A Process For Psychodrama Training: The Hollander Psychodrama Curve

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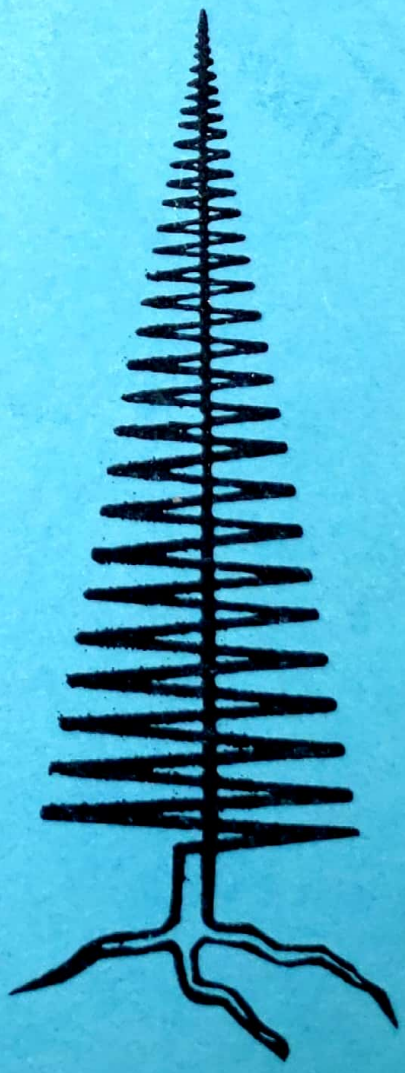

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The purpose of this monograph is to present to experienced psychodrama directors and trainees a macroscopic and microscopic approach to the methodology of the classic Psychodramatic process. Neither techniques nor style will be presented in these pages, as there exists a bountiful volume of techniques among other psychodrama resources.[1] Instead, the emphasis will be placed on viewing the methods by which a psychodrama develops, proceeds, and concludes. The intent is to propose a systematic way to both understand and impart to others the developmental evolution of a psychodrama session. To date, only a few varieties of training exist whereby newcomers can facilitate the learning and teaching of the global picture as well as the separate stages of psychodrama.[2] Through the Hollander Psychodrama Curve, a new avenue is being provided to aid the trainee and trainer in their tasks.

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1. See Group Psychotherapy Quarterly; Moreno, J.L., Psychodrama, Volume 1, (Beacon, New York: Beacon House, Inc., 1964).

2. Although the major emphasis is classical psychodrama per se, the Curve is also intended to facilitate the employment of roleplaying and sociodrama, and variations of each.

The process reported here has been employed in three interrelated settings: Beginning training groups, advanced (director) seminars, workshops and psychodrama review sessions. The consumers may range in disciplines to include clinicians, educators, and social scientists. Through the use of a graphic paradigm, the Hollander Psychodrama Curve, trainers and trainees are enabled to reify a complex, abstract process.

The Curve

Borrowing and transforming the concept of the normal curve into a variant that resembles a pyramid, the Hollander Psychodrama Curve attempts to denote the bilateral symmetry that exists among all population activities so long as the triadic and temporal processes of "warming up," "activity," and "integration" are fulfilled. Therefore, the curve is divided into three horizontal parts. In addition to the horizontal continuum, a vertical dimension is employed. The vertical concept denotes the emotional qualities which exist as one proceeds from the warm-up to integration (Figure 1). These continua remain theoretically the same for any activity, be it birth, marriage, painting, athletics, music, lovemaking, communicating, or developing interpersonal rela-

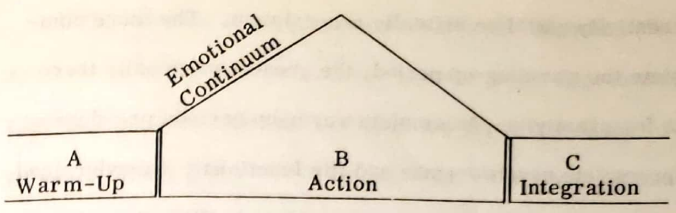

Figure 1
Triad of Vertical and Horizontal Dimensions

tionships. These processes are not only dynamic, but also cyclic. For example, the birth process begins with a warm-up of conception and a nine-month gestation during which physiological, psychological, and social characteristics develop in preparation for birth. Subsequently, the neonate emerges (the birth drama). Thereafter the child is socialized and integrated into his primary, secondary, and tertiary groups whereupon he contributes to the recirculation of the process in his nuclear family and beyond.

The Warm-Up

The warm-up position along the continuum may best be described as the "operational manifestation of spontaneity[3]" and, as such a manifestation, it acts as a catalyst for creativity. Without the necessary ingredients for spontaneity,

3. Moreno, Ibid., Page 52.

creativity would be virtually non-existent. The more complete the warming-up period, the greater propensity there is for creativity. Incomplete warm-up periods pre-dispose incomplete psychodramas and life functions. To understand the warming-up period, it is important to dissect the warm-up into three subdivisions and microscopically examine each part. The three micro-parts are the Encounter, the Phase, and the Sociometric Process.

The Encounter or "Begegnung" takes place at two intervals: The "self" and the "other." The self or "me-me" encounter occurs when the individual spontaneously becomes aware of his physiological and psychological readiness. He asks, "What's going on with me?" or "What am I warmed-up to?" The other or "me-you" and "you-me" encounter is sociologically and sociometrically based. In a psychodrama, the director who is chief therapist, catalyzer, and leader, asks "Where am I with you?" and, "Where are you with you?" (as he investigates relationships within and among the group or audience with whom he is encountering). If the director experiences optimal spontaneity at the "me-me" and "me-you" levels, he is prepared to investigate the sociometry of the group.

If the director senses anxieties which are impeding the spontaneity of the audience and/or himself to the degree that resistances block free expression of the creativity of the group, he must find avenues through which the anxieties can be externalized. Action at a physical level is one means by which anxieties are externalized. Because anxiety develops in the absence of spontaneity, directors must draw upon their repertoire of physical starters. The implementation of "starters" defines the second subdivision -- the Warm-up Phase.

Starters, which characterize the Warm-up Phase, have many forms. For example, spontaneity tests, stiuational tests, group exercises and games, and rearranging seating configurations are useful physical techniques for helping individuals begin interacting. Once the residue of anxiety seems dissipated from the audience and director, and spontaneity appears to have risen, the group is prepared to deal creatively with issues which heretofore were locked. The point at which the group members begin to interact and co-act marks the termination of the warm-up phase and the beginning of the sociometric process. There are times when

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groups congregate and experience a great deal of spontaneity. At such times the Warm-up Phase is not necessary.

In the Sociometric Process[4] the interpersonal placement and communication pathways which are accessible via sociometric methods become evident. It is through these channels of spontaneous interaction that 1) the group's wishes are made known, 2) the theme to which they need to relate is disclosed, and 3) the sociometric star (or protagonist) emerges. The Sociometric Process pursues a natural group evolutionary course generated by the individuals within the group and based upon the norms guiding group-member interaction. It differs from the Phase in that the latter is often artifically induced by the director. The warm-up period is fulfilled when the protagonist emerges from the audience to the area designated for action (the stage). As he encounters the locus of his psychodrama, moves into action, and spontaneously seeks the creative processes for clarifying his concerns, the psychodrama (action) period begins (Figure 2).

4. Some examples are Moreno, J. L., Who Shall Survive? (New York: Beacon House, Inc., 1953); Moreno, J. L., Sociometry and the Science of Man, (New York: Beacon House, Inc., 1956); Moreno, J. L., Sociometry, Experimental Method of Science and Societry, (New York: Beacon House, Inc., 1951); J. L. Moreno et. al. (Ed.), The Sociometry Reader (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1960).

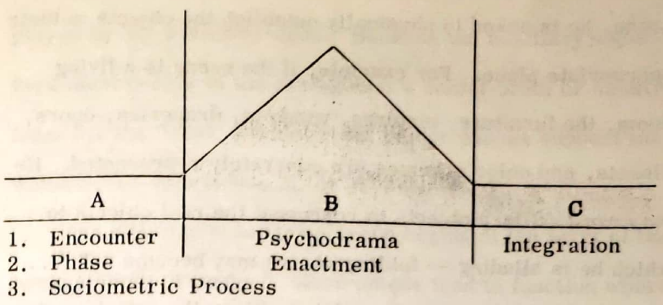

Figure 2
The three divisions of the warm-up period

Although this discussion focuses upon the psychodramatic and sociometric process, it has been necessary to bridge into the total context the antecedent and subsequent periods which bring this process full-circle. The psychodramatic enactment is another central issue requiring conceptual microscopy.

The Psychodrama Enactment

The psychodramatic enactment begins as soon as the protagonist has warmed-up to 1) the psychodrama stage and 2) the scene in which he is to become involved. An initial part of the protagonist's warm-up occurs as he describes his scene for action -- his space. As he describes the

scene, he is asked to physically establish the objects in their appropriate place. For example, if the scene is a living room, the furniture, pictures, windows, draperies, doors, closets, and color schemes are concretely represented. He may use auxiliary objects to represent the real objects to which he is alluding -- folding-chairs may become a T.V., a couch, etc. As the protagonist positions the articles, the audience warms up to the same living room, i.e., they begin to see it through the protagonist's eyes.

Another significant part of the protagonist's warm-up is the anchoring of the time period. Seasons, dates, and hours are temporally important to the warm-up since the sociometric placement of relevant "others" is strategically linked to time periods in one's life. Individuals are linked to both time and space. One is associated to the others. That is, as a person recalls a time period, a person, or a locus, he simultaneously has a vital link to the other variables. As time, place, and people are woven together, there is greater potential for emotional involvement and clarification for both rational and emotional integration.

Establishing time and space prepares (warm-up) the protagonist (and audience) for the significant roles to be

played by his auxiliary-egos. Because the auxiliary-egos represent people in the protagonist's social-atom or substitutes for the "real" people, their performances support the warming-up experience of the protagonist.

The initial psychodrama scene begins at the level of the protagonist's "reality." Since people tend to function where they are comfortable, the first scene places the actors at or near the operational level of approximate spontaneity. Primary psychodrama scenes are anchored in the protagonist's reality, and not at the director's level of reality. As the first scene evolves, the protagonist shows how "his life really is." The values of the initial scene are many. For example, the director learns from the first scene which biases and assumptions are rationally and emotionally maintained by the protagonist. From this array of information, the director develops his initial diagnosis for the psychodrama. The diagnosis he makes is not a conventional clinical one but an existential assessment of the protagonist's micro-socio-emotional situation taken from his total macro-socio-emotional life. The length of the first psychodrama scene is gauged by the time it takes the director to 1) understand and explore the essence of the problem, 2) synthesize

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a diagnosis, and 3) create an atmosphere of permissiveness which nurtures a feeling of trust and freedom. Gleaning the essential data from the first scene paves the way for ensuing scenes.

As the protagonist moves from the periphery to the center of his quest for integration, exactness of detail becomes less significant than the emotional qualities related to the experiences. Encouraging only the crisp essence of an experience, the director catalyzes the action and interaction toward an apex. As the affective climax approaches, the director confronts, supports, and encourages the protagonist to release in action those emotions which have remained unexpressed or dis-integrated. If the protagonist manifests resistance as he draws near his emotional climax, the director has an option to become firm and urge completion of the abreaction and catharsis, to detour the route undertaken by the protagonist while opting for an alternate, or to deal with the protagonist's resistance. Which ever choice the director makes, he must be sensitive to the emotions emerging. He might simultaneously assist in the externalization of those feelings or help the protagonist decide what must be done with the feelings. The initial

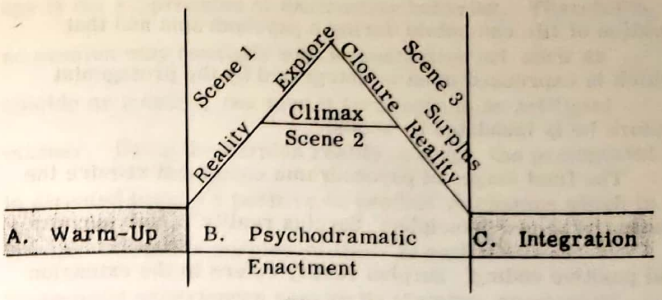

Figure 3
Reality - Climax - Surplus Reality
in Psychodramatic Enactment

scenes of a psychodrama, i.e., those preceding the climax, are exploratory and exposing; subsequent scenes build toward integration and closure (of feelings, intellect, and experience). Once the emotional peak has been achieved, the director should assist the protagonist in "closing down" the drama (Figure 3). Rather than further exploration and disclosure, the protagonist is urged to concentrate upon closing the session and building integration into the psychodrama.

Although each session has the potential for vitalizing many other psychodrama sessions, the director needs to be aware of his time and energy limitations. Psychodrama is a method of assessing life situations (whether dreams, fantasies, or the more tangible). It is dynamic and always in flux. It is important to know that only a small cross-

section of life can unfold during a psychodrama and that which is expressed must be integrated by the protagonist before he is inundated by another.

The final stages of psychodrama enactment require the inclusion of two principles: Surplus reality[5] and a purposeful positive ending. Surplus reality refers to the extension and expansion of the normative standard which in our system defines reality. For example, the utilization of future and past projections, auxiliary-ego, double, projective chair, talking with a deceased person, the mirror techniques, and high chair - low chair are surplus reality experiences. As the protagonist draws his session to a close, the director must aid the protagonist by introducing rehearsal for life situations, corrective alternatives, self-confrontation, or psychodramatic ego-repair endings. By doing this he encourages the protagonist to spontaneously evolve new creativity for his life without fear of reprisal or embarrassment.

Psychodrama enactment is provided for creative and productive objectives. One ethic inherent in the methodology is the suppression of destructive behavior. Therefore, no session may conclude with a destructive act such as suicide or murder, nor may it terminate in an artificial manner. Using the surplus reality concept, the protagonist is directed toward a positive or productive closure which is feasible within his purview of life. In such closures, the protagonist experiences sensitivity training, spontaneity training, role training, and an aesthetic expression of his creative potential.

5. Moreno, J. L. Who Shall Survive?, op. cit., p. 85 and Moreno, J. L. "Therapeutic Vehicles and the Concept of Surplus Reality" in Group Psychotherapy, Vol. XVIII, 4, December 1965, pp. 211-216.

Integration

Once the psychodramatic action concludes, the auxiliary-egos return to their seats in the audience, the director and protagonist sit side-by-side in front of the audience, and the third segment of the activity, the Integration, begins. As seen in Figure 4, there are three steps included in the Integration segment: The audience disclosure, group dialogue and summary.

Because the protagonist gives a great deal of himself to the audience during the psychodramatic enactment, the members of the audience must give back in kind. Therefore, they are expected to report openly and freely the iden-

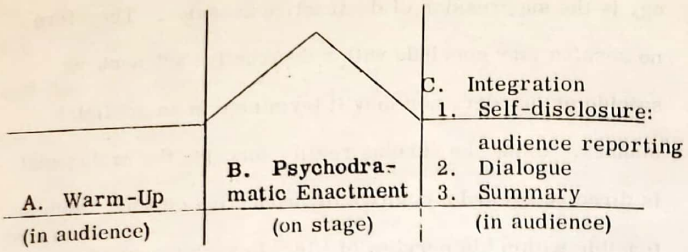

Figure 4

tifications they have made with the psychodramatic action. The rationale for this expectation are twofold: First, as in all experiences in life, one association triggers another and in doing so uncovers areas in our "memory-bank" which, in turn, release emotional material, For example, listening to a musical composition may recall memories of childhood experiences, unrequited love experiences, or special relationships with people. Just as tears, smiles, or curses often are aroused by the musical experience, so in psychodrama, the audience is prone to experience a catharsis by associating with the protagonist. Therefore, equal time for expression is provided. Second, as the protagonist leaves the audience and emerges, he must physically and emotionally separate from them to the stage in order to experience the scene he chooses to enact. Consequently, the audience sociometry is changed and the protagonist risks

isolation. The efficacy of the Integration segment catalyzes group cohesion and reassimilation of the protagonist into the audience. Within the period of disclosure, the protagonist learns that nearly every member of the audience can identify with him or his session.

The second segment, the dialogue, is equivalent to group discussion, group psychotherapy, or a didactic experience in group dynamics. Since the first part (self disclosure) of the Integration is designed for reporting only about one's self; all questions, interpretations, analyses, and evaluations are withheld until the dialogue portion. The major emphasis in the dialogue is upon open interaction among members of the group and the needs which individuals expose. Usually, staff members act as co-therapists and encourage the group to plot its own course and take the time to come "full circle" with the theme they had selected to explore. It is analogous to the process of the psychodrama in that the director follows and assists the protagonist along the route which he (the protagonist) specifies. The group receives reification for its own strength during the dialogue period and re-enters into the experience that "a group takes care of its own members."

The concluding thread of the process is a summarization. The summary may be presented by the director, the protagonist, or the audience. The summary and dialogue portions build from an affective focus to a cognitive one. As the members endeavor to integrate their feelings, experiences, and thoughts into a congruous whole, they simultaneously insure themselves against the possibility that anyone will exit from the session in "psychodramatic shock" or in a state of incompleteness, pain, or panic. One way to close an emotionally energized group is to help members return to their "heads," i.e., their intellectual processes.

Conclusion

The Hollander Psychodrama Curve has been designed to facilitate the training of psychodrama practitioners. Because psychodrama is applied by the educator, the social scientist, and the clinician, the Curve is a generalized depiction lending breadth for multi-disciplinary application. It is, by design, geared for those interested in classical psychodrama. Yet, it is applicable for those using sociodrama, roleplaying, ethnodrama, axiodrama, or group process.

The greatest strength of the Curve is its visual usefulness. It permits both a partial and a total analysis of classical psychodrama. In addition, the newcomer to psychodrama is presented with the means by which sociometry, psychodrama, and group psychotherapy (or group process) are integrated. Furthermore, the Curve may be utilized as a paradigm from which professional and student practitioners can review and gain understanding of psychodrama sessions.

All too often the neophyte to psychodrama falsely assumes from a few sessions that he is adequately prepared to direct others in psychodrama. An introduction to the total process and dynamics of psychodrama via the Curve may encourage him to be more circumspect with his precipitous assumptions, and he may perhaps give time and energy to additional preparation.

Upon first impression the Curve seems to connote the presence of a terminal point in a psychodrama session. However, this is not true. Each session is potentially an extension of, or forerunner to, additional psychodramas. Therefore the Curve is only one facet of a dynamic process consisting of a continuum of similar curves. The Hollander

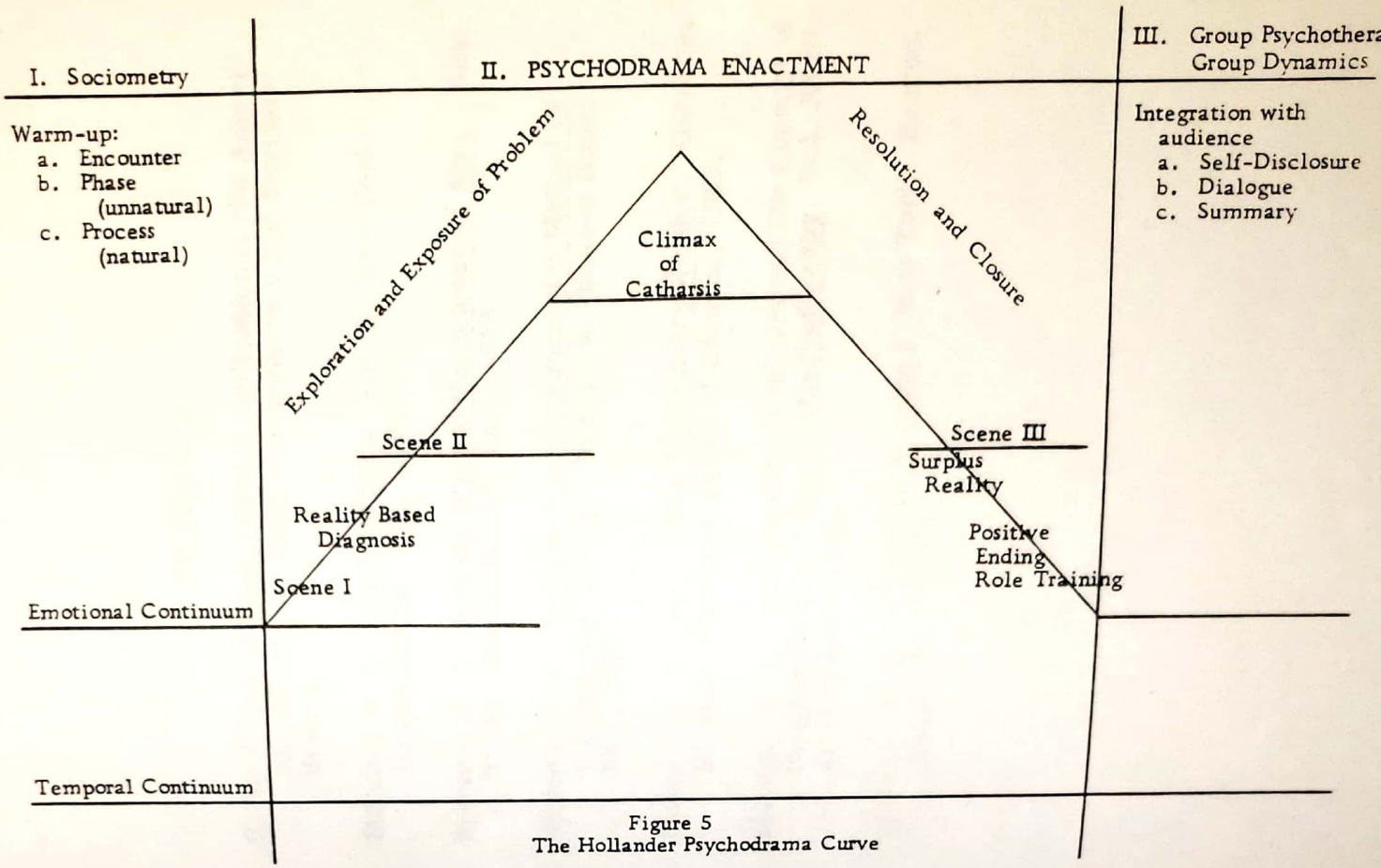

Figure 5
The Hollander Psychodrama Curve

Psychodrama Curve is not intended to be static. Rather, it is only one objectification of a dynamic process having many parallels to the dynamic process of life. (See Figure 5)