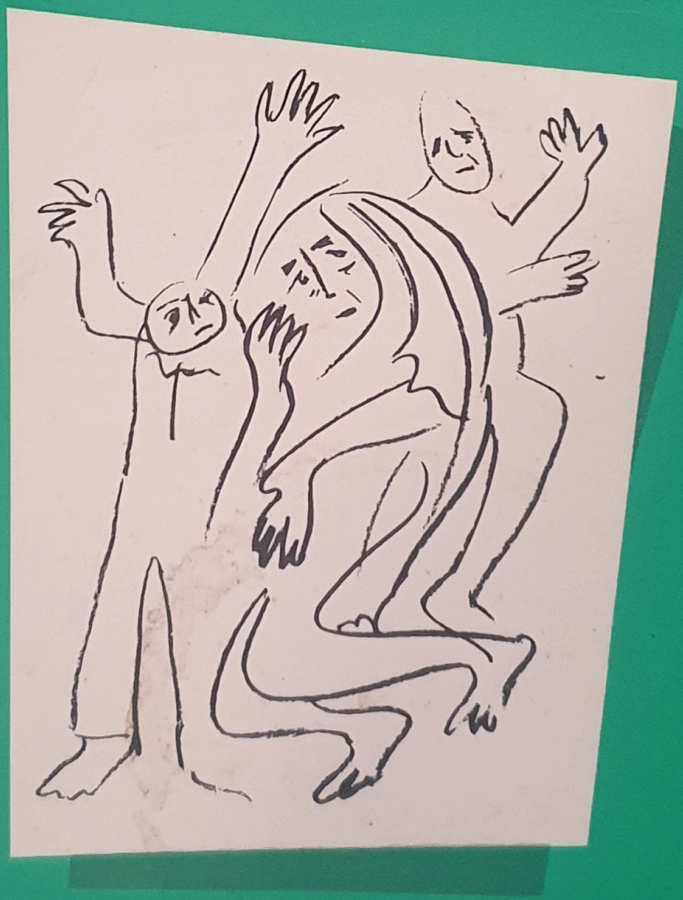
THE PASSIONATE TECHNIQUE

STRATEGIC PSYCHODRAMA WITH INDIVIDUALS, FAMILIES, AND GROUPS



ANTONY WILLIAMS

The Passionate Technique - Antony Williams (1986)

Chapter two

A passion for action

When you set out for Ithaka

ask that your way be long,

full of adventure, full of instruction.

C.P. Cavafy

The essence of action methods is action. ‘Action methods' are ways of understanding and acting, derived from psychodrama, that do not involve a full psychodrama as such. Role reversal is an action method, for example, and so is the 'empty chair technique' and various forms of sociometry. Action methods send a verbal narrative into space and time. They produce dialogue. They seize on ‘messages from the unconscious’ by making use of small bodily movements and maximizing them. Thus a twitch of the mouth, a sigh, a clenched fist, or a tapping of the toe is repeated, repeated, and enlarged. The tapping of a foot may become a stamping, and the stamping a jumping or kicking.

Naturally enough, this sort of behaviour changes what might have started out as a rather staid and stuck dialogue (let us say between a man and his boss) into something quite different. While jumping up and down, protagonists are likely to have quite new thoughts and say quite new things to the other person than they had before, or even than they would ‘in reality’. Verisimilitude is not the point: the psychological reality of the interaction is enlarged, even if the content cannot quite be repeated outside the therapy room.

The methods have the ability to get quickly to the emotional and interactional 'heart of the matter’. Let us say that a man says he is having 'trouble' with his son. He is asked by the director for two words that might describe him. ‘Weak and bland’ is the instant reply. He is then asked for a word or symbol to describe his relationship with his son. ‘It's like trying to catch a fly with chopsticks’, he says. The director then asks the person to choose someone to be the fly, and a chase around the room ensues, with the man snapping at the fly as if he were a pair of chopsticks. He role reverses as the fly and feels what it is like to be such an adroit escapist. The action may stop at this first scene, and be self-contained (a vignette), or it may provide a take-off pad from which the protagonist is already compelled to view events in a new way. The enactment, while imaginative and enjoyable, also presses a point: it is difficult to keep quite the same opinions or worldview after one has become a pair of chopsticks, or has buzzed around the room like a fly. A new orientation is called for, a start on the problem and its habitual solution.

Concretization

Concretization is the term used most frequently for the acting-out of a metaphor unwittingly produced by the protagonist or deliberately introduced by the director. A metaphor, says Gordon (1978), is a novel representation of something old. Metaphors tend to compact information, expand perception, evoke emotion, and permit expression of experiences that could not otherwise be expressed (Billow, 1977). Concretization is a major part of the method, giving it not only warmth and vitality, but also much of its clinical and diagnostic strength.

While full psychodramas usually imply interactions with the ‘other’, action methods also lend themselves to encounter with the self. By means of concretization and dramatization, the self may be represented dramatically either by another person, or by a chair or other object. The implication of using the dramatic

method with the self is that the self is a system. The object is thrown ‘outside’ the speaking self in order that the relationship aspect of self with self may be manifested and then developed.

As soon as the self, or part of the self, becomes 'outside in an object or other person, that is, when it is concretized, the quality of relationship with the self must change as the person is required to enter a dramatic dialogue. A new perspective is necessitated by the format of the drama itself. The format for such an encounter is: ‘Choose an object that represents you. Interact with that object in some way. Extend this interaction so that it may be witnessed by others.’ The following example is derived from the above general formula wherein people externalize a 'part of the self and then address it:

Everyone, take off one of your shoes the shoe from the foot that you'll lead with next year. Pick it up and hold it in your hand. It's January the first, next year. Sight along the shoe to where you want to go see that place and that state. Now, do to the shoe whatever needs to be done to help it get there it may need little gentle pushes, it may need shaking, it may simply need pointing, or it may need some mess cleaned off so it's not so heavy. I don't know. Only you can know that.

The shoe takes on the reality of the self about to embark on a new course of action. Participants are asked to do to the shoe 'whatever needs to be done' - by implication, the way they treat the shoe (gentle pushes, shaking, etc.) is the way they need to treat themselves in order to get what they want in the coming year, if instructions on how to treat oneself were given directly to the person, however, it is likely that they would be ignored or have little impact. They would not have the same imaginative resonance or trancelike quality that is lent by the process of dialogue and enactment. In later chapters, when the concept of 'double description’ has been introduced, the therapeutic effectiveness of the dialogue with the self in the form of a shoe may become more intelligible. Double description is not a term commonly found in the psychodrama canon, however, and at this stage we are preferring to remain within the traditional psychodramatic framework.

Let us take another example, this time not at the start of a drama, as in the case of Portia's 'rails' or the man who chased the fly with 'chopsticks', but from during a drama itself. The protagonist is walking around her family (represented by five auxiliaries), who are grouped in a circle. It is the second scene of this particular drama, and the protagonist is 'stuck'; she does not know what to do or say. The director asks:

D: What are relationships in this family like?

P: They stink.

D: What would the spirit of the relationship be?

P: Like a sewer.

D: Set up a sewer, and let's see who is in it.

Although we will not report the remainder of this drama, suffice it to say that the sudden shift brought about by concretizing the metaphor sets the protagonist in a new direction as she deals with her family as a sewer and its members as turds, tampons, spent tea leaves, used bits of paper, and so on. In concretizing a metaphor, the director is not immediately striving for insight', but rather for a new vision, a form of thinking and being radically different from the habitual, which presumably has landed the protagonist in trouble in the first place. Insight, if it comes at all, follows the action. The issue is first presented in dramatic terms, and later, if at all, analysed in terms of role states in a particular time and place. Seeing her family as a 'sewer’ is not journey's end, but the protagonist has certainly left the sealed main road and is now jolting along an unfamiliar bush track, not knowing what will come next, even though she co-

creates what comes next. The sewer metaphor has been a ‘way of speaking in which one thing is expressed in terms of another, whereby this bringing together throws new light on the character of what is being described' (Kopp, 1971, p. 17).

The immediacy and urgency of action methods spring in large part from their being both physical and visual. Interactions find not only a verbal but also a bodily expression, which may be gross, such as shouting, dancing, vomiting, or hugging, or may be relatively imperceptible, such as the twitching of a muscle, or the clenching of a fist, or a trembling in the voice. Using involuntary movements of the body helps protagonists to get in touch with their primary feelings and to intensify them when appropriate. The physical expression of emotion, especially when manifested inter-personally

and in a scene, gives clues to the structure of relationships and the restricted or adequate roles that are being portrayed.

Directors can heighten the emotional tone of an interaction by asking the protagonist to 'put your body in the shape of the feeling' or to 'sculpt with your body you in the interaction right now’. When people are talking about an event it is usually possible for them to control both the interaction and the emotional impact that the event has made. But when they become warmed-up actors in a scene, the as-ifness of the experience becomes more pronounced, and they begin to behave, think, and feel as they would in actual life situations. The physical and verbal cues are maximized taken to the limit- and then fed into interaction with another person.

Wiping the sink

Now that Portia's ‘Off the rails' drama may have receded from memory somewhat, it may be helpful to present another outline of a 'typical' psychodrama. This one involves two scenes one in the present, and one in the past that is linked to the first scene. Many further psychodramas will be described in detail throughout the book, with their systemic implications drawn out, or a particular teaching point being made. 'Wiping the sink' is still a 'taster to impart the general idea of a drama, and to become familiar with its sometimes strange language. The narrative of the drama of 'Wiping the sink' will be interspersed with explanation of terminology and some of the basic procedures and 'rules' will be indicated.

A group, let us say a personal-growth psychodrama group, has met about six times. Its members are by now familiar with the psychodrama format. After half an hour or so of discussion, a theme or central concern emerges: it is that of overreacting in a guilty fashion to apparently small criticisms. Phyllis is chosen by the group as protagonist. (All protagonists names in this book will begin with P and all directors' names will begin with D' so that the reader knows who is who in the sometimes complex narrative of a drama.) Phyllis had joined the conversation with an anecdote about herself in the workplace. Although a tireless worker, she has been accused by a colleague of being 'half-hearted' in her consultancy to a self help grief group. Let us use Phyllis's drama to reiterate and follow through some of the terms and typical procedures of a psychodrama.

Dot encourages Phyllis to make a contract with her about the purpose of the drama. Phyllis says that she wants to know why she feels so ‘hopeless'. She begins to set the scene in the staff room of the hospital where she works. She uses chairs to establish the benches, the sink, the refrigerator, and the central table and chairs. When she and the group are ‘fully there', or warmed up to the scene, she is asked to choose someone from the group (an auxiliary) to represent Larry, the man who was angry with her.

‘Larry’ knows what to say and do by means of *role reversal*. In their argument, Phyllis continually changes between being herself and Larry, and after she has spoken Larry's part, the auxiliary steps in and

says more or less the same words, until the role is established and ad-libbing can take over. Then auxiliaries can experience the protagonist in the 'now' and authentically respond to that experience from the role. If the auxiliary gets too far off the track in the ad-libbing, or if an important change in direction Occurs, role reversal is again used until the new ad-libbing is reliable. The process will be illustrated many times in this book, and will become completely familiar to the reader, if it is not already.

The auxiliary takes up not only the words but also the physical posture of the other. If there is a fight, or an embrace, or a beating, they find the amount of force that is required by role reversal, and then give this back to the protagonist with the same amount of strength to create a full experience for them. If protagonists push softly, so do the auxiliaries in role reversal; if they punch hard, so do the auxiliaries, leaving it up to the director to see that no-one is hurt.

Auxiliaries physically change places with the protagonist and repeat the words that the protagonist has spoken so that protagonists can hear their own words while in the role of the other. The protagonist is not the only person to benefit from a drama; by taking up roles of the other, auxiliaries broaden their life experience, gain a deep connection with others, and have the freedom to express themselves in ways they may normally avoid. They might enact the roles, over several sessions, of clinging grandmothèr, drunken husband, *ingénue*, lonely dead brother, or *femme fatale*. When it is not fun, it is at least broadening.

Goldman and Morrison (1984, p. 18) suggest five specific purposes for role reversal:

(1) At the simplest level, role reversal is necessary to obtain information known only to the protagonist.
(2) Role reversal is also used when it is necessary for the protagonist to understand and feel the sensibility of the other.
(3) It is used to help the protagonist see self through the eyes of the other, thus leading to awareness of the effects of one's own behaviour and being.
(4) It can be used to accelerate protagonist's spontaneity and free-up their thinking: a wife may see her husband as putting too many limits on the relationship. In role reversal as him, she feels what it is like to put on those limits, and may actually wish to put more on, or less as the case may be.
(5) Finally, it can be used when the protagonist is the only one in a position to be able to answer a question about the self. For example, in scenes of reconciliation or interactions with reversed 'wisdom figures' such as a deceased relative, Jesus Christ, a part of the self, or others (see The relative influence of Peggy's monster', p. 129; 'Dale's dilemma', p. 40 The women who couldn't get in p. 104, etc) protagonists ask advice of 'the other' or seek to be reconciled with the other. It is imperative that the director role-reverse the protagonist into the other for the answer, rather than allowing the auxiliary to ad-lib the reply. Thus the person becomes, of course, their own wisdom figure, even while speaking or acting as Jesus Christ or a loving and grown-up self.

Dot is puzzled as Phyllis then re-enacts the scene with Larry. While the scene is 'authentic' enough, there is a question as to why Phyllis should be so upset by such a small event. There are few clues in the scene that suggest a contact with Phyllis's own core issues or themes. The argument with Larry might lend itself later to role training or 'assertiveness training', but at the moment there appears to be something very incomplete about it.

Phyllis tells Dot that the feeling is just like the one she had as a young girl in her family. A new scene is created, in which Phylis is 7 years old. She has just been doing the washing-up, and is standing by the

sink, wiping it over and over. Dot conducts the interview-in-role, addressing Phylns as a 7-year-old, and warming her up to the role of a child in that particular household. She asks questions about her family, and finds that Phylis's elder sister has just been diagnosed as an incurable epileptic. She is having fits of increasing frequency and severity after a head injury two years previously.

Auxiliaries are chosen to represent the parents and the sister, who are all in the sitting room next to the kitchen. Again by the use of role reversal an interaction is developed between Phyllis and her parents, first centering on her father and then on her mother. As this dialogue never actually happened, it is an example of what psychodrama calls 'surplus reality'. Phyllis is bewildered, and continually feels at fault for her sister's illness. The parents react in a most emotionally constricted way. They are unable to explain anything to her, and do not notice the guilt and rage that she is experiencing.

Phyllis becomes more and more frustrated in her attempts to gain recognition and love. She flies at her mother, bringing her to the floor. When (in role reversal) her mother protests at this unusual behaviour, she muzzles her, and tells her off for ignoring her and for showing so little understanding of what was happening to her. Her mother weeps, and says that she too feels guilty and bewildered - she just does not seem to have the resources to cope with such a sick child, she explains. Phyllis wavers; she is very persuaded by her own empathy with her mother's plight. But this is partly the quality that led her into difficulties in the first place. She cannot afford to take on the whole world at this stage, no matter how realistic are her mother's difficulties. With the encouragement of the group, she operates once more from' total, subjective one-sidedness, and acts from a primitive subjectivity. It is most liberating. She muzzles her mother once more, casts withering look at her father, and tells her mother that she is only little and that she herself needs to be helped, rather than having to help all the time. (Page 21) Another auxiliary is chosen to portray Phyllis at the sink, endlessly wiping it. The auxiliary is acting as a mirror, portraying the actions and unconscious of Phyllis at a distance so that she can see herself. Phyllis 'stands out' of the drama beside the director, observing herself. She moves back into the scene and once again kneels on the floor beside her mother. She addresses the auxiliary who is portraying herself in the role of guilty servant' With her hand still over her mother's mouth, she says: 'Stop! You've done enough.' In role reversal, as the guilty servant, she hears these words coming to her. She looks stunned, then relieved. The two Phyllises embrace. Finally, Dot introduces Larry to the scene. Phyllis shouts at him: 'It is enough. I've done enough. She is elated by her discovery. The drama ends, and the group share from their experience the parts of their lives that have been prominent for them in Phyllis's drama.

A fortnight later, in the processing of the drama, the major auxiliaries Sister, mother, father, and guilty servant speak of their experiences of being in those roles. Phyllis reports on her activities and feelings in the intervening time - she notes that she has been perfectly calm in her meetings With Larry, and that her attitudes towards her patients have been gentleer. She has also been able to study - a quite unexpected outcome. It would appear that the new role - calm self-appreciator, perhaps, which was conveyed by the words 'I've done enough', has persisted and filtered through into many areas of her life.

The goal of psychodrama is spontaneity a new and adequate way of action where feelings, belief, and behaviour are not conflicted. In the spontaneity state, everything seems to come together in the sweet joys of uncomplicated action. The formerly bowed and stuck protagonist may laugh, shout, cry, rage, or fall on another person in utter ecstasy or do all of those one after another, Alternatively, spontaneity might arrive in the form of a quiet 'uh-huh a 'got it experience, as when Phyllis said, I've done enough. She was not at that stage spinning around the room in an elevated state, but the statement nevertheless went deep with her. As Zerka Moreno remarks, psychodrama 'is just as much a method of restraint as it is a method of expression' (Z. Moreno, 1969).

The enactment of a scene, and then the move into Surplus reality is designed to throw protagonists into a different state where alternatives are available to them other than their preferred modes of transaction. A spontaneous person is more sensorily aware of the data of experience from the external world. These data give clues to the flow of experience and what should be done about it - what reactions are creative and appropriate. In a state of spontaneity, people experience their own needs and environmental possibilities fully and clearly from moment to moment, whilst working on a creative integration of the two.

(page 22)

Spontaneity involves a different world view one that no longer needs the cognitive affective, and behavioural state that has been the basis of experience for that person previously. The protagonist's symbolic universe becomes more flexible or adaptive as a result of taking on new roles, and becoming those roles. Phyllis's old roles, for example, seemed to be dominated by those of guilty servant and bewildered child. By entering for a while the role of, say, demanding 7-year-old, she was able to progress those of calm self-appreciator and freed spirit.

Most psychodramas, and certainly most systemic psychodramas, assume that a person's inner self is inextricably entwined with the selves of others. Directors search as soon as possible for the transactional component of a role. In the early stages of a drama, protagonists tend to act out roles from their so-called 'neurotic system', they may indeed have had little choice about these roles when they were very young - remember Portia aged 3 in the bathroom, or Phyllis aged 7 by the sink - because of the physical and emotional power of the adult world, or because they were then too little to have any other way of thinking and reacting to events. Their continuance of these roles into adult life, however, presents even more of a problem, but one that may be amenable to new sorts of experience. The goal of a drama is to develop a more adaptive role system in the protagonist and to bring that system into contact with their old role system. A strategic psychodrama aims to promote new definitions in the system that will lead to rapid and durable changes in functioning, as we shall see.

At the end of a drama, the person is usually warmed up to confident, humorous, compassionate, or determined roles in themselves. Thus the two Phyllises hug each other, or Portia stands between the rails once more. There is an internal reconciliation and an end to conflict a developing self-love. Furthermore, a new form of relationship with other people is evident with Phyllis's mother, for example and with Larry and the patients.

Sometimes dramas begin with a metaphor that is concretized and then acted out (as in 'Off the rails', p. 1), and sometimes they begin with a problem, as with Wiping the sink'. The metaphor might lead into a problem, or the problem into a metaphor. These dramas may develop a Surreal quality as they progress. Their imagery can be startling and hyperbolic, or as friendly and cosy as a picnic in a forest. In the two dramas outlined so far, the problem is to help protagonists with their warm-up, to help them visualize, and to free-up the emotional and psychological 'truth as it is experienced. But with other protagonists the problem is different; the visualization involved and the degree of warm-up is overwhelming, making the task to keep the protagonists 'grounded so that they can complete and integrate their work. 'The snakes behind the wall' is one of the latter types of drama.

The snakes behind the wall

Pansy, the protagonist of this drama, is a thin, alert woman in her thirties, the mother of two children. The drama takes place in the context of a personal-growth group that is being run on a sessional basis in a large country town. The membership consists of several first-timers, country housewives, welfare workers, social workers, and teachers, Pansy had attended the group once before, so the session to be described is her second-ever psychodrama experience. Even though new to the medium, she had shown

herself an excellent auxiliary and double, but she had never been a protagonist, nor had she revealed much of herself to the group. When Di, the director, had asked what was 'on top' for her on this particular morning, she replied that she did not really know why she came to the group, but she thought it might have something to do with the fear 'What fear?' the director asked. Pansy's eyes took a faraway look: 'The snakes', she said, 'I used to have nightmares about them when I was a little girl.'

The change in her appearance was remarkable, and caused some fear even in Di and certainly in the rest of the group; the members looked at each other and shifted uncomfortably. 'What snakes?' asked Di. 'The snakes behind the wall over there', replied Pansy, her eyes wide and staring. 'Let's have a look at those old snakes,' said Di getting to her feet. 'Do you feel solid with me?' She holds Pansy's gaze, and looks at her very seriously. Pansy pauses, focuses on Di's face, and says that she does.

Di is already setting limits around the drama and the protagonist. Although she reported later that she was 'quite frightened' by Pansy's apparently altered state and strong powers of hallucination, she believed that she would be able to help Pansy move productively between a present time focus, at the same time allowing her to experience whatever it was that was so troubling. She uses language such as those old snakes to demonstrate that the snakes had no power over Di herself, and she takes unusual steps such as asking Pansy whether she feels 'solid' with her to help Pansy relate to her directly before the drama begins, and to 'ground' her.

She says to Pansy, 'Why don't we set up a wall in front of that wall?' In front of the real wall of the room is erected a psychodramatic wall made of chairs. Although rather slight in build, Pansy chooses the heaviest armchairs, and throws them into place with considerable ease. She is, to say the least, warmed up. Di then encourages Pansy to choose five or six people from the group to be snakes, Pansy does this with some difficulty, as even the word 'snakes, or the thought of them, causes her intense anxiety. She stands in front of the wall staring at the snakes, who are moving around in energetic arabesques, which seem to imply patterns of smoothly evil force.

The auxiliaries are relishing their splendidly evil role; it is fun to be so bad, once in a while. That is, every so often it can be liberating to give full vent to one's own evil or 'shadow selves' given a suitably safe environment. Pansy is not having fun, however. When asked to role-reverse as one of the Snakes, she refuses, saying that it is 'impossible'.

Pansy is clearly very afraid as she experiences the nightmarish quality of that time in the past Di realizes that she will need to. continue to be a container for her, setting firm limits to the drama, and taking more control of the action than she would normally be inclined to do. She does this by making the directives for role reversal very crisp, and by having her voIce almost bark directions, so that Pansy, at least to some degree, is reminded of the present time and place, that there is, after all, an 'adult present who is in charge.

Pansy singles out one of the snakes as having 'angry eyes'. She at last has allayed her fears sufficiently to allow herself to role-reverse with it; the action in itself has already brought some relief and some sense of mastery. In role as the snake, she presents a vicious countenance to the world beyond the wall; she sways and glares beyond her boundaries.

Sn: Pooey humans! Pooey and full of mess!

Di: Is she (pointing to the auxiliary playing Pansy) included?

Sn: She certainly is. She's just like the rest of them.

Di: Say that to her

Sn: You're just like the rest of them. Making a mess and hurting each other. I hate you all. The only clean things are birds.

Back as herself, by role reversal, Pansy is shaken by the snake's hatred, and cries in a jagged and tormented fashion She says that she too would like to be like a bird, flying high above everything. Di considers that at this stage there would be a real risk that Pansy might like, all too well, 'flying high' above everything, and that it might be difficult to get her to make contact with the ground again. Rather than taking up the action cue (of having Pansy be a bird and 'flying high') she decides that there has been adequate acting of metaphor already.

Di conjectures that if the snake is angry at 'people for hurting each other and making messes, these people must be from Pansy's original social atom, and that the hurting probably took place when she was quite young. Ignoring the 'anal' references in the snake's diatribe, Di asks Pansy to set up a scene where people in her family were hurting each other. In doing this she challenges the notion of a purely 'internal context to the problem that might be implied by making a pooey mess when one is little, although concretizing this metaphor would also have been legitimate

There are many paths a director can take when presented with the hundreds of words and images that people produce in discourse. The context is never quite 'outside' or completely inside'. To be sure, the snakes are a 'part' of Pansy but they are likely to make most sense in a context between her and someone else Strategic psychodrama, as we shall see, regards the self as a subsystem, and the individual as part of a larger organism. Each person within the larger organism arranges the other's reality so no-one is entirely a cause, or entirely an effect.

Pansy's family is comprised of father, mother, Pansy, a sister nearly two years younger, and an infant. Father and mother are always fighting', and when they do fight, Pansy becomes afraid, and hides. In this particular dispute, father and mother are having one of their sulking fights, where they do not speak to each other. Pansy is hiding behind a door, with her toy koala, played by an auxiliary The director asks what she is doing.

Pa: I'm going to cut his ears off.

Di: Why's that?

Pa: He's pretty.

Di: How come you want to cut his ears off, then?

Pa: I want to make him like me.

Di: Like you. What are you like?

Pa: I'm ugly!

Di. What?

Pa: (Shouting and crying at the same time) I'm ugly. Ugly. Oooh!

Di: What do you cut his ears off with? Scissors.

Di: Better get yourself a nice big pair Pa: (Searches around the room until she finds two broomsticks which she joins together to make a grotesquely large pair of scissors. She begins to cut the ears off the koala.)

Di: Here comes your mother!

Pa: (Crying) Go away! I'm ugly, I'm skinny, and I'm stupid.

Mo: lf you were a good girl, you wouldn't get into trouble.

Pa: Go away.

Mo: Don't be bad.

Di: Reverse roles as the snake.

The snake hisses around, and comes out from behind the barrier. Pansy is so distressed that she goes into a state of role confusion between herself and the snake. The director allows this, thinking that probably the roles are not so different anyway. Pansy says that it is no good being a snake, they just hurt things just like I hurt my baby cocky

(page 26)

Di's hunch that the snake is linked with Pansy's anger at someone in her family is neither confirmed nor disconfirmed, at this stage, though it is evident that her early directorial intervention regarding the expression of anger has been premature. Pansy is not yet warmed up to anger to the extent that she can express it directly as herself, or indirectly as the snake. She is more preoccupied at the moment with guilt and fear, leading to a symbolic self-mutilation.

Di suggests that they now go to the scene where she hurts her baby cockatoo. This scene is constructed: it takes place on the rear verandah of a typical farmhouse, with tankstand, clothesline, working boots, etc. Apparently the cocky had 'not been eating, and Pansy, aged 3, is attempting to persuade it to have some food. She places a grub in its mouth, but the bird cannot swallow, and just keeps it there in its beak. She shoves the grub down the bird's throat, using a stick. In role reversal as the bird, she falls over and dies. Back as herself, she is wild with grief. Her tears go on for some time. Di prompts her to apologize to the bird for killing it, thus bringing in the notion of reparation, which is different from guilt and grief, but which, like grief, has a healing quality. In her younger days, Di found herself quite influenced by Kleinian psychotherapy.

Pansy apologizes to the cocky, at some length and with great feeling. When asked if she wishes to bury the bird, she says no, that she wants its spirit to fly free. Di asks where that spirit is now. Pansy replies that it is flying high above everything, riding on a cloud, partly supported by it. When a role reversal is suggested, she says that she is quite content just watching, and that she can experience all she needs from her present position. This is so obviously the truth that Di does not persist. The flying high above everything' that Pansy has mentioned at the beginning of the drama is now linked with this scene, which is itself linked with death and transcendence.

Pansy now returns to the koala and apologizes to it for mistreating it. She begins to laugh at how crazy it is to live in her family. Her mother reprimands her, and she deflates once again. Di suggests that it is now time for the revenge of the snakes'. By this time Pansy is fully ready to take on the role of 'angry snake'. With the other 'snakes' she launches an all-out attack on the mother, hissing and striking. 'I can't help it if I'm skinny. I can't help it if I'm ugly. It's not my fault! It's not my fault!'

She drops her role as the snake, and without suggestion from Di grows up to adult status. She shouts at her mother for daring to tell her how to raise her own daughters, and lists examples of the incompetent mothering that she herself has received. She carries on, stabbing her mother in the breast with her finger,

and stating her own beliefs in parenting and the nature of childhood. Suddenly, it is done. 'It's all over now', she says. 'I don't think I'm going to be afraid of those snakes again.' Di sees little need to point out what the snakes meant. Their meaning is now obvious.

The 'diagnosis' that Pansy had hitherto applied herself had assumed a problem that was 'internal to her. The psychodrama separates Pansy from the problem by externalizing it within a scene. That is, the very setting up of a scene and populating it carries the implicit assumption that this problem began at a particular time and in an interpersonal context. The problem is not intrinsic to the protagonist, but is interactional or relational. Bateson (1979) remarks that it makes no sense to talk about 'dependency' or 'aggressiveness' or 'pride', and so on. All such words have their roots in what happens between persons not in something or other inside the person: If you want to talk about, say, 'pride', you must talk about two persons or two groups and what happens between them (p. 133).

Pansy's problem has been externalized and placed between another person, her mother, and herself. Although the problem is still 'her' anger, it is found to have its origins at a particular time and in a particular context. Furthermore, she has inherited from her family a particular perspective a transmitted universe. This universe has the advantage of being a known territory, but it also imposes limitations that do not have to be there. It has prevented her from exploring different worlds, and of changing perspectives on the one she does inhabit. The drama offers her an extension, an alternative, a modification of her known boundaries.

The lady of Spain

Peta, the protagonist of this transgenerational epic, is an attractive, serious-looking woman in her early thirties who works as a psychologist in a position of high responsibility in the community. She won the group's interest by saying, in the group warm-up phase, that she had realized that she was somewhat secretive, and she recognized that her mother was a bit secretive too. I'd just like to explore this, she said.

The group elected Peta as protagonist in a formal manner by sociometric choice That is, after she and one or two others tell of the issues that concern them, they sit in front of the group and declare their readiness to be protagonists. The remaining group members then come out and stand behind the person whose theme seems to trigger something in themselves. The group is asked to choose 'selfishly' in these instances, not on the basis of any popularity poll, or because they feel sorry for the speaker, but according to a hunch that if this person were protagonist in a psychodrama, some of their own questions would be answered too. Such a basis for choice helps to ensure that the protagonist is truly representing the group's themes at that time (see the section on central concern p. 52).

Also standing for the protagonist role was Pino ('The clockmaker's son', see Chapter 9), who said that he was feeling 'very frustrated and without potency'. Pino's own drama is recounted later in the chapter on transference. In fact, Pino at this stage gave a more elaborate and more emotional discourse on his difficulty than did Peta. The formal sociometric choice nevertheless went to Peta, presumably by reason of some kind of group unconscious process. Pino's prospective drama about 'not being powerful was, in a sense, validated by the group's failing to choose him, and was to be suggested again in the course of Peta's drama itself, where Pino becomes the disappearing auxiliary who never gets to say his Iines. As so often occurs in a psychodrama group, the themes acted out in the psychodrama are also present in the group roles that members take.

In the preliminary interview for the drama, Peta was asked if any pictures came into her mind that might have to do with her theme. She replied that she had a vague image of a scene with her brother when she was about 10 years old, but that it didn't seem to have anything to do with secrets or secretiveness. The director encouraged her nonetheless to go ahead with that scene, assuring her that if nothing came of it,

another would occur readily enough that might be more relevant. Peta rather perfunctorily sets up the kitchen of a villa outside Madrid, where the family had a holiday house. The director asks her to look out the window. She begins to warm up to herself as a young girl as she gazes out over the kitchen bench, noting various features outside. She points to a neighbouring villa, which she describes:

P: They're both the same, really the only difference between theirs and ours is that they've looked after the garden, whereas ours has never been developed and is all dry and withered.

D: Just like this family?

P: Yes, that's very true.

Peta chooses Pino as an auxiliary to be her brother Nick who got all the attention. The scene consists of her raising a tin-opener above her head, just about to stab Nick. Her mother, Mary, is nearby in the kitchen, hovering ineffectually, a little appalled at this latest manifestation of family nastiness. Peta portrays Mary as a rather lost woman beneath whose maternalism seems to lie a desperate wistfulness, a pervasive disappointment with life.

Dennis now extends the interview with mother, having in mind Peta's original statement about the link between her secretiveness and her mother's. At this stage the director has no explicit hypothesis. So far he is presented with an air of disappointment and an opening scene of potential violence where a sister is trying to stab her brother. Someone else is getting the (page 29) attention that rightfully belongs to oneself; perhaps this will become a family theme, perhaps not. There are also some family secrets, the point of which will probably not be the content of the secrets, but the alliances that support them. The evocative garden next door, the original tableau of a stabbing, and the strange sadness of the mother suggests that this will be a drama saturated with forms and meanings that may only imperfectly be understood.

The director role-reverses Peta to Mother, and begins the interview-in-role of Mary. Mary is full of complaints about her family, and comments despondently on this latest manifestation of trouble between brother and sister as being typical of the family's troubles and the wearying nature of life in general. The director suggests to the mother that this probably was not really what she had hoped for when she got married. The mother readily agrees, looking somewhat relieved that someone appears to be appreciative of her as a hoping person. Dennis asks her to set up her dream of the marriage From this time on, throughout the drama, Peta stays in role as Mary, the mother, and the scene with the brother is not returned to until the very end of the drama (to Peta's chagrin Chapter 9).

The mother arranges her dream sculpture of herself and her husband. In the tableau, he gazes at her adoringly, and has his arm around her shoulders. She also has children, Six, or maybe even ten'. They are all little, and either play with each other engagingly, or look up at her in a cute fashion. It is almost a scene from a nineteenth-century genre painting. Her dream of family kitsch is totally lacking in vibrancy. Nevertheless, its elements are likely powerfully to affect her emotional satisfaction, or lack of it, and her vision of what reality ought to be. Her vision of reality, and her actual reality seem very much at odds.

Dennis next asks her to establish her version of the family relationships as they actually are, again by means of a sculpture The family is arranged thus: Frank (her husband) is sent to a corner of the room and faces the wall. He is busy and remote. The three children, including Peta, stand like statues, separated from each other and from their mother, who runs around the outside of the group distractedly. Occasionally she makes little darts in towards each of them, asking for their love and begging them not to leave her. In this sculpture, her own character seems to shrivel into pathos and self-recrimination.

The sculpture appears in some way unbalanced and incomplete, although there is plenty of action and dramatic interplay. Dennis asks if there could possibly be anyone else in the sculpture. Mary replies that she prays to God a lot. Dennis asks her to select someone from the group to be God. She does, and places him in another corner, facing her. From the formal qualities of the sculpture, it already seems that there might be a symbolic parallel between the position of her husband and that of God, or at least that God is part of this family.

(Page 30)

The mother begins to pray to 'God' in the corner. She goes very close to him, and rocks back and forth on her knees: 'Make me tolerant, make me good, give me comfort, don't let me be unhappy, she cries, over and over, still rocking.

From the structure of the sculpture, and from a kind of ambiguous sexuality between Mary and God, the director forms the hypothesis that Mary, disappointed by the failure of her dream, has substituted the fantasy husband, God, for the real one, Frank. As later events reveal, this hypothesis is partially incorrect; it turns out to be a fruitful rather than a strictly accurate surmise. But by being able to be ruled out it leads to the formation of new hypotheses and new pathways for distinction and action An invalid hypothesIs is only dangerous if the director sticks to it rigidly, despite its disconfirmation.

The director suggests that maybe Mary (mother) might like to get a little closer to God. She does. They embrace. They embrace some more. They fall to the floor, rolling over and over. Mary wraps her legs around God's. She has thrown away the little toy chisels that she used on the sentimental family sculpture, and is now carving her scene with fists and elbows and belly. The director suggests that Mary might wish to make love to God on his celestial couch. At this stage, the auxiliary playing God objects, saying, 'No, I won't be in that.' The director responds immediately to Mary:

D: That's not quite what you want either, is it?

M: No.

D: You want someone else,

M: I want my daddy.

D: Get your daddy and your mommy here.

An interview-in-role then takes place with Mary's father. The drama has now moved to the second generation, to Peta's mother's relationship with Peta's grandfather. It is as if Mary is the protagonist, rather than Peta. The drama seems to have arrived 'naturally at its present point, yet clearly it has reached this stage through a mixture of spontaneous sequences and steering from Peta and Dennis. The protagonist and director appear to share a 'co-unconscious'. This term was coined by Moreno principally to refer to couples who had been together for a long time; when they came to therapy, Moreno surmized that the therapist had to deal with the consciousness of A, the consciousness of B, the unconscious of A, the unconscious of B, and their co-unconscious - a somewhat independent 'third' unconscious of the relationship itself.

The notion of co-unconscious, however, need not necessarily be restricted to people who have been together for a long time. When directors co-imagine a scene, the process is more than an empathic one; it is a joining, perhaps, of the symbolizing actions of two minds. When protagonists speak about an aspect of their life, the director may form an image, and convey it to them. They may have no trouble acting within that image, and e not puzzled by it, and do not reject it. In turn, they themselves create more

images that the director further acts upon. Director and protagonist operate in a kind of chain reaction, with the director monitoring whether he or she has gone too far beyond the protagonist's 'network of presuppositions' that restrain them from seeing the world in any other way than the way they already see it. We shall have much to say on restraints and networks of presuppositions in subsequent chapters.

We had left the Lady of Spain' at the point where the director asked Mary (Peta's mother) to bring forth her own father and mother - that is, Peta's grandparents. At this stage, therefore, the drama moves into the family-of origin one generation up. Peta (as Mary) makes the selection of grandfather and grandmother. When interviewed in role as the grandfather (Mary's father), one of the first things that Grandpa says is that he never saw his wife naked until she was 72 years old. She had slipped in the bath, necessitating his entry to the bathroom to help her.

The theme of repression, including sexual repression, that had been first hinted at when Peta described the sterility of the garden, and that was evidenced in the family sculpture that Mary set up, and also in her behaviour with God, is repeated through generations. Of all things to mention first, Grandpa mentions the bath scene The drama at this stage could have taken several directions: marital therapy for Grandpa and Grandma, sealing off that spouse holon from the children and effecting repair work within that marriage, or 'structural therapy' towards the role of Grandpa as parent, thus keeping continuity with-Mary's.struggle with God. This latter course was the one adopted. The application of 'structural therapy' to psychodrama will be explained more fully in Chapter 6.

Mary begins an angry confrontation with her father, telling him that he never gave her anything she wanted *and that* he gave all his tenderness to her sister. *The director asks for an auxiliary to be chosen to act as the sister, Sally. Mary then confronts her father and sister together. In the role reversal, Grandpa (played by Peta) acts with extreme reserve towards Mary and great affection towards Sally.*

The two major themes of the drama are re-established: the longing for union *and the* secret rival, *who is presumed to be receiving more affection. The director concludes that further fighting between Mary and her father will not be productive for the time being. The physical dispute between them has taken Mary's (Peta's) spontaneity as far as possible at that stage, and to maximize that battle further does not seem to be a realistic option, although it may well be that this avenue could be better travelled in further work with Peta.*

The director suggests to Grandpa that he parent' Mary to the best of his ability. Peta (as Grandpa) at first does this very awkwardly and roughly it seems that she has no clear idea of how such loving and expressive parenting could be done. But after frequent role reversal and coaching from the group, she beings to be more expressive as Grandpa. In role reversal as daughter Mary, she sits on her father's knee, lapping up all this affection. A charming and peaceful vignette is established, with father talking to daughter, soothing her, cuddling her.

The director then nods to Sally, Mary's sister. The auxiliary playing Sally proves to be an excellent spontaneous actor, butting in on the scene, feigning illness, wheedling, seducing, manipulating, and in short, trying to do anything that will distract her father from his new-found relationship. Grandpa is nonplussed, but after a while Peta, in role reversal as him, is able to deal with Sally's anxiety, promise her equal time later, send her off to her mother, and return his attentions to Mary.

Mary, as daughter, begins to repeat the behaviour with her father that she had manifested with God. She entwines her legs with her father's, and seems to want to climb inside him. She cannot seem to get close enough. She wants no separation at all from him. The director remarks empathically on these actions, saying, It's hard to get 'close enough' and It's almost as if you want to be him. Mary agrees, and does

more entwining and burrowing. The movement does not appear to be so much sexual as a desire for unity, a desire to be not separate. No doubt its manifestations in the family, had they been expressed by Mary and allowed by the father, could easily have become sexual, and perhaps here is the clue to mother's secret.

In role reversal as Grandpa, Peta does not allow Mary to be one with him. Grandpa now allows the feelings and the longings, but draws limits. He empathizes with Mary, tells her he is not going to leave her just yet, and that even when he does, because he has to work and to attend to his own life and that of the rest of his family, he will always be her father. He says that it is impossible for her to be him, or him her, but that it is possible to be close but individual. There is more talk between them. Mary is much quieter now, sitting calmly and rather alertly on her father's lap. This section of the drama seems finished. The sister, Sally, at the director's nod, re-enters, wheedling. Both father and Mary deal with her firmly but kindly. Father sends her off, promising time with her soon.

The director gets an auxiliary to be Mary in that scene, and asks that it be maintained as a tableau in the spot where it occurred. The whole scene becomes a 'mirror' to be observed from without, He then asks for the mother's social atom to be re-established in the part of the stage where it was originally set up, and chooses three extra auxiliaries to be Mary, Peta, and her brother. He asks Peta, her brother, and her mother to re-create the original scene in Spain, with Peta about to stab Pino, while Mary ineffectually stands near.

Peta raises her hand once more. But she seems now not to be very interested in the gesture, and the director decides to make this, to0, a tableau. He removes Peta for a mirroring exercise, choosing an auxiliary for the original scene. Peta then has the opportunity to observe from the mirroring position four scenes: herself in the stabbing scene, her mother's sOCial atom, her mother writhing with God in the corner, and her mother receiving adequate parenting from her grandfather. During the whole drama, Peta had not once done an action as herself, not even following through with the stabbing. She says, from the mirror position, 'if mum had had that (adequate parenting), I wouldn't have needed to do that' (the stabbing). Peta appears calm and relieved, even though she had had no catharsis 'as herself', and had acted almost the entire drama in the roles of other members of her family.

It is difficult to say with certainty why this result should be so. A possible explanation may be that all the roles enacted on the psychodrama stage are somehow roles of the protagonist, even though the narrative is apparently historical, and the drama is populated with other characters. Integration of any two or more people in the drama, therefore, implies integration within the self of those roles. Live theatre, a film, a novel, or a horror story work in a similar manner, perhaps: human beings are so empathic, so tribal, so connected, that a 'part of them goes into the narrative of any involving story concerning other human beings. When the story, film, or play is resolved, the integration between the split-off bits occurs also in the reader or watcher. Psychodrama generally offers a much stronger experience than this, however: the story is one's own, and one becomes an actor in it. Thought and feeling are joined by the terrifying power of action. To explain the phenomena of Peta's drama we are led into the concept of roles and internal representations, which shall be discussed more fully in Chapter 4.