FIVE KEY CONCEPTS OF THE DRAMATURGICAL PERSPECTIVE

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BACKGROUND   The dramaturgical perspective is one of the theoretical orientations of social psychology. From the early 1900's, symbolic ~interactionism has been a prominent theory in the United States. Dramaturgy is usually traced to the literary critic, Burke, who set forth the dramatistic pentad of five key terms: act, scene, agent, agency, and purpose. In the dramatistic approach the most significant term is act. Human behavior is more analyzable by theories of action than by theories of knowledge. Burke stressed the symbol-using property of humans, and establised the centrality of the question of human motivation in dramatism (1969a).

. Burke distinguishes between action and sheer motion. Human relations in terms of action could be called dramatistic (1968 448). Human interaction is best analyzed in terms of drama. People reach human satisfaction by relating to one another as if they were actors playing dramatic roles.

. Goffman (1959) used the perspective of theatrical performance to consider the way an individual presents self and actions to others, and the way the individual can guide and control the impressions which others develop. He described many behaviors that individuals may project or suppress while sustaining a performance before others. Goffman presents the theatrical perspective as a valuable sensitizing device which enables one to detect patterns that might otherwise be missed. Critics assert that actors do not constantly focus on how they are being regarded by others. The dramaturgical perspective helps the sociologist avoid assuming many things that lay persons take for granted. But some social actors do regard certain life situations in theatrical terms. The researcher's task is to determine to what extent social actors are conscious of doing a performance, and of being on-stage.

. Perinbanayagam agrees that social reality is not simply like drama, but that it is drama (1974 533). Hence, social reality can best be studied in dramatic terms.

. Brisset & Edgley (1975 7) summarize the dramaturgic perspective:

1 It studies meaningful behavior. Meaning is problematic, arising in and through interaction.
2 One's sense of individuality is established, not reflected in interaction.
3 Socialization is a process that furnishes resources for situational variation, rather than mechanisms for cultural uniformity.
4 Classical determinism is rejected; the method is prospective rather than retrospective.
5 It is situationally and culturally relativistic.
6 Situations are defined interactionally, not mentalistically.
7 The human is fundamentally a communicator.
8 Interaction and situation, not individuals, are the motive base.
9 Humans are consciously rationalizing, not consciously rational.

THE CONCEPT OF MEANING
. Meaning is built up through day-to-day interaction with other people. 1) Meaning is not given; it is not an inherent characteristic of the actor's world. It is not stable and dependable. Instead, meaning is constantly problematic. 2) Meaning is created by people, and the meaning of any object is continually being re-established by behavior toward that object. A person builds up meaning through day-to-day activity with others. 3) Meaning emerges from the behavioral consensus among actors. It arises from at least two actors responding in a similar manner to people and objects in their environment. Meaning is vitally linked to behavior and to interaction.
. Dramaturgists emphasize the instability of meaning. The socially constructed world is precarious

(Berger 1963 138). Human meaning is arbitrary, fragile, and fictitious (Becker 1975 62). For Mead, meaning is established when a gesture indicates to an actor and to the other, the subsequent behavior of the actor (Strauss 1964 163). Meaning is not an idea, as traditionally conceived, but is implicit in the relation among the various phases of social action.
. Stone (1962 88) interprets Mead as saying that meaning is only established when the response elicited by a symbol is the same for both the sender and the receiver, although the responses can never be identical. Therefore, meaning must be a variable.
. Stone suggests the concept of identification as the guarantee against non-sense. This term subsumes two processes: identification of, and with. Stone feels that taking the role of the other is only one variant, and that identification with one another cannot be made without identifications of one another. Such identifications are factilitated by appearance, and are accomplished non-verbally. Appearance and discourse are dialectical processes in social transactions, but appearance is more basic to the process of constructing meaning.
. Becker links meaning to verbal process: ".. if we bungle the verbal context for action, if we deliver the wrong lines at the wrong time, we frustrate the possibility of meaningful action and unquestioned motivation." (1975 62) Goffman, more than any other dramaturgist has carefully detailed those qualities of players and performances which infuse social life with meaning (1974 4). He accepts Schutz' definition of meaning: We speak of provinces of meaning and not of sub-universes because it is the meaning of our experiences, and not the ontological structure of the objects which constitute reality (Schutz 1962 230). What a person does actually has little meaning until the individual actively makes autobiographical use of already completed actions (Travisano 1975

71). Berger says that individuals constantly remake their own biographies by working together the bits and pieces of completed action, and thus create the meaning of their own life.

THE KEY CONCEPT OF SELF
. Dramaturgists use the term self rather than personality to avoid assumptions inherent in personality theory. They refer to the self simply as the meaning of the human organism (Brisset & Edgley 1975 3). The self is not stable, but tenuous and problematic. It is not inherent in the individual, nor an artifact carried from one situation to another. Selves are outcomes of human interaction. The self is established by the actions of the individual and by the responsive actions of others. What one does establishes who one is, and not vice versa. As Burke put it, doing is being.
. According to dramaturgists, the self is situationally specific. Different situations occasion the establishment of different selves. The self is established in terms of resources and audiences available in the immediate situation. Individuality is a shared, interactive phenomenon. A person's self emerges and is maintained through a process of consensual validation. Dramaturgists avoid construing one's self and one's society as separate entities. Mead's influence is apparent in this fusion of self and society, and it helps to put the dramaturgical views in persective.
. Goffman argues that the very structure of the self appears in terms of the way one arranges to present it to others. The performance self is seen as a type of image, usually creditable, that the individual tries to induce others to hold of her/him (Goffman 1959 252).
. Becker (1975) sees the self as a system of language and ideas that is in a constant state of modification as an individual interacts with others. Since the self is primarily a linguistic device, an infallible self is one with complete

control over words and verbal ex-
pression. Becker stresses the ex-
pressions one <u>gives</u>, as opposed
to those one <u>gives off</u>. Stone, on
the other hand, is concerned with
expressions one <u>gives off</u>, since
he sees the self as residing in
the meaning of one's appearance.
Like Mead, he finds the meaning
of <u>appearance</u> in the responses
that appearances generate. Stone
is concerned with two such re-
sponses, which he calls <u>programs</u>:
1) responses made about the wear-
er of clothing by others who
<u>review</u> clothing; and 2) responses
made by the wearer of clothing
about himself (Stone 1962 92).
. Dramaturgists see the creation
of self as a very tenuous affair
which is threatened by the pre-
sence of others in the social situa-
tion. "We have no idea what
words are going to spout forth
from another's self system." (Beck-
er 1975 58) Foote sees development
occurring as the <u>cumulative</u> pro-
duct of successive outcomes of var-
ious situations. As a person devel-
ops, successive episodes of inter-
action condition one another.
Through experience, one accumu-
lates an enlarging choice of rou-
tines and an enlarging repertoire.
Travisano (1975) remarks on
changes in the self that occur in
a lifetime. If there were no carry-
-over between situations, how
could such long range changes be
meaningfully discussed?

THE CONCEPT OF INTERACTION
. The symbolic interactionist's em-
phasis on <u>interaction</u> is influen-
tial in the dramaturgical perspec-
tive, and the dramaturgist's view
of life is largely a result of
their intense focus on the inter-
active process. This focus can be
seen in dramaturgical research
ventures where the guiding ques-
tion is: "What difference does this
factor make in interaction?" Klapp
(1969) traces the interactive con-
sequences of the vast accumula-
tion of impersonal objective know-
ledge, the modernization process,
mobility, and the decline in iden-
tification ritual and identification
ceremony. Glaser and Strauss

(1965) describe the interaction be-
tween the dying patient, the hos-
pital staff, and certain others.
In this situation, the patient's
awareness is seen as an extremely
important element in influencing
the nature of the interaction.
. The episode is the basic unit of
interaction, and the resulting
human development is the product
of successive outcomes of inter-
action. Foote emphasizes the uncer-
tainty of every outcome of social
interaction, and stresses the ex-
ploratory, formulative, and crea-
tive aspects. He asserts that: "..
at the conclusion of any episode
of interaction, the position of the
participants vis-a-vis each other
is always and necessarily differ-
ent from what it was at its com-
mencement." (Foote 1975 27).
. In stressing face-to-face inter-
action, Goffman defines interaction
as "the reciprocal influence of
individuals upon one another's
actions when in one another's im-
mediate physical presence." (1959
15) People acquire information
about one another to interact.
. The outcome of interaction is
different, and not necessarily pre-
dictable from the sum of the indi-
vidual parts (McCall & Simmons
1966). Strauss demands that we
recognize the tremendous complex-
ity of interaction. He describes
face-to-face interaction as a fluid
moving, indeterminate process,
and indicates that during its
course, participants take succes-
sive stances toward each other
(Strauss 1959 55). According to
Becker, individuals must be very
skilled performers to emerge from
an interaction better than they
entered it. He sees a creative,
but threatening aspect in every
interaction. The process is com-
plex, and much can go wrong.
. Scheff has set out a series of
propositions showing the relation
between the power and authority
of interactants in assessing re-
sponsibility. He couches his pro-
positions in terms of the resources
available in the interaction. In
the relation between professional
interrogator, such as a lawyer,
and a lay client, greater shared

awareness that the situation is one of negotiation gives the client more control over the definition of the situation. A more explicit agenda also increases the client's control in defining the situation. The party who responds has relatively more power than the party who offers, and that one who responds by making counter offers has relatively more power than one who simply limits the response to acceptance or rejection. Finally, the more direct the questions and the responses, the more power the interrogator has to define the situation (Scheff 1968 16).

THE CONCEPT OF IDENTITY
. When Erikson re-introduced the term identity to the social sciences, it was rapidly accepted. Strauss gave the concept of identity its primary focus, although he did not define the term, saying that it was chosen because the ambiguity and diffuseness of its reference would allow less constrictive exploration of new perspectives. Those using the concept generally agree that it answers the question: "Who am I?" Most writers imply that identity establishes what and where the person is in social terms.
. "One's identity is established when others place him as a social object by assigning him the same words of identity that he appropriates for himself or announces. It is in the coincidence of placements and announcements that identity becomes a meaning of the self .." (Stone 1962 93). Identity is not a substitute for the term self; rather, when one has identity, one is situated. Stone feels that identity tells what the parties to an interaction are. However, if the transactions persist, merely establishing identities is not enough to guarantee meaningful discourse. In interpersonal relations, the mood of the participants must be established, and upon entering structural relations, the values of participants must be established. Finally there is the matter of the individual's activation, as affected by the

way the individual has acted, is acting, and will further act. Stone refers to these aspects of the individual as attitudes. For Stone, the self has four components: 1) identity, 2) value, 3) mood, and 4) attitude. All four are situationally relevant.
. Klapp (1969) also sees one's identity as indicating that one is situated in social terms. Identity depends on symbolic reference points which enable a person to remember who s/he is. Klapp's thesis is that in modern society, the too-rapid and indiscriminate sweeping away of symbols results in a loss of identity.
. Travisano does not see a loss of identity in modern society, but stresses the pervasiveness of identity change. Alteration and conversion are defined as different kinds of identity change. Conversion involves a radical reorganization of identity and a change from one universe of discourse to another. Alternations involve the usual changes in life, in which one identity seems to grow naturally out of another. These changes cause little disruption in the individual's life and such linked identities may be referred to as identity sequences (Travisano 1975 93). There are two distinct ways in which identities can be pervasive: 1) They can be relevant in many situations; and 2) they can be central to interaction. Since the centrality of an identity concerns the number of situations, it can dominate basic, general, and independent identities (Travisano 1975 99).

THE CONCEPT OF MOTIVATION
. Traditional schemes envision motivation as internal or external forces that propel an individual into action. This implies a passive person, and is highly deterministic. Mills (1940 904) reacted against "the inferential conception of motives as subjective 'springs' of action .."
. Dramaturgists wholeheartedly embrace Dewey's declaration: "In truth man acts anyway; he can't help acting. In every fundamental

sense, it is false that a man requires a motive to make him do something. It is absurd to ask what induces a man to activity generally speaking." (Dewey 1922 119) Thus, the dramaturgists shift their attention from the origins of activity to its directions. That the dramaturgical perspective emphasizes motivation is not surprising in light of Burke's basic theme of human motivation. Burke did not see motives as biological or psychological forces, but considered them the basic forms of thought through which humans experience their world. Thus, a basic link was established between motives and language. Burke established three categories of motivation. He developed the grammar of motives by looking at the various types of motivational terms. He considered the symbolism of motives concerned with the modes of expression in the fine arts. Finally, he described the rhetoric of motives involving the basic strategies that individuals use in manipulating one another. This category has been of the most interest to social scientists.
. Mills states that motives are words (1940 905). Motives are the terms through which the interpretation of conduct by social actors proceeds. According to Mills, one's attention is directed outside oneself until one's acts are somehow frustrated or questioned. In these question situations, awareness of self and motive arises. These motives are not seen as denoting any elements within the individual, but stand for the anticipated situational consequences of the questioned conduct.
. Mills sees motives as consensual, since they appeal to others involved in one's act, and thus are strategies of action. Often, for a social action to take place, others must agree, whether implicitly or explicitly. Such acts will often be abandoned if no reason can be found that is acceptable to others. Mills also feels that motives are learned, since they are imputed by others even before they are avowed by the

self. Finally, though vocabularies of motive may be very stable in folk societies, in modern secular urban societies they are highly problematic. Varying and competing vocabularies of motives may operate coterminously, and the appropriate situations may not be clearly marked. One meets the existence of competing vocabularies of motive with mixed motives and motivational conflicts.
. Foote (1951) feels that analysis of motives in terms of language leaves a hiatus between words and acts, and a mystery as to just how language motivates. He feels that the concept of identification fills this gap as a process of naming. Every actor must categorize other actors in order to interact with them. Categories applied to other actors immediately indicate the motives to be imputed to them. Identities give stability and predictability to one's own behavior as long as they are retained. The establishment of one's own identity is vital, since the identities of others involved in interaction is dependent on one's own. Only full commitment to one's own identity permits a full picture of motivation.
. Strauss 1959 45) points out that the motives imputed may be quite incorrect, yet action will be organized on the basis of this imputation. Strauss also says that assigning reasons for acts differs depending on one's perspective, and what often happens is that one imputes to other's behavior what might be one's own reasons for acting. This implies that "agreement among a group of people concerning the motives of another person merely tells us something about the common terminology with which they operate." Strauss 1959 49) Motive imputation and motive avowal are not radically different acts, but differ only in whether the motives are assigned to oneself or to others. The only motives one can attribute to oneself or to others are those that one understands. One uses the vocabularies of motive that one has learned to use. Contact with

new groups may result in acquiring a new vocabulary of motives which is available for future use.
. Perinbanayagam suggests that the primary group is an intermediary between the generalized other and the self, as a transmitter of motives (1975 512). Thus, the primary group draws its vocabularies of motive from the generalized other, and provides them to an emerging self. He sees it as an obligation of the primary group to validate and support motives of its members when they face a crisis. Vocabularies of motive serve to guide actions as well as to justify them (Perinbanayagam 1977).
. On admission to a mental hospital, whether a woman presents herself for psychiatric treatment to begin with, or is referred from a service where she assumed that she was physically ill, depends on whether she possesses a psychiatric vocabulary of motives. Working class women are less likely to use such vocabularies of motives than middle and upper class women (Bart 1968).

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