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THE THEATRE OF PSYCHODRAMA

This paper is based on a two day workshop entitled DIRECTING FOR THE THEATRE, led by Baz Kershaw, Senior Lecturer in Theatre Arts, Rolle College, Exmouth, Devon, to whom I am greatly indebted, and on my experiences as a psychodramatist.

Psychodrama is based on the Greek Theatre and so it is perhaps useful to compare theatre and psychodrama. The components required for each are:

Psychodrama	Theatre
Stage	Stage
Protagonist	Playwright
Director	Director
Auxiliaries	Actors
Audience	Audience

The protagonist is the person through whose eyes we see all the action. He is the first (proto) to communicate (agone). The agone was also a formal debate on a crucial issue of the play which was inserted in the centre of the Greek tragedies. The auxiliaries are group members who take on the roles of people who are important in the action, i.e. the protagonist's mother, brother, child, etc. Moreno saw that we all have a script in life and roles to play. The script is written for us by our early experiences and our relationships with other people. He thought it was possible to rewrite a script by a series of spontaneous scenes, and conceived the ideal of theatre based on reality, drawing on the experience of the actors to discover why we behave as we do and how it can be changed.

Psychodrama has three phases. The warm-up from which the protagonist emerges; the action which may be several scenes taken from any period of the protagonist's life, past, present or future, or from fantasy; then comes the sharing in which the rest of the group share similar experiences with the protagonist and identify with him or her. Theatre has a period of rehearsal where the company study the play and learn their parts. This is followed by the actual production before an audience. Afterwards there is a relaxing of tension and, frequently, some kind of party in which the actors share with one another their feelings and experiences about the production.

The Stage

In classical psychodrama, the stage is one of three concentric circles of different levels as the traditional Greek stage was. Moreno's intention was that the action starts on the periphery and, as it moves nearer the truth, the entire company on stage move to a different level until the core of the matter is reached. There are few institutions which can afford to have a purpose built theatre with a space used only for psychodrama sessions. In reality we use an available room and clear the floor space within it to form a stage area.

Traditionally, the stage in theatre is a raised platform on which the action takes place. One of the earliest European stages was the medieval cart on which the Mystery Cycles were performed. The height of the cart allowed them to be seen by all the audience. This was borne in mind when theatres were built. The Greeks had built the auditorium to look down on the stage but the early European theatres had raised stages. Nowadays there is a return to the origins of theatre and a feeling that an act of theatre can take place anywhere and that place becomes a stage for the duration of the play or action. So a stage which can be clearly seen by the audience is necessary for both psychodrama and theatre.

Lighting is important to both processes. It is a fortunate psychodramatist who has theatre lighting at his disposal, but the best use can be made of existing lighting. Psychodrama may be staged with the protagonist's back to the light, facing the light, or a corner of the room. Curtains may be drawn or part drawn; the full room lighting may be on or only part of the lights switched on. The audience in either case must be able to see and hear clearly and the lighting highlights events and emotions and creates atmosphere for both audience and participants.

Playwright/Protagonist

A play which is written is literature. It is only when it is produced and becomes alive that it is an act of theatre. It may contain comedy, tragedy, farce; it will certainly evoke emotions and it often presents issues to the audience. The director will decide which of these issues to highlight

There are many parallels between the playwright and the protagonist. The spontaneous scenes of the protagonist only begin to exist as they are developed in the action. (But they can be the means of rewriting the script for the protagonist's future life). The protagonist expresses the emotions and effects of the issues in his action just as the playwright does in the theatre.

The Director

The success of the theatre director is dependent on the relationship with the other members of the company. Creativity can be crushed by autocratic

behaviour. The total success of the play is based on all concerned being allowed to develop their creativity to its fullest extent. Drama is a form of communication and the director is continually looking for the most effective ways in which to communicate with the audience. The director is part of the play, yet apart from it, involved yet objective. It is the director who must see that the actors use their space to the best advantage, that they can be seen and heard by the audience, that the stage management is reliable and props, etc. available. The pace of the play must be interesting and varied, and the whole must come together at a given time for the production.

A psychodrama director too starts by forming a cohesive group. His preliminary warm ups help to bind the group together, forming a working relationship and a security from which the protagonist can express a desire to work.

Protagonists' needs must come first, and psychodrama directors must work with them towards a satisfactory conclusion in the same way that theatre directors work with their companies. The psychodrama director, too, is involved yet objective moving in and out of the action - part of it, but not overwhelmed by it - seeing the whole yet aware of the details. It is the director's responsibility to see that the space is well used and that appropriate props are available.

Actors/Auxiliaries

Actors in the theatre have to perform many different characters and play many roles. This fluidity leads to empathy and communication with each other and with the audience at differing levels.

In psychodrama, group members (auxiliaries) take on the roles as the protagonist "writes his play". The inexperienced auxiliary comes on stage prepared to "play a part" and finds that instead they are expected to "be". They have to experience the role, not pretend, and in so doing have to call on their own resources. They find that they are looking at themselves through the personality of the role they are playing. In the same way that theatre actors monitor their performances, the auxiliaries learn about themselves.

In casting a play, the director has said something about the actors themselves, having made public a personal perception of an actor's ability and personality. Similarly, in casting his auxiliaries, the protagonist or director makes a statement about the auxiliary. It may be that the auxiliary is chosen because of a physical resemblance to the role, or maybe because of similar characteristics or problems. In psychodrama, the auxiliary is given an opportunity to react to the unexpressed statement and time is allowed for this in the sharing at the end of the psychodrama.

In the theatre it is the vital interaction between artist and audience which makes each performance a unique event. There is a two-way interaction as the actor communicates ideas, feelings, experiences, issues, stories, etc. and those listening internalise, empathise and react. There is also the collective experience of the audience in a three-cornered feedback from

performer to audience, audience to audience, and audience to performer (Esslin, 1976). Grotowski (1969) describes theatre as an encounter between creative people and says that the self-revelation of the actor gives the spectator a revelation of himself. He suggests that you can do away with all the trappings of theatre, even a stage area, but you cannot dispense with the audience. It is the encounter that makes it theatre.

The audience in psychodrama is a participating one. The "actors" are all drawn from the audience, and there can be times when the entire group become involved in the action. An example of this may be a scene in a playground when all the audience become the protagonist's peer group, or more fancifully, the entire group could become a garden - each member being a flower, bird, wall, etc. In this sense, the audience and the performers are one. An empathy builds up between spectator and protagonist and the spectator lives his own drama through the psychodrama.

Thus, with quite different histories and objectives, psychodrama and theatre go their separate but parallel ways, and each can perhaps learn something from the other.

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What is more of an acting out performance than an act of suicide? What is more dramatic than a suicidal action that is precipitated as a result of an interpersonal conflict or a family argument? And what role playing can be more realistic and more natural?

Edgar C. Trautman M.D. Psychodrama p.315