

# The Passionate Technique (pp 120 – 135)

## - *Antony Williams*

### **Chapter Seven: The systemic nature of roles**

*The use of an epistemology of billiard balls to approach human phenomena is an indication of madness. Bradford Keeney*

The psychodramatic stage simplifies and reduces the complexities of life down to its raw essentials. Protagonists warm up to an experience, intensify it, and toss out what is not pertinent to their enlivened perception. The process is one of selection, not dissimilar to that of the artist, who paints not the landscape, but a selection from the landscape; not the nude, but a version and selection of the nude. In psychodrama, the dramatic protocol ensures that events and reactions begin and end within the time allotted to them the edges are clipped off neatly, unlike in life. Periods of years are passed over in an instant, while a significant moment might be isolated and take two hours to re-enact. Time is reduced or intensified, collapsed or expanded. This removal of complexities and shadings that normally beset a life produces a liberating effect, as the protagonists' perceptions become uncluttered and lucid. Intuitions and emotions normally experienced as fragmentary and dissociated become psychologically and dramatically linked, and the significant moments of life are categorically illuminated.

In strategic psychodrama, as in conventional psychodrama, reality is reduced to proportions in which protagonists are able to express the essential experience of their existence. Within the therapeutic frame, their lives at last gain unity and completeness, an intelligibility that replaces incoherence, and a validity that replaces cynicism and despair. Strategic psychodramas put to work the immediacy and vibrancy of the psychodramatic method, but enlarge its systems orientation. The dysfunctional behaviour of any one member of the social atom is regarded as a 'spy' about the family's difficulty in evolving. A problem is identified, the attempted solutions in the social atom are enacted, and the protagonist works towards new solutions by means of new information.

To be sure, the psychodramatic tradition already does possess a systems orientation, but it is embryonic and underused. Psychodramatic theory and practice, which has done so much to enrich other therapies, may now need to assimilate certain sorts of theory for itself to survive even minimally as a systems therapy. In this book, a new synthesis is attempted in which clinical leverage is given to psychodrama and group work. In a psychodrama itself, this leverage applies mostly at the level of the interview-in-role and in the surplus-reality section of the psychodrama. In group work, the subject of the companion volume to this, *Forbidden agendas*, considerable attention is given to the recursiveness of interaction between leader and group, and to analysis of alliances and coalitions around a problem as being a good solvent for those problems. Prior to a psychodrama, the director focuses on the status of the problem as a problem, the minimal goals for problem resolution, and so on, as outlined in Chapter 5. Some time after a psychodrama, differences in the protagonist's functioning are highlighted, and The improvement routine (Brennan and Williams, 1988) may be gone through. The aim of strategic psychodrama, like the aim of psychodrama itself, remains that

of spontaneity, but the spontaneity involved is more systems-sound and systems-responsive. The 'complaint' in the group is treated as a message about relationships.

Since the theory and practice of family therapy spans many philosophies and many schools, there is no one process called family therapy, as we have already noted. The major influences that have been used to evolve a strategic form of psychodrama may now be apparent by the author citations appearing throughout the book: Gregory Bateson; the staff of the Mental Research Institute (MRI) such as Watzlawick, Fisch, etc.; an Australian family therapist called Michael White (1986a, b) who is himself highly influenced by Bateson; and the Milan group of family therapists Selvini Palazzoli, Boscolo, Cecchin, and Prata. Bateson's and White's thinking will be particularly noticeable in the present chapter.

As dramatic and artistic experiences, well-conducted psychodramas are valuable for themselves; they do not need any 'extra'. Protagonists remember and cherish them as having been some of the richest moments in their lives times when they have been truly filled with spirit, and in contact with the greatness of their own and others humanity; times when the connectedness of all people and all reality becomes apparent; times of intense beauty and nobility even amid intense suffering, times when the perspective of the true heart is validated. I have earlier described the merits of this process and called it 'psychodrama as revelation'.

These sorts of epiphanic experiences are rightly to be venerated, and belong among the best that life can offer us. The world of aesthetics and the rule of the liberated spirit belong in the highest areas of our being. Contact with that world can be therapeutic' in the broad sense, but that world is not in itself therapy, and nor, perhaps, should it be reduced to function, for the sake of something else. It is absolute, categorical, and exists in its own right, rather than as an instrument to make us feel better, or to cure us. As a clinical modality involving this sort of world, however, psychodrama can act for good or ill. Reiterative psychodramas chasing cure in places where cure does not belong can become part of the problem rather than part of the solution, as we shall elaborate in the following chapter.

Strategic psychodramas are problem-focused: they recover spontaneity within the system by helping to redefine the system according to all its relevant connections, its invisible loyalties'. Like the therapy of the strategic/systemic schools, such a method attempts to prevent a repetition of dysfunctional sequences in which a person or family is involved, and to open out their system to more complexity and alternatives. It uses psychodrama's ability to collapse time, evoke space, and produce an intense reduction of complexity so that a person's life data is suitable for the therapeutic frame. Psychodrama's capacity to direct emotional experience to its essence is combined with systemic thinking in order to open out new domains; the emotional experience becomes enacted in all its relevant connections with other people. It employs the systemic-role analysis that was introduced in Chapter 4, to focus on the interpersonal context of roles, and the recursiveness of people's interaction with one another.

*Cl: I have anorexia nervosa.*

*Th: What does it mean for you?*

*Cl: (No answer)*

*Th: What does it mean for your mother? What sort of problem is it for your sister?*

*The therapist finds that the client thinks mother is unhappy because of her, father is unhappy because of her, and her sister purports to be unhappy because of her. This kind of power, while in one way pleasing, always has paradoxical consequences: one is powerful, but one does not get what one wants.*

*The client is then asked whether mother may be unhappy because of any other problem; whether she thinks she will ever look as good as her sister, whether, if she were not anorexic, her parents would enjoy their own relationship more or less, and whether they would like her more or less than her sister; whether her sister would fall apart if she gained weight. In these questions, the therapist is not only potentially getting information, but also giving information by means of indirect suggestions concerning looking good, enjoying relationships, looking after others, disastrous consequences for someone else if she became normal size, and so on.*

Moreno started with the idea that the spontaneous/creative matrix could be made the central focus of people's worlds, not only as an underlying source, but on the very surface of their actual living. Strategic psychodrama suggests a further approach to spontaneity one based on cybernetics. Spontaneity is the capacity to take up adequate new roles within a system; it is made possible when the person or whole system has access to certain sorts of information, certain definitions of itself that become 'news of difference'. Sometimes a 'standard' psychodrama will be adequate to provide this new information, as we have seen in Chapters 1 and 2. At others, the therapist needs strategically to create more unusual contexts for adventure and discovery so that the new definition can be arrived at.

Since psychodrama with one protagonist is essentially systemic therapy with an individual, directors work with individuals to help them make use of their own energy and entity in interacting with others. The question becomes one of finding ways to release the energy so that, if necessary, individuals can utilize themselves as potential therapists within the family system, or within their immediate social atom. A social atom, you may recall, comprises the people who are essential to the protagonist in the here-and-now. Family members would usually, but not always, be included, but so could workmates, friends, and even organizations. To be change agents within their own system, protagonists may need a new form of thinking and being; to 'see the difference' that has been created in the psychodrama.

In the previous example of Anna, the anorexic, the therapist believes that the hidden rules in Anna's social system form a network of presuppositions that prevent or restrain her from seeing reality in any way other than that in which she currently does see it. These restraints, largely acting out of conscious awareness, help form Anna's consciousness and tend to dictate her behaviour in terms of making it more likely that she will do some things and less likely she will do others because of the way she 'sees' reality. A systems therapist sets about unravelling the cultural and social rules with which clients are complying or defying, and the restraints that prevent them from acting in other ways, or appreciating different alternatives. These social 'rules' are comprised of sets of meaning that are for the most part hidden. In

removing some of the restraints, the way is cleared for spontaneity and the discovery of new solutions.

The therapist's questions to Anna have mostly concerned difference, especially difference within relationships. In very pathological families, news of difference is dangerous. The nonresponse to difference may take the form of character and of action: if one sister is intelligent and the other very mediocre, the mediocre will become bright and the bright less clever so that there will be no difference. They all become stuck on doing something for each other: the anorexic in a family is often an excellent cook, feeding the other family members while starving herself. Anna is closer to mother than the other sister, but she asks herself whether she is closer because mother really loves her or because she is sick. The therapist reflects such inner questions and makes them overt:

*You are very strong, very stubborn, but your mother does not trust you. When she does trust you, maybe you can stop your anorexic behaviour. But even if your mother does trust you, you can still go downhill. Perhaps your stubbornness is stronger than you.*

The therapist implicitly conveys a systemic epistemology by the form of the questions: You do this and what does mother do when you do this? All of us nearly always function in circular patterns of causality the form of the question or of the therapy is designed to bring that circularity out. The direction of the therapy is to bring news of difference to the client, not only about relationships in the family, but even between the person and her stubbornness, which is externalized. An artificial distinction is therefore made, and becomes the basis of a double description between the person and her stubbornness. This form of working in the group and in psychodrama will be illustrated in the drama of The relative influence of Peggy's Monster (p. 129); but first we need to discuss what a 'cause' might be in human interaction.

### ***Causality in living systems***

#### **Negative explanation**

Therapists attempt to help their clients effect change in their lives. Some therapists believe that if they simply provide the 'necessary and sufficient conditions, clients will simply change by themselves. Others hope to 'cause' change by adopting particular strategies. The notion of causality in living systems, however, is rather complex. Most of us have a billiard-ball idea of causality: strike the billiard ball accurately, and it will go into the pocket. This is a positive explanation. According to positive explanation, events take their course because they are driven or propelled to do so; one can predict what will happen if one knows enough of the conditions the force of the cue, the angle on which the ball is hit, and so on. Positive explanations are quite satisfactory for the world of the non-living, such as billiard balls or piles of bricks.

A different type of explanation is called for, however, in living systems, and particularly in human systems. Try this for an experiment: take a chair, and push it around the room. It goes more or less where you push it, does it not? You can roughly predict where the chair will go by your strength, its weight, the surface of the floor, and so on. You are a cause, it is an effect. Now try pushing three other persons around the room, one after another. Person no.

1 falls on the floor, person no. 2 goes along with you, and becomes a chu-chu train. Then she becomes the engine and you the carriage. You circle the room, making noises. Person no. 3 does not like to be pushed. He pushes back, harder than you pushed him. The three act very differently to each other, and this difference has not been dependent solely on whether they are fat or thin, or on whether there is a carpet or polished boards under your feet.

Let us consider the person who falls on the floor: it is a man. You bend over him and ask if he is alright. A dialogue begins. You feel guilty for having pushed him over, and tell him this. He becomes accusatory and a little triumphant. You become even more guilty, and so on. Did you 'cause' him to fall on the floor? No, or at least not in the way that you 'caused' the chair to move. If you had caused the fall, why didn't the other two people fall? Yet it was the same strength of push you gave to each. After he fell over, did person no. 1 'cause' you to bend over and express guilt? Again, not quite, since another person may not have bent over at all, but may have gone about their business, or trodden on the man once he was down, or thrown confetti over him, or fallen down too, or whatever.

So if billiard-ball causality does not apply in human events, how do we then explain that anything happens at all? We cannot have a 'positive explanation' (I push/chair moves) and so are forced to a negative explanation. When I push, the other person selects from a range of possible behaviours, and enacts one he falls on the floor. The other two people selected and enacted different roles one went with the pushing, and became a little train, while the other pushed back. We might say that the person who fell on the floor acted almost as if he were restrained from selecting other behaviours. The restraint is not absolute he could have done differently; it is a matter of probability or tendency. Now here is where the notion is a useful one for therapy (not that falling on the floor is particularly dysfunctional behaviour that needs to be changed, but we will stick to the example for the moment). If ways can be found of lifting the restraints, opportunities for spontaneity can be created. If the man were not restrained from seeing that other types of response were possible and legitimate, if he were not blinkered by these restraints, he would be able to select other sets of responses that may be thought to be more enhancing of his being.

Let us go back over this for a moment, since although the example is simple, the ideas elude many people and do not quite fit our normal styles of thinking. A person is like he or she is, and a social atom is like it is, and events have taken the course that they have taken, not so much because they have been made to by a cause, but because they have been restrained from taking alternative courses (Bateson, 1972, pp. 399-400). Becoming aware that behaviour is as it is by the analysis of restraint, or negative explanation, provides a different kind of thinking on the problem to direct analysis of cause. Restraints establish limitations on the amount and type of information a person or system can manage thus everyone has a threshold of perception of news of difference dictated by restraints that are largely out of consciousness. Restraints render people (us) unready to respond to certain differences or distinctions. People are restrained from the trial-and-error searching that is necessary for the discovery of new ideas and the triggering of new responses (White, 1986a, p. 171). Relatively speaking, they cannot think or act in any other way. They cannot even see that there are any other ways. Old ideas endure; new information becomes blurred; spontaneity is lost.

## News of difference

We need another concept that of information. Billiard-ball causality in living systems is not appropriate not only because of the cycle of an effect becoming a cause becoming an effect becoming a cause, etc. (I push/he falls/I become guilty/he becomes triumphant/I become more guilty/he becomes depressed/I become triumphant, I push/he) and not only because of negative rather than positive explanation, but because events among living beings, including animals and even plants, are determined more by information than by gross physical forces. The pusher and the faller are both reacting to information rather than to simple physics. They have information about the pushing, but also information (from their own personal-construct system) about what they 'should do' if someone pushes. That is, they make sense of the event as best they can. The way they make sense of data and turn it into 'information is by making distinctions.

We only know 'hot' by distinction from 'cold' or 'cool', or even 'warm. We know 'red' because it is different from blue or yellow or brown. We know kind by distinction from cruel or indifferent. Even physically, our body acts on information, for example, by sweating when we are hot, and by producing scabs when we bleed. If our body acts on wrong information, or makes the wrong distinctions, for example by producing scab cells when we are not injured, we are in deep trouble. Systems, including the system of our own bodies, work by information.

Clearly there are millions upon millions of distinctions that we make daily. They are the basis for all action, for the smallest gesture, the tiniest step. Only a few are transformed into enduring ideas, and only a few are the subject of therapy. A person's map of reality or network of presuppositions provides a context for the restraints that will be operating when there is a need for new information and new distinctions. Information about events in the world (for example, I push/the man falls down) is transformed into descriptions in the form of words, figures, or pictures. The information becomes a 'story' via the explanation I give it, and this explanation depends on my own network of presuppositions. That is 'why I bend over the man who has fallen, rather than throw confetti on him, or fall over with him. I have made up my own story about what that event means; his falling has acted as information to me. How the 'news' comes (of the falling) is dependent on how it fits in with my network of presuppositions.

Most of my network of presuppositions are shaped by others, particularly by my family of origin. This is where I gain my basic beliefs about the world for example, that I should lean over when someone falls to the floor. For change to occur, these old ideas need to be replaced by new ideas. But the old ideas are very enduring, and so the new ideas must be equally enduring. A helpful new network must be such that it endures longer than the alternatives. People in trouble come to therapy having already attempted some solutions to their difficulties; but these solutions, and even previous therapy, may have served to perpetuate or even reinforce the very problems for which a solution was sought. Even though the solutions may not have been helpful, they are resorted to time and again. The individual or family keep resorting to solutions as if they were restrained from discovering alternative solutions. If one examines the solution, information usually becomes available about the restraints. The task of therapy is to establish conditions where new distinctions

can be drawn, and new ideas can survive longer than the old ideas (White, 1986a). Strategic psychodrama not only allows the system to define itself (by the very process of setting out the action in a drama) but takes steps to ensure the survival of new ideas.

Strategic psychodrama's path, ideally, is to effect transformation in the whole system so that the creative energy that has been locked up' by over-restrictive networks of presuppositions is released. Individuals are then liberated from some of the particular restraints of these networks; they become open to new information, and have more access to their own energy and the spontaneity that will enhance their way of being. The restraints-based interview focuses on what blocks the protagonist at a given moment or on a given problem from a course of adventure and discovery that is required for new solutions (spontaneity). For a procedure to be called therapy it may not be enough that a domain of adventure and discovery is merely provided. A therapy establishes a context that contributes to the client's skill to respond to new information, to make discoveries that endure as long as they are enhancing. More than the evocation of spontaneity is at stake, therefore. Its endurance is also crucial. At a literal and analogic level, protagonists are the most available and competent part of the system from which they come. By putting the weight of a psychodrama behind the protagonist, directors are responsible for co-creating new roles in the system that are no longer so restrained by dysfunctional presuppositions.

### **Redefinition**

Any psychodrama, or indeed any events of one's life, are capable of creating a context for adventure and discovery wherein new ideas may emerge. But there is little in the protocol of the psychodrama method that ensures the endurance of these new ideas. Sometimes it seems that directors hope to establish enough of a 'big bang' to keep the stars endlessly expanding outwards. the more powerful the blast-off, the further into orbit the client may go. When this procedure is not successful, directors may join protagonists in a solution of more psychodrama or more therapy. The therapy of the moment' can be very valuable, but such therapy runs the risk of becoming part of a person's dysfunctional system if the only moments that a person can have are in therapy itself.

We have noted that living systems react within themselves (within their own reality) to what they perceive in order to maintain their own autonomous organization: they will 'take in' from the outside only if it seems that this action does not threaten their identify or autonomy (their 'reality'). A 'disturbance' from another system such as a therapist, however, might actually enhance the autonomy or identity of the system. Such a disturbance is regarded as enhancing if it recognizes the system as it is if the disturbance is not perceived as 'foreign'. These sorts of disturbances are welcomed with open arms, as it were, and can be incorporated into a new reality, a new definition.

A direct proposal for 'change' that comes from a source external to the system may be perceived by the system as a threat to its autonomy. But a change that takes place after the system has simply been allowed to redefine itself makes internal sense to the changed person or system. Possibly the most effective way of influencing a system is actually to give it scope to enhance its own autonomy by allowing it first to see what that autonomy is. Here lies the advantage of psychodrama: in a psychodrama, protagonists are invited to share their

*Eigenwelt*, or private inner world, no matter how bizarre or idiosyncratic. By this process, their sense of the system's autonomy is validated; they are then open to new distinctions and new information.

Behaviour of organisms, according to Maturana and Varela (1980), is not an accommodation to environment, but a manifestation of internal structure. Maturana's observations provide a useful chance to re-think our notions of change and causality. There may, after all, be little point in people trying directly to change other people; at best, one might be able to trigger an internal disturbance, a change in the internal logic of the system. If a system can be helped to reorganize itself as it is, and according to all its connections, it may then be able to change its internal structure. In therapy one can provide a domain that is wider than the domain within which the system could roam previously. Successful therapy, therefore, offers a context that recognizes a system's unique way of being itself: the system is the only possible provider of the resources needed to deal with disturbances that do not enhance its wellbeing.

A psychodrama that helps define and then redefine the system can be a way of extending the domain, and of providing a more vivid definition of the individual or system for itself, as it exists now. The system receives an assurance, as it were, that it will not be bothered from the 'outside' when directors simply help the protagonist set their system out. But there is an extra element: the director assists the protagonist to set out the system according to all its relevant connections. Only then is the system properly defined. This is where skilful questioning from the director comes into play: the protagonist may not know what these relevant connections are what 'invisible loyalties' are moving him or her, what networks and coalitions are working within the social atom to shape what is regarded as information and what is not so regarded. Perhaps Maturana is right: perhaps it is actually impossible to change anyone.

People change in relation to their interaction with the therapist only if it makes sense to do so in their own terms (Kelly, 1955). A therapist who confirms this essential fact can actually expand clients' sense of themselves; a therapist who does not is likely to complain to colleagues and even hint to clients about the unusual amount of resistance they are encountering. By helping the protagonist set out their system according to its relevant connections, directors are not making an intervention the interview is in itself an intervention (Tomm, 1987). They do not suggest anything at this stage, but rather say, 'What more? Who else is relevant? What is X's relationship with Y? What does Z think?'

With luck, the produced definition may allow the system first to recognize, and then perhaps to 'argue' with its own internal logic. Family therapists are familiar with this process: for example, if a daughter's behaviour in running away from home is described as a way of being 'loving' to her parents, and she is urged to consider the 'risks' in changing that behaviour, a second definition has effectively been given to the protagonist. The daughter may then say to herself, 'I'm not going to sacrifice my education and later life just to give my folks something to worry about now.' Her 'logic' has changed, and so does the internal truth' of the family members, who may also need to argue with their own former logic.



Strategic therapists can go one step further from simply defining a protagonist's system according to all its connections: they can add a new definition once the protagonist has made up his or hers. That is, the protagonist supplies one description, and the therapist another. The two are then coded side by side so that a difference is evident. By validating the two types of logic within the system, the system is allowed to argue with itself, rather than with the director. A drama becomes an orthogonal intervention, an internal logic changer, a massive bit of communication with the system that the system 'allows in'. It can become a confirmation, par excellence, of the system's autonomy, and at the same time extend the system's information about its internal relationships. It adds to the system's reality by recognizing that all change is a change in internal structure, and that only the system itself can accomplish such a change.

### **The relative influence of Peggy's monster**

Some people are dominated by their presuppositions of being 'damaged' to the extent that they have little opportunity to live satisfactorily in the everyday world. Their fear, rage, or hurt overwhelms them so that their inner processing of these states disastrously interferes with their perception of daily events. They may be so 'shaky' and preoccupied that they cannot go to work, or if there, cannot function adequately. When with friends, the slightest remark may evoke an emotional response that seems out of all proportion to the content of the remark. When alone, they are excessively given to introspection and gloom.

*Peggy was a person in such a state, almost permanently. A member of a training group that met weekly, she had also been attending another psychodrama group, for a couple of years. That is, she had had plenty of therapy. Peggy is 30 years old, a slim and attractive woman with large eyes that frequently filled with tears. She was competent as an auxiliary and as a trainee psychodrama director, as was well liked by other group members. Indeed, some of the men in the group idealized her as the wounded woman', and compared their own apparently stoical barriers to emotional experience with her volatility and lability. It could almost be said that they had a stake in her remaining flooded and oversensitive. The women in the group were not so envious, perhaps being less prone than the men idealistically to confuse Peggy's out-of-control, flooded experience with emotional flexibility.*

The case reported here represents a two-session intervention, separated by several weeks. It illustrates the potency of the interview-in-role as an intervention in itself when relevant distinctions are made that allow the protagonist news of difference. An essential feature was to externalize and personify one of Peggy's major and overdeveloped roles. This role is artificially separated from her, and a new role is developed 'in' her to ward off the threatening 'outsider'.

*Peggy, who had been in Di's group for about three weeks, reported that after the groups she was scarcely able to function: 'I come here to get support, and I get it. But it only seems to make things worse.'*

*Di: It seems as if you're presenting us with something of a paradox.*

*P: How come?*

*Di: Well, you attend the group and you become very warmed up. Then you get support for being so warmed up. That's a nice feeling and it makes you want to come back, but the process begins all over again.. How long are you upset after a group?*

*P: Oh ages it takes days to calm down. I work as a consultant you know. I have to be on the ball.*

*Di: Are you still upset by Friday? (The group meets on Monday evenings)*

*P: No, I'm generally over it by Friday.*

*Peggy and Di begin to work down from Peggy's global notion of being upset pretty well all the time' to an understanding (a revelation to Peggy) that she is most upset on a Tuesday. In fact, Tuesday is the only day her work as a consultant is really affected by her overwhelming negative feelings. She has already drawn a distinction that has enabled her to notice differences between a general state of being overwhelmed, and being overwhelmed on a particular day. Di encourages Peggy to draw distinctions between her state at one point in time, and her state at another point. might have been equally effective to have drawn distinctions between types of 'being overwhelmed, and then to ask which type was the worst, next worst, etc. As it was, the over-developed role of flooded incompetent' was now seen as chiefly operating at certain times, rather than all the time.*

*Di next enquires whether, given the extent of her upset, she may not need more than one day to give herself up to it. She makes these enquiries not to be clever or paradoxical', but to help Peggy to make further distinctions between the present state of affairs and a future state of affairs if 'being overwhelmed' were to be extended more fully into a problem life style. Peggy replies that one day is quite enough. Di then suggests that since one day is enough, and more than one day is 'too much', whether she could possibly fit her upset into half a day perhaps Tuesday morning-leaving the rest of the day free for work and pleasure' Peggy replies that to do that would be to cut herself off from her feelings, and that her 'demon' would come back with renewed force.*

Di has introduced the notion that there might be time in Peggy's life 'free for pleasure'. Peggy has countered with the notion of a 'demon' - one of her own roles that she can picture as being outside herself. She has given Di an opening to establish relative influence between herself and the demon, herself and her 'flooded' self that seems to take her over. Relative influence (White, 1986a) requires the establishment of two differently coded descriptions. In one of those descriptions, events are coded according to the protagonist's network of pre-existing presuppositions, and in the other, events are coded according to the premisses contributed by the therapist.

We need at this stage to digress from Peggy and her monster to consider another important process that of double description. Double description is a cybernetic concept that lends itself admirably to psychodrama and to action methods. First let us consider the hypothetical problem of the zealous father, Fred, who punishes his son, Sam. A single description of what is going on in the family from the viewpoint of the son might be: 'He punishes, I rebel.' And from the father, a therapist might glean the description of the situation as: He rebels, I punish. If an observer combines the views of both parties, a sense of the father-son system will begin to emerge.

Keeney (1983) points out that there are several ways in which such a holistic description can be conceptualized. First, the construct generated by each person can be prescribed in a sequential fashion, with the whole series seen as a representative of the dyadic system. For example, when the two descriptions 'He punishes, I rebel' and 'He rebels, I punish' are collectively viewed, they provide a first landing stage for understanding the interactive system.

When these different constructs (or 'punctuations' in cybernetic terms) are placed side by side in a sequential fashion, the pattern that connects them may start to be discernible: the simultaneous combination of their constructs yields a glimpse of their whole relationship. This glimpse of the whole relationship, the role of the son and the role of the father combined at the same time - is called by Bateson (1979) 'double description'.

Relationship is always a product of double description. He wanted two parties to any interaction to be regarded as two eyes, each giving a monocular view of what goes on and, together, giving a binocular view in depth. This double view is the relationship. (Bateson, 1979, p. 133)

In the case of 'He punishes, I rebel - He rebels, I punish', the double description would be that of what Bateson called a complementary relationship: the actions of father and son are different, but mutually fit each other. Sam and his father are locked into a vicious cycle, a deviation amplifying process (Hoffman, 1981). The more the tension grows, the more each party resorts to his solution: more discipline or more rebellion.

Roles cannot fully be understood except in the context of the other. A role is 'an interpersonal experience and needs usually two or more individuals to be actualized' (Moreno, 1964, p. 184). Roles give a sense of the lives all around us: the lives that had passed before we were born, the lives that are still continuing; and the lives whose coming we would intersect. The concept of role is already systemic. It opens out the interpersonal construction of the self to the ebb and flow of the other, so that the definition of self must always be mutually constructed.

To understand the action of a role, a double description is almost always required. A follower requires a leader; a leader requires a follower; otherwise the terms leader and follower have little or no meaning. Leadership is an extracted half of the double description: leader-follower relationship. Most descriptions of so-called personality characteristics actually consist of extracted halves of larger relationship patterns. It is possible to work directly with Fred or directly with Sam, but even in such an instance it is preferable to work on the Fred/Sam double description. It is possible to work on leaders, or on followers in an industrial consultancy, say, but it is preferable to work on leader and follower as two halves of a description.

In the case of Peggy and her monster, Di is establishing a double description between Peggy and one of her roles. In the example of Sam and Fred, above, the double description is between two or more people. Double descriptions can be established between a person at one time or another, between two or more persons, between a person in one state and another, and so on. Di has first mapped out, by drawing distinctions, the extent of the

problem's influence on the protagonist, at least in terms of how long the problem is influential. She now invites Peggy to supply any information that may assist her to reach an understanding of Peggy's experience of the problem. She stresses that she needs information about the extent to which the protagonist is being 'influenced by the problem that is now construed as 'outside' her. She has created a dialectic between Peggy and the problem. In her attempt to map out the extent of influence of the problem, she listens especially to Peggy's ideas of being out of control, of not being competent. She also gains information on the protagonist's own 'influence in the life of the problem, ascertaining to what extent she has been able to stand up to the problem's oppression. That is, the protagonist is invited also to select out ideas of competence and ability, as well as non-competence and difficulty. Protagonists may find it extremely hard to find areas of competence and ability with respect to the problem; with help, however, usually they can access one or two areas. This procedure, of course, is in no way intended to jolly along the protagonist by pointing out that things aren't so bad after all. Rather it is to establish understandings of difference, and the relative influence of the problem.

After protagonists have nominated such a large area when their lives have been ruled by the problem, the director may then be able genuinely to express surprise that, under the circumstances, the protagonist has been able to maintain some influence in her life and ward off a total surrender to the problem (White, 1986a). This is why Di asked Peggy whether she might not have needed more than one day for her collapse. The influence of the monster (now externalized) has been fixed as lasting one day, not more and not less. As they interact, Peggy is developing a different set of roles towards Di during this interview; she seems brighter, more forceful and alert as she discusses her problem. She has moved from the role of tearful incompetent and warmed up to her alert, problem-solver role.

She has also developed a markedly different orientation towards her problem, which has changed from the paradoxical one of being completely out of control and therefore needing the group to support her, and yet becoming completely out of control because of her attendance at the group. That is, therapy had become part of the problem, rather than part of the solution. The problem's influence is now seen as extensive, but by no means overarching. What has taken place is not simply a logical correction of vague or loose talk, but a new way of seeing and being. If the problem is construed as huge, permanent, and out of control, then it actually becomes so. (That, generally speaking, is why a problem is a problem in psychology.)

Di's next approach was to ask Peggy whether she thought that if the monster was kept out' for too long it would build up its strength and become unmanageable. Peggy thought that it would. Di has tapped into a repression hypothesis held by Peggy and by many people who attend groups or are involved in individual therapy. This implicit hypothesis maintains that most psychological difficulties are caused by repression and that the answer to these difficulties is expression. The worse one feels, therefore, the more the need to express hidden pain, hurt, or anger.

Peggy fears that if she does not give herself over to being overwhelmed and feeling all the pain, confusion, and despair she must feel, at least on a Tuesday, that the monster will grow in size because it has been locked away. Who knows what psychological damage might result

if she is not completely open to all her negative impulses and sentiments: she may end up being defensive, and in real trouble.

*D: It's as if it goes off and pumps iron. And if you leave it too long in the gym, it becomes enormously strong.*

*P: Yes, just like that. Stand up. Reverse roles and be the monster. (She does) Who are*

*D: you?*

*M: I'm her fear.*

*D: How long have you been around? Oh ages.*

*D: Is it true that she should encounter you all the time, so that at least you're kept busy and can't get any bigger? That's just it. Only if she stays completely open to me has she got any chance. If she ignores me, I just grow.*

*M: Thank you, monster. Reverse roles (to Peggy).*

*D: Have you ever thought that you could pump iron?*

*P: What?*

*D: Well, while it's off exercising, are there any exercises that you can do? Sort of build up your own strength.*

*P: Well, I've never really thought of that.*

*D: Think about it now for a minute. What are your weak points, here in this group?*

*Di and Peggy discuss Peggy's 'weak points' the situations in which she most becomes upset and most feels out of control. They mostly concern her losing boundaries, and becoming 'flooded' with the material that anyone in the group is presenting. She loses capacity to differentiate and to think, and then goes into 'I'm worthless' spiral, feels isolated, begins to cry, receives comfort, and the whole cycle begins again. Peggy and Di then discuss how she can recognize these occasions as they emerge, and what sort of 'exercises' she can do. Peggy says that she can 'mentally pump iron' when anything happens in the group that triggers her old cycle. Di encourages her in this, and they go through a routine of mental push-ups and barbells. Di does not challenge Peggy's belief that the monster will only get bigger if she ignores it. Rather, she enters the metaphor but creates a different set of descriptions around her own behaviour. The 'drama', which in fact, had been rather like an extended interview-in-role, finishes for the time being*

In the following three months, Peggy only cries in the group twice, in completely appropriate circumstances, and acts as a skilled auxiliary and able group member. She challenges others, supports them, and speaks her mind to Di on occasion. She ridicules the men in the group who lament the loss of her wounded-woman role, so voyeuristically fascinating for them, so uncomfortable for her. She also reports that she is not missing any days at Work now 'not even Tuesday, and is surprised by the pleasure she now takes in little things.

*A few weeks later Peggy enacted a light-hearted drama, a vignette showing herself at her training gym. The instructor at the gym, Leola, was very beautiful and wore 'beautiful leotards'. In the interview-in-role Leola said that she had to keep an eye on her ladies so they don't strain themselves keep to their programmes'. When asked her opinion of Peggy, she said 'She has a few problems she's not very strong. I'll have to make sure she continues she needs encouragement.*

*The vignette was quite humorous, with Peggy baulking at the more formidable machines, and role-reversing as various 'macho men' and 'macho women'. In one interaction with Leola she says; 'I think I'll skip having a body like yours. I'll stick with these lower weights for a while' When Leola inquires about Peggy's progress, she replies; 'I ache a lot - does that count?'" Leola tells her that to 'ache' is not necessarily a valid criterion for success or progress.*

*Leola and Peggy continue to talk about her fitness programme in a fashion that is, to the onlooker, fairly clearly analogical with Peggy's progress and her difficulties in the last few weeks. Peggy has chosen an unlikely but in actual fact satisfactory wisdom figure a gym instructress with whom to have dialogue.*