

THE "DOUBLE SITUATION" IN PSYCHODRAMA

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INTRODUCTION

It has often been pointed out that psychodrama, similar to sociometric procedure, does not discover anything new, but is able, because of the sophistication and flexibility of its methods, to develop an idea further into its most remote and least obvious ramifications. The double appears in the mythology of many cultures and has been described by some of the great writers of ancient and modern literature. In these descriptions the double is a symbolic experience, performing acts of his own, outside of the volition or control of the subject. The hallucinated double of a mental patient comes into the room, sits down, or, as in the well known case of de Maupassant, dictates his work to him. In the psychodrama the double is an objective experience, both double and subject perform the same act, think and act at times in unison. De Maupassant's double subjugated him to his will and created his work, it was a figment of his own mind and an "involuntary" production, he could not share it with another person at the time of its occurrence. The psychodramatic double situation is a voluntary production, the subject has either a major share, or at least an equal share in it.

In an earlier paper* I described the double technique in psychodrama as follows: "For the double ego technique the patient and auxiliary ego are placed on the stage together. In order that the patient (often called "primary ego") accepts the presence of the auxiliary ego on the stage, she is told to consider the ego as her double, the invisible "I," the alter ego with whom she talks at times but who exists only within herself. In the psychodrama this invisible double is projected into space, embodied by an actual person and experienced as outside of the patient. The patient represents the deeper, inner levels of experience while the ego acts as double, copying physical bearing in every way and representing the outer levels. However, in actuality the patient usually begins by first revealing the superficial layers; the auxiliary's task is then, for strategic reasons, the reverse of the director's formal instructions. It is her job to stir up the subject to reach deeper levels of expression by peeling off the outer, socially visible "I" of the subject, and by reaching for those experiences

* See "Clinical Psychodrama: Auxiliary Ego Double and Mirror Techniques," Zerka Toeman, *Sociometry*, Volume 9, No. 2-3, May-August, 1946.

and imageries which a person would reveal when talking to herself, alone, in the privacy of her own room." Thus the production of subject and ego is a common task, shared by every member in the audience. It is not merely something which takes place in the mind of a single individual, but a systematic process taking place in an objective setting. In the "imagined" double experience the subject is generally fearful, or at least fear and panic are the outstanding factors in the situation. In the psychodrama double experience fear may enter into the situation when the subject realizes how much the double knows about himself, but it is only one of the factors which operate in it and the fear occurs only occasionally. The more the subject warms up to the double situation, the more he loses his fear. In literature the double is usually depicted either as the person's better self, as in Edgar Allan Poe's "William Wilson," where the double acted as his guardian angel, or as the person's worse self, as in Robert Louis Stevenson's "Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde." De Maupassant recognized his double as an "Intimate Enemy." In psychodrama no moral values are placed on the double, he is neither the better nor the worse part of the self; he is merely there, at times the better, at times the worse part. Nor is there in psychodrama any clearcut division between the subject and the double. They are fused and separate and fuse again. One of the most masterful descriptions of the double phenomenon in literature is repeatedly encountered in the works of Dostoevski. However, he too, felt the double to be parts of people; the people so divided are as two halves of a third divided personality, halves which, like the doubles, seek themselves and pursue themselves. In psychodrama the purpose of the double is not to claim or prove that the subject is two people. The double may represent many other reflections of the subject, not merely one. In fact, the more doubles the auxiliary ego can produce the more integrating the double experience will be for the subject. The chief purpose of the psychodramatic double is to stimulate, not to pursue the subject, to help and retrain, not to persecute. Dostoevski injected his double with all the manifestations of the Devil who comes to the subject and declares himself his double, a creation of Man in his own image. To Dostoevski the double is an hallucination, in psychodrama it is a consciously produced and elaborated experience; the very incarnations of the double are put side by side with the subject on the stage, and there he acts out situations as a real person.

We may, therefore, distinguish three types of doubles, I) the fictitious double constructed by the fertile imagination of a writer, as Dostoevski, etc., II) the psychotic double which is an hallucination by a mental patient, and III) the psychodramatic, therapeutic double which is an *experimental device*; by means of dramatic methods he is given three-dimensional reality.

Double Technique and Double Experience in Psychodrama

The function of the auxiliary ego in psychodrama has been described elsewhere.* Usually it relates to representing absentee members of the subject's world. The double technique, however, is a special technique within the auxiliary ego's sphere. A skilled auxiliary will be quick to gather and use information concerning the subject which has been revealed in previous action or in the pre-double situation interview. This information has to be translated into suitable action on the stage and will act as a preliminary starter for the double situation to be enacted. As the double situation is often entered into when the subject warms up too slowly or is unable to get at basic levels of experience, the auxiliary ego has a particularly difficult task. The subject may produce all kinds of resistances. These the auxiliary ego has to make use of and to work through until the deeper levels are reached.

The Double Situation with Nancy

The following illustrations* will serve to explain how the double situation in psychodrama develops. Our first subject, Nancy, was a young married woman who was three months pregnant. She and her husband were studying psychodrama and they offered themselves as subjects for this session. In preliminary scenes with her husband which showed how they had met and married, Nancy revealed some anxiety about her future. The director then moved her into the double situation. The scene was set, late at night, with the subject and her double preparing to go to bed. Although the double situation may be started almost anywhere and any time, this particular setting is a useful one as the end of the day, before sleep overtakes us, is a suitable time for cogitating over the day's happenings in particular and the future in general, a fertile moment for self-communication. The subject and ego were thus preparing to go to bed, and reflecting upon the coming of the baby. After Nancy tried to "cool off" in the scene by calling to her husband, asking whether he was coming to bed soon, etc., (her husband sat on the edge of the stage, watching the scene) I began to warm her up by reflecting along the lines of whether the baby would be a boy or a girl, whether my husband was happy about the arrival of the baby, whether I was glad, whether our marriage was satisfactory, etc. Nancy retorted to all these remarks in a positive way, on a somewhat unrealistic, idealizing, slightly manic level. She mentioned only the "good" things in the situation, avoiding the consideration of the responsibilities and difficulties involved. I, therefore, began to counter with a number of more serious remarks, questioning

* "Psychodrama," Volume I, J. L. Moreno, Beacon House, 1946.

* Both sessions were directed by J. L. Moreno.

our maturity for taking such a step, worrying about the finances since I would no longer be able to work, at least for quite a while, what the baby would do to our marriage, whether I would be disfigured or incapacitated after the event. Nancy persisted in verbally pushing problems out of the way: "What's the use of worrying about such things"; "We're both so happy about it." However, her body no longer expressed the same emotions as before, she began to slouch and her face looked worried. The director changed the scene: "This is the hospital, the labor pains have begun, the baby is about to be borne. Now go ahead, both of you." At this point I felt that Nancy was far more frightened than she had allowed herself to admit. By warming up to Nancy's world I was carried away from myself and I became like Nancy. I could feel like her and with her. Thus I felt that she realized that her production up to now had been unrealistic, but that she was slow to warm up to the double situation. The director moved towards me and prompted me to warm up to the pain, the suffering and so on, but I had already warmed up to "our fear of death," death of the baby, death of ourselves, and who would take care of "our husband" and "our baby" in that case, that I could but briefly dwell upon the pain as prompted, and began to tremble. I noticed that Nancy, too, was trembling. I said: "I hope everything goes alright," and began to weep. Some audience members told me after the session that Nancy had already started to weep, but I had not noticed it until after I wept myself. I became further involved in her fears when I saw that she too, was weeping. I said: "I hope I won't die." Nancy, who was by this time weeping out loud, replied: "I don't want to die." This was the moment for me to retract and get back to the positive aspects of the situation, so I said: "Well, I'll probably be alright. People don't die of childbirth these days, this is not the eighteenth century. Doctors know so much about these things today." This reassured Nancy, who said: "He's supposed to be a very good Doctor and he told me everything was going just fine." I answered: "Sure, I'm young and healthy, and it will all be over in no time."

After this scene a good deal of reassurance had to be maintained for the subject, so the following scene was a future projection with Nancy and her husband, allowing complete freedom of expression for the subject, who projected the baby as a girl, six months old. Nancy display far greater imagination and authority in this scene than heretofore, having been very much dominated by her husband's presence up to this point. She reported to us at later intervals that she gained confidence through the double scene. She admitted that these fears had been very often with her up to the time of her production on *the stage*, and wondered how I knew about it, but that this working them out had made

them recede considerably and that she faced the arrival of the baby with more peace of mind. It was quite obvious that she would never have admitted to them openly, without the deep action method being applied.*

The Double Situation with Linda

The second case is that of a young woman whom we may call Linda. She had recently divorced her husband and was fearful about her future relationships to men, although she did not realize this. Linda produced first a number of scenes with various men of her acquaintance, warming up only on the superficial, social levels. Then the director suggested a double situation. She tried continuously to slip out of the situation, for instance, by saying: "Let's go and tell Mary (room mate) about what happened at school today, she'd laugh at that story with John," or, "I forgot to brush my teeth and have to go to the bathroom," "I have to empty the ice box," etc., restlessly moving into the background. I, as the double, at first went along with her in space, copying every one of her gestures, but then, when she had accepted me as her double, I began slowly and gently to counter her: "Mary's asleep, I can't wake her now," "Let's empty the ice box first," "I'm too tired to brush my teeth anyway." This brought the subject back to herself and she began to concentrate on preparing her clothes to wear the next day. I again went along with her but began to move back into the proscenium by refusing to make any more decisions. I walked ahead of her to the bed which was right in front of the audience and the director. Now Linda followed my actions, rather than setting them herself. Although no coercion was used she copied my motions, walked behind me. Then she sat down on the bed, so did I. She took off her shoes, and so did I. At this point I felt from Linda's long pauses between acts, slower, pensive movements, and from the way she responded to the total situation that she had reached a level of deeper reflection than heretofore. Therefore, I immediately moved into the fear I had of meeting men, especially those unknown, the fear of people in general, and how hard I always tried to make a good impression on them. Linda agreed at once: "That's what Dick (husband) always used to tell me. I try so hard to overcome my fear that I become overexcited and exhibitionistic. I go out of my way to attract attention and become unnatural." This was the first time she agreed with me. Up to this point she neither denied nor agreed with anything I produced, she merely jumped from one situation to another. Now she began to enlarge upon my production and became enveloped by the process. It had taken a good deal of fencing around the superficial aspects of her life before we could enter into the deeper ones. From this point

* A single psychodramatic session usually cannot do more than point out the problem. In a series of sessions a gradual structuring of the conflict and retraining of the subject in action takes place, and a cure from such anxieties is achieved.

on Linda warmed up more and more. It was a fascinating series of stepping stones in our mutual feeling (tele) process. Once the mutual tele pattern had been sufficiently established for the basic relationship the rest followed easily. The director asked Linda whether she had lately had a dream. Linda answered: "I often dream." The director instructed us then to fall asleep and to try to dream; he suggested that we see "the same things in our dream, and to enact this dream together." We warmed up to sleep and after a little while stepped out of bed. Linda did not speak. I realized that she had not mentioned her parents in the previous scenes at all, but that the dream concerned them, so I took a chance: "It's about Mother and Dad." Linda countered: "Yes, and in our house in Connecticut, our old home. But it's much larger, and it's growing larger all the time." I said: "I'm scared. It's so weird, why should the house grow like this?" Linda: "And what are all these people doing here? I suppose it's one of Mother's socials. I just can't bear them, I'm going to get out of this." Double ego: "I always want to run away and hide when these people swarm around the house. But where can I go without being seen?" Linda: "To my room upstairs, that's where I'll go. Dad, where's Dad? I don't see him. He hates these affairs of Mother's as much as I do, but somehow he gets away with it. I've just got to go upstairs." Double ego: "What will Mother say if she finds out?" Linda: "I don't care, though I guess she'll be mad at me. Oh, where are those stairs? Here they are, and all the time the house is changing. Blue walls? I never saw such a color in this house before!" Double ego: "It's most peculiar. Let's go upstairs." Upstairs Linda thought she'd better go down again. Linda: "Where are those stairs now? I've got to get down or Mother will scold me. Where are they?" Here she began to run around the stage wildly, looking for the stairs. Her gestures were frantic and her voice rose in pitch. She became far more intensive and dramatic than before. She pointed: "Look! Oh, look!" Double ego: "Where have they gone? Oh, what's happened to them?" Linda: "There they are, they're just a big, black, gaping hole. That's where that woman threw down my shoes. I suppose I'll have to jump down." Double ego: "I don't want to jump down there, I'm scared." Linda: "I've got to jump down, I've got to get downstairs, I've got to find my shoes." Both of us jumped down. The director told Linda to replay the last part of the dream alone, the part about the stairs, but she was unable to warm up until the auxiliary ego again took the double role alongside of her. Linda (voice and movements still more frantic than before): "Oh, where are those stairs? Where did they go? How could they disappear like that? How can I get down without them?" Double: "I'll have to find the other stairs, then" (walked around to the other side of stage, Linda following). Linda: "No,

I won't go down these. They're the ones Mother told me she and Brother fell down. I don't want to fall down them and hurt myself." Double ego: "But I've got to get down there somehow! How will I get down if I don't use these?" Linda: "I don't want to fall down those steps, I won't go down there. Mother threatened me that I might fall down and harm myself or she might fall down them again and die. She passed out once from falling down them. I can't use these stairs."

Analysis of Double Technique and Double Experience

Besides the techniques described in my previous paper, techniques of the pure action type have been found extremely useful with subjects who produce great resistance to start with or a growing resistance in the course of the double situation. The rapport between the subject and the auxiliary ego may be fairly well established on the surface of the verbal associations. Everything seems to run smoothly and the subject appears cooperative. Suddenly the auxiliary ego double feels that the subject tries to bring the double situation to a premature end, that the maximum of production and catharsis has not been reached yet; she realizes that the subject is afraid of what she may reveal if she warms up still further and therefore attempts to interrupt or terminate the double situation. The double ego may, on the verbal level, be soft, gentle, permissive, but produce counter-actions which are intended to draw the subject back into the situation. For instance, a subject says: "I'm tired now, let's go to sleep"; then she closes her eyes, withdraws from any action; or, she may say suggestively to her double: "Let's go into the other room and undress, to get ready for bed," and start to remove herself physically from the scene. Then the double may get into an opposite motion, walk around the subject before she can step off the stage, or get off the bed or chair, and break into all kinds of actions which suggest to the subject motorically to *stay* in the scene and to *continue, to warm up in a different direction*. Just as the resistance of the subject may be silent, so the aggression and persistence of the ego is equally silent, gestural and motorically active.

After this phase is successfully completed, it is interesting to watch a subject when she begins to warm up and accept the double as if she would really be her double. Then the subject stimulates the double to an idea or action, but in reverse, the double stimulates the subject to an idea or action. The closer the double gets to the subject, the more the subject warms up and reveals further experiences. The most intimate personal experience of the subject's are thus highly intensified. It is interesting to note that it is not necessary for the double to be always of the same sex as the subject. Double situations with

mixed sexes have been produced effectively and with the subject losing the sense of the presence of a member of the opposite sex and fully accepting the double in terms of a representation of him- or herself.

The illustration of Linda's double production shows the amount of material which can be obtained by the double dream method when the subject is carefully guarding her secrets, anxious not to give herself away. Through the dynamics of the warming up process she was gradually led into her own lifeline and could not resist until the whole episode had been entirely lived out. The latter part of her dream production turned out to be not a dream (as the first part had actually been, and one she had recently dreamt), but an incident which had occurred when her mother had guests in the house, the same house in which Linda had been married but in which her parents no longer lived.

The stimulus which comes to the subject from the body image of the double, when the double lowers his head with the subject, moves his arm with the subject, closes his eyes with the subject, the animal effect of the mere doubling up of the same gestures, purely physical, have a profound effect in producing in the subject the image of a co-existing body and mind. Once this relationship is there the auxiliary ego can begin to deviate somewhat in action and bodily expression, and stimulate the subject along a different track or set of tracks. The auxiliary ego started the dream by structuring the situation: "It is strange that I should dream about Mother and Dad." The subject fell in with this and enlarged upon it, producing the house in which she had lived as a child. Her parents had meanwhile moved to a different residence but in the dream Linda was once again a little girl, afraid of meeting her mother's friends at a social gathering. The house looked weird, larger than in reality, and continuously grew until she became so afraid that she had to go upstairs, to her own room, to hide there until the company had left. But when she wanted to return to the stairs again because Mother would be angry, the stairs had disappeared and turned into a gaping black hole into which she finally vanished. When the latter part of the dream was once again enacted it became evident that these were the stairs from which her mother and brother once fell down, and since they were older and more powerful than she, she was afraid to use them for fear of what they might do to her. Although the auxiliary ego became far less directive once the subject started her dream, there were a number of times when she was able to stimulate the dreamer by co-experiencing and co-producing, enlarging here and there upon the dream. This is an extremely subtle technique in the double situation and well worthy of further study.

The Matrix of Identity and the Double Experience

The double experience is probably the foundation of intuitive experiences between lovers, husbands and wives, intimate friends, and may be the basis for what has been called "identification" by psychoanalysts. The old Indian "Twa ma si," this is me, is another, religious confirmation of the double experience. The role experience of a spectator in a theatre is a double experience. It is the experience of identity — and not indentification, which implies that the self and the mirror are not the same thing, but that the subject imagines that they are the same by adding something to it or subtracting something from it. It is probable that in the double situation one of the oldest experiences of the infant and child is paralleled and that is perhaps the reason for its enormous effectiveness. It is the experience of the child looking into a mirror and seeing another child, a stranger, but someone who looks and acts exactly like himself.

According to spontaneity theory, the first matrix of experience is the matrix of identity. The bodies of several individuals and the shapes of many objects have a share in it. If the double experience would be a transference relationship of the subject towards the double, nothing essential would come of it, except the free association and delusions the subject has in reference to the double. Conversely, if it would be a transference relationship of the double towards the subject, nothing could come of it either, unless the subject would be of such extreme suggestibility that everything produced by the double would be blindly accepted, which has never happened to date. Furthermore, the double experience cannot be explained only by the empathy which the double may have in regard to the subject. Some elements of transference, as well as some elements of empathy may operate in the relationship, but through empathy or transference alone the double is not able but to intuit certain elements which the subject may feel at the time of the double situation.

According to admissions from subjects, what is particularly striking to them is when the auxiliary ego seems to divine something which the subject tries to hide, or of which he was not fully aware; but when struck by this phenomenon of insight which the auxiliary ego seems to have he enlarges on the spot. The auxiliary ego, made bolder by this retorts with further additions, to which the subject again adds new pieces and this process goes back and forth from subject to ego and ego to subject, until the whole configuration of an experience is lived out. This is not only true on the verbal level, but perhaps still more profoundly on the action level. The double ego, for instance, begins to weep and that is exactly what the subject was on the verge of doing, and now the subject weeps with the ego. Or the ego strikes his head with his fists and

the subject goes a step further and jumps down. The subject will say that he wanted to do that, he wanted to hurt himself and die. This two-way feeling out, the auxiliary ego first feeling out the subject, and the subject feeling out the ego, that is, what the ego feels out about himself, produces an interaction on the depth level. It does not deal with projected material but with real events, it is a tele phenomenon. The two doubles are held together by a tele experience; empathy and transference play some part in it but they do not represent the core of the processes of the relationship.

In the double situation what often most propels the subject to a similar experience beneath the surface is the distressed facial expression of the double, gestures he makes; the words he speaks may be immaterial or rather incidental because as the subject warms up to the same or a similar gestural pattern the verbal follows automatically. An important phase in the double situation is when the double gives herself the fullest possible receptivity by repeating the words of the subject in an auxiliary ego sense, by repeating the feelings the subject has, feelings of mourning, of joy, or resentment, anger or hostility. By giving the subject the experience that the double next to him feels the same feelings, by actually giving him that feeling of identity which we discussed before, the discovery that there is someone in space who is not himself but still entirely like himself, a double who knows everything about him because he is himself; who at times reveals certain parts of him which he is not able to reveal himself and so represents an indispensable component of his psyche, the link is established. The double is the beginning of a society. He has always been unconsciously aware that he exists, but it is only in the double situation of the psychodrama that he is brought into the full reality of daylight. This phase of whole identity is only one of the phases characteristic for the double experience. At times a second phase sets in, the double systematically and consciously elaborates the feelings which the subject has by multiplying their intensity or their quantity. If the subject is somewhat sad, the ego becomes double depressed. If the subject is glad about a relation, the ego magnifies it further, far beyond the admission of the subject. This phase of extending the subject's feeling levels has two purposes. On one hand it is meant to bring the subject to agreement with these extensions and to stimulate additional dimensions, on the other hand to provoke him to halt the double's apperceptions. Another phase is one in which the double becomes highly directive and bold in remarks and actions. The subject may show considerable aggression and resentment and produce counter aggression in which the double immediately joins with a permissive and cooperative attitude as if nothing had happened. Still another phase occurs when the double antici-

pates the subject's actions in the future — what he will do tomorrow. The deepest and rarest phase in the double experience is when the subject loses the feeling that the double is another, he is like in a "double trance." The threshold* between them is gone, he and the double are one. This may well be the basis for the mystic idea of oneness and for the mediumistic experiences described by psychic researchers.

THE PROBLEM OF VALIDATION AND DOUBLE "CONTROL"

In order to estimate the validity of double experience the following experimental design was set up: The double situation with Linda was electrically and stenographically recorded, both verbal and action elements. Immediately after the session the double situation with Linda was replayed in the presence of the subject and every item presented to her for evaluation. In the process analysis two hundred and twelve items, either verbal or action elements, were counted. Every verbal repartee of the double was considered a unit, and every action was considered as a unit, whether it was accompanied by words or not. In the course of replaying the record the subject warmed up again to her own attitude during the session and scored the responses of the double as correct (agreement), incorrect (disagreement), or probable. The score was 82% correct, 10% probable, and 8% inaccurate. By this method an objective estimation as to the accuracy of double experience was possible.

Another design which proved useful was the introduction of a double near the stage as a control to the double in action. The double control, a trained auxiliary ego, attempted to warm up to the subject, a sort of mute audience double. As the production went on she scored the actual double's responses as to agreement, disagreement or probability with her own. She scored on a sheet of paper the difference between her own double experience and the experience of the double actor on the stage. A 68% agreement between the double actor and the double control was found.

* Subjects often express resentment at the double situation. This resentment is the greater the closer the auxiliary ego comes to crossing this threshold, reaching a full duplication of many of the subject's carefully concealed experiences. It is like an unexpected intrusion; the subject is frequently determined to keep the truth to herself, alone, "the truth hurts."