I tell the protagonist to open his or her eyes to see all the back up. The group returns to their seats and we begin the action portion of the psychodrama. In the unlikely instance of a tie, I stop the process, let the two decide between themselves who should go first. Then I'll look at the clock to see whether there's time for two. If not, I'll promise a private session with the one to go second. Or, if they prefer, I'll decide for the group and give a plausible reason, based on my reaction to the person chosen as the one who needs attention right now. I'll ask the group if they agree. They do.

We shall summarize the psychodrama process and minimize the content to protect the identity of the protagonist. At this late date the only ones who could guess who this is will be persons who were there twenty years ago, and who're already partners to confidentiality.

Mardy Psychodrama, age 35. "Is the risk worth it?"

The protagonist is about to move from a small town in Oregon to Portland, which seems to be required for him to progress in his vocation. His question, "Will my wife like it? Will she come with me? She has a lot of personal ties where we live now."

1. Director: "Show us the place where you're living. Take us from an outside view through the door to the room within where the action takes place."

He shows us the kitchen, and I interview him-as-her. Then he selects an auxiliary to play his wife. She is working on the stir fry. He senses she's irritated with him. The issue has become clear. I cut scene.

2. She is pregnant. He also has a creative work in process. I designated a chair at one wall as that baby, and a chair at the opposite wall as his creative work. We represented each with auxiliaries.

He role reversed with the unborn baby to which I gave the power of

understanding and speech, then reversed him back to himself at the center of the room. We did the same with the creative work. Then the two polar auxiliaries each took an arm and applied pressure to see which way he'd yield. One auxiliary was so involved she blocked and had to be replaced. I promised to be with her afterwards along with anyone else she trusted.

Closure

3. I dismissed the polar auxiliaries without requiring a decision from the protagonist. Enough to heighten his tension. Then we brought the wife auxiliary center stage seated her facing him. Using role reversals as needed, but otherwise trusting improvisations, I had each tell the other what one wanted from the other and what concession one was willing to make to obtain it. The protagonist had a hard time seeing things from his wife's point of view. Finally he told her that he loved her, after their fears had been accepted.

4. We did a future projection of the protagonist and his wife going somewhere in a car, when he told her what took place in his psychodrama at the conference. We heard what he believed would be the resolution.

Sharing

The group was totally with him. When he and the wife auxiliary spontaneously stood and embraced, I invited the whole group in to share nonverbally. Then they returned to their seats for verbal sharing, which went on and on and on. I had to break in and insist on deroling before I could let the group go.

Recapitulation

We have sought to develop a structure for what is already being done as psychodrama without depending on frames-of-reference embedded in the medical model or in those personality theories which fail to take interaction as the fundamental unit of analysis. We are not prepared to jettison all traditional psychiatric and psychological models, but we offer what we believe to be more inclusive alternatives to broaden the base of our art. Symbolic interactionist social psychology, comparative and historical religion, but most of all theater, novels and the media have been especially helpful. Generic sequences, such as those suggested by the 'Hero's Journey' and role transition metaphors, guide us. Our regular practice restores, provides, explores and establishes contexts.

The 24 story system shows the range of contexts drama therapies and psychodramas typically take, and each of these plots suggest a role family. We seek to integrate our protagonists into reality and reality into our protagonists. This requires that we master context and process, orchestrating protagonist-antagonist interactions such that troublesome triangles move into series of dyads, which manageable focus leads from decision in action on stage, through reconsideration on the basis of what's happened there, to action forward in life. Remember the three stages of role transitions:

1. **ROLE FATIGUE**, where the old roles no longer work.
2. **ROLE EXPLORATION**, where we are in the process of finally letting go the old and searching around for an adequate alternative. Ideally the community provides enough patient support to let the protagonist do this well.
3. **ROLE TRANSFORMATION**, which begins when one is committed to a new role constellation and has received encouraging confirmation in it. Surely you're noticed this trichotomy approximates Moreno's flow from conserve to spontaneity to creativity.

If you feel we have a valid approach, may I invite you to view your life cycle from a role transition perspective and discover where you are.

One of our more fruitful approaches, ideal for role transitions, comes through the concrete, literal enactment of metaphors. Consider these as alternate names for the second transition stage:

Closure

Enacting Metaphors

1. *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're beyond the point of no return, but where may you land on THE BANK AHEAD? Resourceful directors use chairs, persons, or whatever is at hand to intensify the effect. Doing it together enhances the experience, and simply doing it improves on thinking about it or even talking about it.
2. *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. Though we cannot remain at the summit, for a long moment we stand in the presence of ETERNITY, as our ancestors stood on Olympus or Sinai. The panoramic view discloses essences which underlie the flow of existence.

3. *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. Mobilized Story 18 below provides details.

4. *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: Let us 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 farther. 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, *the divine wager*: Balance the possibility of infinite gain against finite loss, and the wiser choice seems obvious.

5. *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.

Chapter Two Bridges to Cross

This was the title of a Saturday psychodrama training workshop I offered years ago, and I have only a hazy memory of what we did, but the title lingered. Then came Robert James Waller's *The Bridges of Madison County*, and the power of the image once again nudged me. I thought of old covered bridges I'd first seen in New England, and most recently near Philadelphia, only a ten minute drive from where we had the workshop.

Did I mention the bridge back then? I don't know. Maybe some reader out there does, and has an inclination to pick up a phone to help me tie loose ends. I write a continent away from where we were, and revel in transcending time and space just to create another bridge.

After a while we saw the movie, and just recently got the book. Here are a few lines from a letter Francesca wrote her grown-up children, which they read, as she'd planned, after her death (p156):

Though we never spoke again to one another, we remained bound together as tightly as it's possible for two people to be bound. I cannot find the words to express this adequately. He said it best when he told me we had ceased being separate beings and, instead, become a third being formed by the two of us. Neither of us existed independent of that being. And that being was left to wander.

I realize this is fiction, but we psychodramatists know we can often find far more reality in the surplus reality of imagination than in prosaic everyday routines, so I shall speak as if it actually had happened. I'm sure it has---many times.

What impelled Francesca to write this? Why risk dashing cold water on memories of mother? So that mother could nourish the hope that, what she once had with her lover, Robert Kincaid, might not end with their deaths. And on another level:

Francesca already had a bridge to her children, but never in life had she dared put it to such a test. So she gave herself the satisfaction of having shared her precious secret with persons dearest to her, whose maturity she believed in. She was reaching out to them.

As it happened I was high in the sky when I first saw the movie. I asked the stranger next to me what she'd thought of it. With furrowed brow she asked, *What if that were the story of my mother?* As an off-duty professional, I answered her question with a question: *What if you were Francesca?* She shrugged, and said, *"I don't know. I've never been to Iowa,"* and turned away. The flight captain announced we're landing shortly, underscoring her provocative reply.

Had the stranger been a psychodramatist, she'd have been to Iowa. That's what our work is all about. Take the quotation above, about having ceased being separate beings, and becoming instead *a third being, formed by the two of us (which) neither of us existed independent of.* A love story, no less so for the unhappy ending *that being was left to wander.* The letter affirms how we exist as dyads in reciprocal interaction. Dyads require contexts, the lack of which had foreclosed their relationship, for she could find no way to fit the precious being in with the rest of her life.

The Veil of Secrecy

But in Francesca's writing the letter, the third being wandered no more. Here's a basic truth life has taught couples which endure, that unions require external social quite as much as internal personal validation. That's why this mother swept aside the veil of secrecy, and gave her children the truth, which showed how much more there was to her life than they'd ever seen before. That's why she told them. That's why we do psychodrama.

And consider this, you who find yourself adrift in the psychodrama process, that you've lost your bearings because you have not penetrated the veil of secrecy. Who in her life has the protagonist not told? How about you, the director?

What a great symbol, the bridge! How apt for our communication too, for we are concerned with social transitions all the way, more implicitly than explicitly. To begin with what is implicit for directors:

Directorial Transitions

There is the matter of shifting from one scene to another in a way that connects rather than disconnects. Not simply movement, but movement that carries the past with it into the future, and enhances the future because that's where it's been. We speak of the *conserve* which is the matrix spontaneity acts upon to creatively produce a new and more adequate conserve. Without the bridge of spontaneity to offer something to meet the test of adequacy, the end will fall short of the beginning, yielding at best eccentricity and at worst pathology, the result of impulsively floundering for we know not what. This is, in short, to act-out.

Now to drop from process to concerns of content: One may follow Freud's, Piaget's, Loevinger's or Erikson's developmental schemas---it doesn't matter whose, they all have something to say. I'm sure none would deny that we readily picture the developing person ever standing somewhere with reference to a bridge. Campbell and Vogler, following what amounts to a closely related metaphor, see the hero at either side of a threshold. If we refuse the call to move forward, we are guilty of failing to realize our potential, but if we heed the call and cross over, the anxiety which the unknown always brings confronts us, for we encounter unpredictable Tests, Allies and Enemies. This is a characteristic feature of role transitions.

May we imagine their losing the promise that single encounter offered Francesca and Robert Kincaid constituted their Supreme Ordeal? Not all ordeals involve dragon-slaying.

What psychodrama directors do is to create conditions of security whereby, the protagonist, relieved of the need to defend, is more inclined to risk in the Special World on-stage, where the consequences of protagonist mistakes are less than earthshaking. There we reframe mistakes, such that what the protagonist has ventured with an on-stage choice need not be followed through in life. Our doing it on stage invites discovery, and this is to do something well worthwhile. Nothing has been lost, inertia has been overcome, and life's all but irrevocable decisions have been informed by realistic on-stage monitoring by the director and the supportive audience.

Protagonist Transitions

To move to a third level: that which the drama represents. The examples which most quickly suggest themselves are the institutionally defined: matriculation, graduation, being hired, being fired, moving up, moving down, engagement, marriage, child-birth, baptism, confirmation, transfer, confinement, retirement...et cetera. Not only for individuals, but for all associated others through reciprocal role interaction. But not all role transitions are so clearly institutionalized. Within the psychodrama itself, the protagonist makes an association to what she's just done, which offers a possible connection elsewhere, and the director cuts scene to *when the protagonist was nine*.

When is this? Where is this? Who else was there? Answers to these basic orientation questions lets us cross from the last scene to the next. Now, if we were to back up to take a panoramic view of the psychodrama as a whole, we'd note how warm-up led from the Ordinary World into the Special World of on-stage action. That done, protagonists return to a transformed Ordinary World of sharing and discussion, such that, if all has gone well, we emerge from the theater into life with a 'finished story!' or at the very least, ready for the next chapter next session.

The role transitions easiest to follow are simple temporal progressions from past to future, as Campbell gives us in the Hero's Journey. But in complex novels, movies and plays we do more -- and much more than that in the psychodrama. If we are to bring in whole contexts, we cannot aspire to tell it all, but selectively bring out what

matters, and there's the artist's skill. In the psychodrama we do this for the actors, not the audience, but in serving the actors the audiences find themselves more fulfilled than ever.

Institutional Transitions

According to Julius Gould and W.L. Kolb's *Dictionary of the Social Sciences* role may be defined (on page 609) as:

a named social position characterized by a set of (a) personal qualities and (b) activities, the set being normatively evaluated to some degree by both those in the situation and others.

This does not describe Moreno's usage, nor mine. The editors cite an alternate possibility I like better:

an element in role-playing or social interaction....a patterned sequence of learnt actions performed by a person in an interaction situation.

But even this does not quite do justice to the dynamic nature of roles, for we must acknowledge the essential developmental aspect, as we see it, where we move from role taking through role-playing to role creating. See Adam Blatner's journal article (JGPPS, 44, No.1) *Role Dynamics: A Comprehensive Theory of Psychology*

But unless one seeks out sociology texts written from a symbolic interactionist point-of-view, the student is given the feeling that a role is a cut-and-dried affair society offers individuals who either take it or leave it. Is socialization merely a passive process which one must swallow whole? What educator would dare say so?

Nevertheless, presentations of role transitions one finds in standard texts commonly imply just that. Let us explore the same territory together and see where this leads. Evelyn Duvall's *Family Development* (page 121) summarizes a Family Life Cycle:

1. BEGINNING FAMILIES: married couple with children
2. CHILDBEARING FAMILIES: oldest child < 30 months
3. FAMILIES WITH PRESCHOOL CHILDREN: oldest child 30 months to 6 years
4. FAMILIES WITH SCHOOL AGE CHILDREN: oldest child 6 years to 13 years
5. FAMILIES WITH TEENAGERS: oldest child 13 years to 20 years
6. FAMILIES AS LAUNCHING CENTERS: first child gone to last child leaving home

7. MIDDLE-AGED PARENTS: empty nest to retirement
 8. AGING FAMILIES: retirement to death of first spouse

I have to admit that's not a bad chart. It has more built in flexibility than those concerned mainly with numbers. It's clarity should appeal to observers, but it does not address how participants see themselves. I'll elaborate to bring out the shoals of role transitions.

Premarital Couples

Perhaps newly-weds are outside Duvall's definition of a family, but if we are to put the family life cycle with its role transitions into proper perspective, we must look to the warm-up which has long been underway. The couple's role-taking involves *bonding*. This includes the *Love* story's lover and loved roles, which presuppose the well-developed ability to handle role reversals.

I doubt whether we've backed up far enough. We should give space to the role transitions of courtship, which may exemplify the *Pursue* story 16, or as particular circumstances occasionally dictate, where the *Liberate* story 1 of one protagonist coincides with the *Rescue* story 19 of another. If the courtship doesn't work out, we will enact the *Threatened 2* or *Abandon 10* scenarios. That's not all. The wedding itself calls for the *Celebrate* story 23, as do all institutional rites which follow. If our ideal couple have enjoyed a relative independence of their families of origin, we may regard bride and groom as having exited an *Associate* story 22 in common on their way to making the transition to the *Love* story 24. Transition normally implies going from one role to another, and even where it doesn't, it significantly alters the character of roles continued.

If you've done as I often do, start reading a book in the middle, like coming into a movie after it's started, you must have been hard pressed, presupposing as it does the 24 story system detailed above. The same may be said of the Campbell Hero's Journey and Vogler's *Writer's Journey*. My purpose in the foregoing was to show how the analysis into stories and the search for generic psychodrama may overlap with conceptualization in terms of role transitions.

Childbirth

Protagonists experiencing preparation for childbirth for the first time may regard it as the Supreme Ordeal. Surely you've experienced psychodramas where the protagonist discovers she's pregnant, whether

she wanted to be or not, whether this is too soon or too late, or with the one who wants to be father or doesn't.

The body gets into the act. It may be her first trip ever to a hospital, or there may be dire risk involved, or someone may suggest an abortion. How hard it is when the suggestion comes from the father. What does this tell her about him, or how he feels about their relationship? As often as not, the pregnant woman makes the choice, without even telling him what she intends. It's her body, isn't it? What happens to them when he finds out?

I've had prospective fathers as protagonist too, with or without the presence and approval of mothers-to-be. Consider his frustration, when faced with the abortion as a *fait accompli*. If this doesn't destroy their relationship, what a loss for them when they do marry! In the more up-front situation when the woman tells him in advance of her intention to terminate the pregnancy, he must decide whether to support her in this, or insist on his own way, or face the issue in a psychodrama. We've done that too.

Enter the Newborn

Even without such complications, when the baby comes as expected, what a transition this is for its parents. It helps to have grown up in a family with several younger children, but consider how new this is for parents who were themselves youngest or only children. They have to deal with loss, with anger, with envy, with new identities, and with fatigue. Where's the money coming from to handle all the cost? Should be look for a new set of friends---unless they all got married too, which isn't likely. So it's just a matter of time before old singles drop out of the picture, and that's a loss. Someone ends up feeling *abandoned*, Story 10.

Oedipus Revisited

Some fathers hold back a bit when it comes to handling infants, but who can ignore toddlers, especially as they approach the third year. The child has become a major player in the family drama, or as psychoanalysts put it, the family romance. This is the classical oedipus complex, presenting itself in two major forms:

- 1) positive: the child competes with the parent of the same sex for the parent of the opposite sex, and
- 2) negative: the child competes with the parent of the opposite sex for the parent of the same sex. In boys the positive comes first