

Earl Koile



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The Magic Shop: The Therapist Masquerades As a Shopkeeper

In its simplest psychodramatic form, the Magic Shop is a place where protagonists, the principal characters in a psychodramatic scene, might pursue something they wish to acquire or to give up. We became intrigued in psychotherapy groups with the potential for psychological change in the Magic Shop. This occurs through bartering and risk-taking in settling on the price to pay.

THE MAGIC SHOP OPENS

THE SHOP IS A WONDERFUL PLACE for psychological growth where the therapist (shopkeeper) sets the stage, without drawing the line between fantasy and reality, where even the leader can assume that “wishes are horses and beggars do ride.” Important elements in setting the stage include creating a climate of adventure and a community-like atmosphere in the Shop, making clear the negotiating power of the shopper and highlighting the nature of the Shop’s psychological wares. There are not many basic rules except that people pay for things they want to get or things they want to get rid of. They negotiate through the shopkeeper or through a representative of the shopkeeper who is a participant in the group. They do not trade and bargain with each other in the Shop. People come alone or in groups, browsing is encouraged. Transactions are open for others to watch and perhaps participate in. People bring behavioral samples of the kinds of things they want to purchase or to dispose of. The shopkeeper or the Shop’s representatives may have samples of the psychological wares for which people barter.

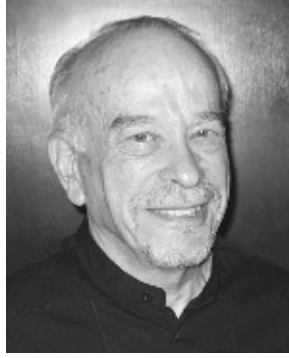
The psychological wares of the Shop are created out of real experience and brought about through fantasy, wishes, desire, faith, and hope. The products that people seek are custom-made. It is extremely important that each person get something that fits uniquely, or gets rid of something distasteful or modifies it constructively. The Magic Shop is a place of barter. Transactions within the Shop may become complex since shoppers often stay to bargain for something quite different from desires initially expressed.

Lucia Albino Gilbert

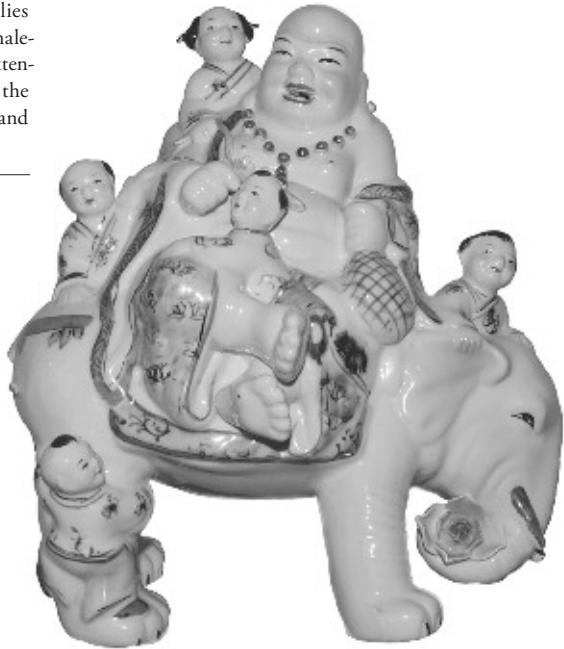


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MURRAY SCHER holds the PhD in Counseling Psychology from the University of Texas at Austin. His major professional interest for many years was the intersection of the male gender role and psychotherapy. He has published and presented widely on that subject. A Past President of the Academy he is a regular and sought after presenter of process groups for the Academy.



AN ILLUSTRATION

Four people walk into the Shop and Jared is the first to indicate an interest in shopping and bartering. Jared was a handsome professional man in his late twenties.

Shopkeeper: Good afternoon.

Jared: I don't know whether you have any of this, but I want to shop for some kind of anti-control appliance. I heard that you could get that kind of thing here at this Shop. In other words, I'm not sure how you can go about getting that, but so much of the time I want to be in charge and control and to get certain things, and I end up not being satisfied with what I've structured or what I've set up or tried to accomplish with so much control. I just seem to feel like less of a person and I'm not at all happy about that.

Shopkeeper: Anti-control, huh? Well, we've got that. We don't call it that. There are some other kinds of things with it. You know, maybe you can give us a sample of what it is you've got. It sounds to me like you really want to get rid of something instead of just getting something.

Jared: Yeah, yeah.

Shopkeeper: Maybe you could give us a little sample of what it is you want to get rid of. I wouldn't want you to take a thing out of here without really knowing what the product is, and I sure don't want to take something from you without knowing what I'm getting. The stuff that I take from you, nobody else can use in that form, and we have a new ecological program in which we can recycle this into something that's usable, you see.

Jared: Let me set up a situation for you.

Shopkeeper: Well, don't set it up so much as show me. Well, you can set it up but I'd like to see it operable.

Jared: I'll give you a sample of it, but I just have to kind of set up a situation where I am very much in control.

Shopkeeper: Yes, well you've already started.

Jared: I'm getting the feel for it. Let's say I really want to obtain someone's or a particular group's approval, you know what I mean. And that's really important to me. And when it's extremely important and I'm unsure whether they like me or whether they dislike me, I get extremely nervous in their presence and it's very hard for me to just be spontaneous and just be where I am because a lot of times I feel very distant from them, very nervous, in control and anxious.

Shopkeeper: So you end up looking bad when you're really trying to look good.

Jared: That's right.

Shopkeeper: You're trying to get rid of looking bad and pick up some looking good. Is there anybody here that you need to impress or to look good for?

Jared: Yeah, well I think maybe the shopkeeper.

Shopkeeper: You need to impress me maybe. How would you impress me?

Jared: Okay, I'd probably ...

Shopkeeper: Show me, don't tell me. See if you can show me. You've already shown me a little, but see if you can show me another way. (Pause) What are you doing now?

Jared: I'm thinking about how I'd do it and a lot of ways occurred to me. You know, like I might start talking to you about a book that I've read and I'd see whether you'd read that book.

Shopkeeper: And the idea of that would be to impress me that you'd read it?

Jared: No, not that I'd read it, but that I understand it or know something about it.

Shopkeeper: That you really are not dumb by any means.

Jared: Yeah.

Shopkeeper: Are you kind of intelligent?

Jared: Yeah.

Shopkeeper: You really are?

Jared: Yeah, I feel that way.

Shopkeeper: But you don't know that I feel that way.

Jared: Uh, well I don't know what I want from you. It's like all I want to do is almost, uh, give something to you and have you like me. And you liking me is geared toward the thing I would give you. And I don't know what that would be, but I would make several attempts at it like telling you something about what's happening with me.

Shopkeeper: But if I didn't need anything, what could you do?

Jared: If you didn't need anything from me?

Shopkeeper: See I've got a whole shop full of the stuff I'd need.

Jared: Yeah. Uh, I would try and create a situation where you would need something.

Shopkeeper: How might you do that?

Jared: Uh, by exploring, by asking you questions and stuff, kind of getting your interest.

Shopkeeper: What if you ended up finding out nothing? That I'd just be straightforward and tell you about all that but that I still didn't need you.

Jared: You just didn't need me at all?

Shopkeeper: Um hum. I might like you, but I just didn't need you. Then what would you feel?

Jared: Well, why would you like me if you didn't need something that I had to give you?

Shopkeeper: Because you're you. You know, I might like you despite the fact that you think you've got something to give me.

Jared: Gee, that's hard for me to believe. I mean I really have a hard time believing that.

Shopkeeper: Now you're showing me something else you need or that you want to put in the Shop.

Jared: I don't see what it is.

Shopkeeper: You're sort of giving me two things. One, "I'm a very egocentric fellow." Two: "Everyone needs me. You know, I can't imagine somebody not needing me."

Jared: I can imagine people not needing me, but you know, they don't need me, they like me because I'm interesting to be with.

Shopkeeper: Then you're saying, "I can't imagine somebody just liking me without needing me or without having some reason."

Jared: Yeah, that they could put their finger on.

Shopkeeper: And most of the reasons I know and I can supply.

Jared: Yeah.

Shopkeeper: Okay. That's a pretty good sample of control. In fact, that's a very good sample of control. We've developed over time some facility for discovering what the customer wants, even though the customer may not come in for it. The customer may be coming in for something else. So see, we have to discover what it is you really do want. Not that we disbelieve you. We do believe you, but there is more, that we have to discover. It sounds like now you are saying "I need to be liked, but I also need to be in control of what I do such that people will like me, because that's the only way I can be sure or trusted or believed." Does this make any sense?

Jared: Yeah, it does.

Shopkeeper: So maybe anti-control is just one facet of it. There's another little facet. The anti-control thing you're talking about then would be, "How could I let people feel however they feel about me, and kind of be whatever I can be, and they can decide if they are interested in me?" I'll tell you what I'm tinkering with. We have a... crazy thing... and we just came onto it fairly recently in the laboratory and it's not fully ready for the public, but I'm kind of confident enough to try it. We don't have a trade name for it yet, so we just use it by its generic label. We call it self-liking. And what we're about to discover is that if a person can have enough self-liking and enough self-trust and we don't know yet what blend goes for each person, that some real funny things happen in terms of the dissolution of this need for control. And so we've got our laboratory people still working on it. We're just not sure that it will do everything that we hope it will do, but I might consider making a deal with you. And people often think they've already got it or too much of it—this kind of self-liking, self-trust blend. And the way we package it, we have self-liking at the top and self-trust at the bottom and you can't get one without the other. I don't know whether this would appeal to you or not. I don't know if you have any interest in that.

Jared: No, it sounds like I would be interested.

Shopkeeper: Well okay, kind of play with that and while you're sort of thinking about whether that's relevant you might think about the most you can afford to pay, knowing I'll probably double that amount in some way. Okay, would you kind of sit with that and maybe we can work up a deal here in a minute.

As illustrated by Jared, perhaps the most important part of the shopping phase is the process of discovering whether the shoppers really want what they say they want. Perhaps, through exploring what they want and what they wish to do with it, they may discover that instead of coming in to get rid of, for example, their extreme controlling behavior, that they might end up working toward acquiring

on-the-spot experiences with others in the Shop, which could lead to a higher level of sensitivity.

In the Magic Shop all the usual rules are changed. Shoppers are free to seek unfair bargains, to be calculating, or not to be at all spontaneous. Yet, the lifting of the bans of the group's norms sometimes leads to hilarious behavior. The quiet, frightened, shy member may come into the Shop aggressively seeking to buy "assertiveness," which is obviously there. The task of the shopkeeper, the shopper and other participants who may be shoppers, consultants, trainees or other resource people becomes one of sampling different kinds of behavior associated with assertiveness and its opposite. The shopkeeper may take the lead, and usually the shoppers follow in creating a climate of risk. Since anyone can opt out without censure, spontaneity becomes the most appealing behavior: each shopper has power to barter or not to barter. In the Magic Shop the customer may not always be right but has a choice of whether or not to make a deal.

There are shoplifters aplenty around the place. They do not get off free. Often they are so pleased with themselves that they confess and want to pay something. The other customers participate in determining what prices shoplifters might reasonably be charged. Usually the shoplifters are quite willing to show what they got and how they got it. Some turn out to be skillful consultants in helping other people in the shop discover what psychological wares they need.

While the Magic Shop is not a repair shop, it does operate on the principle that some repair or recycling of usable merchandise is a worthwhile enterprise. For example, excessive guilt sometimes is recycled into a reasonable amount of conscience. Customers can come for whatever psychological or attitudinal attributes they desire to purchase, or to get rid of things they don't like about themselves.

INEZ AND THE ROSE: AN ILLUSTRATION

It was in a weekend marathon, late Saturday night, shortly after the "Magic Shop" opened. Inez walked into the Shop and sat down facing the shopkeeper and opened with, "I want to buy a thornless rose. What is the price?" Usually in the Magic Shop shoppers are more tentative, less certain about what they want. Moreover they are less direct in asking about price, often showing temerity, as though it were a delicate subject. Not so with Inez.

Inez was a woman perhaps in her early or middle forties. Her husband had died after an extended illness two years earlier. She had been in a deep depression about a year ago but now seemed to have a brighter outlook and to possess a security and the confidence of a person who was in a rather good place with herself. In the group she had not been especially talkative but was direct in her unvarnished reactions to others. At this stage her motto seemed to be "Ask no quarter; give no quarter!" She did not go out of her way to shoot people down. She did give evidence of some difficulty accepting compliments from others. She also was more inclined to accept liking and affection from someone with whom she had experienced conflict or some negative sort of an encounter. Her ritual seemed

to be based on the notion that she had to fight with people before she could love them, that she had to be certain people saw some of her more negative feelings and the possibility that she could and would express anger, and that she might be unpredictable. After such opportunities to show herself more negatively, she seemed open to liking others, allowing herself to be liked, to sharing affection, and to letting others see her tenderness.

The shopkeeper was surprised by Inez' request. She had asked for little for herself and she had shown a tendency to expect things to be difficult, to expect life to be stormy, to take the bitter with the sweet and all that. Why she would want a rose without thorns was puzzling. She seemed to put thorns on flowers that would not normally have them. The shopkeeper's usual glibness at the beginning of a transaction, especially when the shop had just opened, faltered; failed would be a better word. He was intrigued, but perplexed. What was the symbol of the rose without a thorn? Her confidence and certainty made the shopkeeper not want to ask but to try to go with some form of symbolism, but still, his own need prevailed and he asked, "What might you do with such a rose?" Her reply, "Enjoy it." Her reply made sense at one level and yet it was a most unusual request and the beginning of what might be a most unusual transaction in the shop, for most shoppers seek psychological wares. Without knowing why, the shopkeeper decided that this request should be taken seriously and that something significant would be lost in excessive efforts to understand the psychological implications of the thornless rose. And yet the shopkeeper was baffled about how to proceed.

Inez was serious but at the same time she seemed especially pleased with herself. There was an element of taking on the shopkeeper in her direct and somewhat challenging manner. But there was also sincerity in it. "I am willing to pay a large price because the gift would mean a lot to me." Did she say "gift" instead of "item"? She did, but apparently unwittingly. Still, what should one do with this transaction? By this time other group members had come into the shop and sat down; others were milling around since the shop often takes on the form of a community gathering place.

In the Magic Shop, we often take a product sample to discover what a person would be like either with or without the psychological characteristic this person wanted to buy or sell. In this instance, such a step did not seem relevant and the shopkeeper was not sure why. There was a festive element in Inez' behavior combined with the seriousness, and one wanted to discover a way to be in it with her and yet proceed in the Magic Shop tradition. The idea of a rose without a thorn was still a puzzle, partly because Inez seemed to be a person who would not normally want to buy anything easy, or who would want to avoid her thorns. After some light banter the transaction was referred to other shoppers who were asked for consultation and advice on how to proceed.

The group concluded, finally, Inez should have something somewhat similar to her request, a rose without a thorn, but the shopkeeper was perplexed about how to price it. The price usually involves a person taking a risk and giving up something, or taking on something, that would represent a certain chance in

trying new behavior or in getting rid of an old behavior pattern that is regarded as self-defeating. Again the notion of what to charge was thrown open to some of the consultants and members of the Shop community. Finally, someone suggested that with her rose without thorns she be given thorns without a rose. The shopkeeper knew immediately what he wanted to do. He did not want to give her one rose without thorns in the transaction; neither did he want to give her a stem with thorns only. She had had enough of those.

Shopkeeper: “I cannot let you have one thornless rose but I will let you have one dozen thornless roses for you to enjoy, keep, give away, or use as you see fit.” Now it was Inez’ turn to look puzzled.

Inez: “I can’t have just one rose?”

Shopkeeper: “No, but you may have a dozen.

Inez: “What is the price?”

Shopkeeper: “The price is that there is no price. You must accept them freely from me, from the Shop, from the community of shoppers.”

Inez: (Speaking softly but without hesitation) “I accept.” Then she added: “This is not an easy price for me to pay.”

Shopkeeper: “Yes, I know.”

In the group then she became known as “the keeper of the roses.” There was a special bond that developed among those who seemed to understand the roses and what they meant. Some people would want a rose from Inez and would ask and she gave freely. A few had already received one of Inez’ roses and knew it. Other participants would ask for a rose in some conditional way as though to barter, as though not quite deserving, and they never got one of Inez’ roses. For the condition under which Inez received her roses was one of no condition, simply take or receive. It was this condition then that she implicitly imposed upon others, the condition of no condition. Some members at the end of the group were still puzzling over why they could not have one of her roses. And some of them earlier had received a rose from Inez, given freely without conditions, but did not know it. They could never become the keepers of the roses—or the givers of the roses.

CLOSING

Fantasy is a prime source of creative and innovative thinking and behavior (Cox, 1969). Fantasy can break us out of the prisons of conformity, fixed and rigid ways of thinking and being, and can lift us to new ideas and more imaginative alternatives in dealing with “real” problems and in arriving at solutions and resolutions. Fantasy not only allows but also nourishes thoughts and feelings that may be against the rules or represent forbidden territory. As Inez had shown us, in fantasy the unreal, the impossible, and the ridiculous may become natural parts of our private worlds.

In the Magic Shop the therapist can offer help to everybody through the use of fantasy. This vehicle gives therapists power, much power. Moreover, they can enable the customers, the shoppers, to discover their own power and how to use it. The time for the Magic Shop might be in the early, middle, or late stages of an on-going therapy group. In the process group version of the Magic Shop, it is light and heavy, both spoof and serious effort toward self-understanding, attitude, and behavior change.

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COMMENTARY

This clinically imaginative article immediately inspired me to have some of my colleagues at the “Magic Shop” where we teach group psychotherapy in Washington, DC—The National Group Psychotherapy Institute—share their thoughts about this evocative piece with VOICES readers. The range of theoretical perspective and expertise of our multidisciplinary faculty allows us to teach and influence both our institute members as well as one another. In reading this article, I realized that the process-based attention paid to our faculty interactions as a group—in planning and presenting each institute weekend—has repeatedly created opportunities to “barter” for the acquisition of needed skills and newer approaches to our own group practices. It also provides assistance in trading/processing the disposition of troublesome affective blocks and other anxious impediments to creative thinking.

The immediacy of the engagement and specificity of dialogue in this article represent a way of sharing our work that is not seen frequently enough. The following commentaries view “The Magic Shop” through the lenses of several current approaches to psychodynamic group psychotherapy, adding to the richness of this fine piece.

—Hallie Lovett, PhD

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I was intrigued by the metaphorical use of a Magic Shop to represent a therapy group. In the Magic Shop, we are invited to barter and take risks, but also to engage in adventurous and creative play. These elements do indeed capture group dynamics, and the author’s willingness to take a risk in presenting a group in such a creative manner invites me to play in my response. I plan to take latitude with how I build upon the foundation constructed here, especially as I imagined other “shoppers” and their relating to the protagonists presented here.

In my Magic Shop, which is constructed from the Modern Analytic Group model, there are a few rules, or a contract that (a) serves as a guide to the shoppers about what is expected of them (e.g. to put thought and feelings into words, to use relationships therapeutically, and so on); (b) sets the frame (e.g. arrive on time, attend all sessions, refrain

from abusive communication); and (c) provides a lens through which the shopkeeper and shoppers can observe cooperation and resistance to cooperation. The contract provides a container through which intense psychological and emotional “wares” can be exchanged. The shopkeeper uses whatever methods are available to bring shoppers into exchanges with one another; the currency is emotional communication, and the barriers to currency exchange are identified, studied, and analyzed until they are no longer needed. Here I might deviate from the shopkeeper in this paper, in that I would not only allow, but encourage exchanges directly between shoppers, not only through me, the shopkeeper. In this way, I think of the Magic Shop as more of a Magic Flea Market or Bazaar, where everyone has something to sell, as well as purchase, trade, or barter. In my Magic Shop, however, the wares cannot be initially seen. They might be imagined, feared, or wished for, but they do not materialize until the currency of emotional communication is exchanged.

Group therapy of the kind I imagine in my Magic Shop is dynamic living in the moment. Group members demonstrate their characteristic ways of relating to others through their interactions with the other members and the leader and, therefore, also demonstrate what facilitates and impedes their establishing and maintaining intimate relationships. As the Shopkeeper encouraged with Jared, we want our group members to show us, as much as tell us, about how they relate to important figures in their lives. What unfolds in a dynamic therapy group is a real life sample of our members’ relational lives, with the accompanying feelings and thoughts about what is taking place. As therapists, we want our members to take an equal percentage of the total talking time, to identify their thoughts and feelings, to put them into words, and ultimately to direct them toward other members in the group. In these exchanges, what our patients have been telling us in their individual therapy sessions comes to life before our eyes in the group. We are not just delving into the personal histories of our members in group, we are watching their histories become reenacted in the exchanges in the group (Ormont, 1995). In essence, we are bringing each member’s object representations into the lateral transferences in the group.

So, back to the Magic Shop and Jared. Through the technique of bridging (Ormont, 1997), we might attempt to facilitate interactions between Jared and other members—who might have the same shopping list (i.e. anti-control devices). As the Shopkeeper, I might ask Susan, “Why is Jared so intent on buying an anti-control device?” Susan, through projection of her own need for control, tells us, “Because he knows that his need for control pushes others away, but he is afraid of being hurt if he lets his guard down, even for a moment, so I don’t think the device is going to materialize for him yet.” We then turn to Phil and ask, “Who could help Jared find the device?” Phil tells us that “Glenn might have one to give away, and if he isn’t ready to part with it, he should!” Mary, who is witnessed nodding in agreement, is asked, “Do you agree?” “Yes, he reminds me so much of my father, who would never take a position on anything. Anytime you asked him for guidance, he would just say, ‘I’m sure you can figure it out.’ I mean really! Like a spineless jellyfish! Glenn, you are a nice guy but you really do frustrate me sometimes.”

We want to establish a group climate where members—through emotional exchanges, sharing of thoughts and feelings, and directing them to one another—provide opportunities for each member to confront figures from their object world in the lateral transferences that develop in the group. It is through this process that our members demonstrate and discover their maturational needs, observe each other’s resistances to intimacy, and—through study of resistance—ultimately understand and resolve the underlying fears that fuel the resistances. In this process, the psychological and emotional “wares” are not immediately apparent but—through time and engagement in the above process—gradually, perhaps magically, materialize with unfolding study and understanding. A leader-centered approach can have some benefits, but seems to lose the opportunity that group most provides—to bring to life in the room all the characters in one’s life. We see this process a little more in the second group with Inez, where her desire and fear of intimacy is captured in the metaphor of the rose (with or without thorns), and that something

so beautiful, fragrant, and yet delicate can be given and obtained without cost, without stipulation or condition. In this group, the Shopkeeper seems more facilitator than director, consulting other “shoppers,” and bringing them into emotional exchanges with Inez.

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— Steven Van Wagoner, PhD, CGP,
FAGPA

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I reviewed this article as a member of a large group team, in which, for sixteen years, I have been a large-group facilitator. Our large groups at Washington School of Psychiatry consist of all of the Institute members as well as the large group team consisting of five members. Thus each large group meeting has thirty to fifty members who attend each session. These large groups are an endless source of both mystery and satisfaction.

For me, large group extends the depth and breadth of what occurs in a therapy group. It creates yet another system in which we struggle with our inevitable embeddedness as humans. The large group I attended at the November AAP meetings was a pleasure to watch. This large group has a real sense of community, and it is clear that the connections extend over many years. It serves as a model for large group in that it has a long and ongoing sense of familiarity only possible over many sessions of the large group. How long has it been meeting? I assume decades!

Large group sustains my hope for humanity: each session unfolds, with larger and larger numbers of participants working toward finding their voice and making connection with each other, moving from the position of isolate or singleton, relinquishing anxiety and plunging into the deep and confusing waters of large group membership. As I observe each of us in the group grapple with the inevitable fear, terror, depersonalization and isolation, my hope is renewed. We can communicate; we can talk ourselves into membership with each other.

From my perspective as a large- group facilitator, The Magic Shop was a lovely metaphor for therapy groups. It offers a playful yet meaningful explication of what can be found in the Shop (group). The shopkeeper is wise and the shopper is articulate, though not necessarily accurate about what he or she needs. While the story is engaging, it also captures the ongoing dilemmas of group therapy: Are we treating persons in the group or are we treating subgroups or are we treating the group? And, what about the co-creation of all of our experiences? What do the members offer each other? What happens when the designated leader spends an extended period of time on one member and what happens when the entire group does the same thing?

Perhaps what is missing from the Magic Shop is the presence of co-creation in which the entire group is part of the action. In this age of complexity theory and dynamic systems theory (Galtzer-Levy, 2002, 2004, Coburn, 2002, 2007), it is difficult to imagine individual responses without contextualizing them within the complex emotional life of the entire group. Thus, the group members all contribute to Jared’s search for something for his individual self, even though it is difficult for them to imagine Jared’s social, cultural and biological worlds. An alternate model accepts the role of asymmetry of leader and members at the same time, paradoxically, and does not leave the leader in a position to dictate whether Inez, for example, should have one or many roses. If the leader decides, it suggests that the wisdom resides within the shopkeeper-leader, though the members might aid him or her. Advancements in attachment theory, neuropsychology, and recent discoveries such as mirror neurons (Siegal, D., 2006) make our inevitable intersubjectivity increasingly obvious. Current and future group leaders must address whether behaving as

though not embedded in the group system—captured along with the group members in something larger than the individual self—is a healthy stance.

I enjoyed *The Magic Shop* because it helped me to reevaluate, yet again, my own thinking about being a group leader and about what constitutes a good and effective group treatment.

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— Rosemary Segalla, PhD

* * *

After reading this article, I took a walk in my neighborhood of Old Town Alexandria, VA where I practice, to reflect. A haiku poem emerged by the time I got home.

GROUP

My phi-los-o-fee
Show & tell—rinse and repeat
Thee/me/we will be.

I appreciate multiple theoretical perspectives on the practice of group therapy. All approaches have some basic principles, techniques and values in common. While psychodrama is a mainstream approach to group therapy in many parts of the world, the discipline is not as popular in the United States. I was delighted to experience the action-oriented creativity and human richness of the psychodrama tradition through the “as if” technique of the Magic Shop, designed to engage the group members in transformative play. And I took pleasure in thinking of Lacan’s use of metaphor as both container and pathway to the creative unconscious (Fink, 1995). The first vignette, about buying and relinquishing, brought to mind the discourse about the contemporary analytic notions of “bad fits,” and the secondary gains they maintain. Stewart Aledort’s innovative group model based on the omnipotent child fantasy is another example of this discourse. The authors’ narrative also suggests a therapist/shopkeeper style of attunement and empathic communication. Further, the technique is embedded in the authors’ existential bent towards clients’ freedom of choice, and the acknowledgement of the responsibilities that go with choice. These clinicians’ breadth of knowledge and skill, integrating different clinical traditions into a personal style of group practice, inspires by its example.

In fact, the example highlights the authors’ suggestion that this Magic Shop exercise might be used in groups that are not necessarily psychodrama-based, and conducted in an attuned way at any point along the group’s therapeutic journey. This attitude gives clinicians some dramatic license to take a detour into the creative territory of psychodrama technique, similar to the modern analytic pragmatism of considering technique relative to its effectiveness. I love shopping, and I could see myself entering into the “as if” world of this Magic Shop with gusto. I’m a bit embarrassed to admit I wept reading the

rose-without-thorns vignette, though comforted in remembering the centrality of affect in all processes of psychological change, including my own. I believe that these creative exercises usually have time-released influence over the life of a group, providing many opportunities for change through ongoing reflective discourse and exploration. From a strictly personal preference perspective, I find the intentional, directive function of the leader role in psychodrama too action-packed and therapist-centered for my style. So I most appreciated imagining the selective use of psychodrama technique within my own group therapy tradition. I am grateful to the authors for the sharing of their work.

REFERENCES

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—Robert Schulte, MSW

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This article was delightful to read—full of paradox, laced with both serious and playful ideas. The clinical examples helped to make the work come alive. The idea of commodities bought and sold across and within boundaries has the flavor of some ideas in systems theory. Thinking about my individual and group patients as part of, and embedded in, systems within larger systems (couples, families, professional organizations, etc.) provides me with a more expansive stage on which to do the work.

I did have difficulty, though, as I entered the Shop. The quality of magic began to take the form of “now I see it, now I don’t,” particularly with regard to the role of the shopkeeper/ group leader. I sensed a shopkeeper/therapist who was looking at his prospective customer/patient, rather than being with him, which led me to feel that the authors are describing a therapist-centered therapy rather than an intersubjective/relational one. In the last few decades much has been written about relational psychotherapies which dispute the notion that we therapists can hold ourselves separate from our patients. These therapies, founded on postmodern philosophies, claim that there is no one TRUTH. The therapist does not know. Knowledge is co-created within the relationship of (at least) two people. These relational therapies espouse approaches which consider that we are all, always, embedded in an intersubjective/relational field of mutuality and mutual influence. I come from this position. I view group members and therapists as more intrinsically embedded in a relational field than is described here. In the real world, as in therapy, shopkeepers/ therapists do need things from their customers/patients and are unavoidably influenced by them.

How can group members avoid trading with each other? Projections and projective identifications are our stocks in trade and are all around us. I was glad that the therapist sought the help of group members in the second clinical example. I wish she/he had expanded on that moment in the group process, for it was difficult for me to know the value the therapist places on this kind of mutuality.

The authors do thoroughly give fantasy its rightful place on the therapeutic stage. Fantasy opens the space for creativity, for imagining the unimaginable, for expanding our internal and external worlds—things all too devalued in our present society. I thank them for letting me into the Magic Shop.

—Mary Ann Dubner, PhD