

unconscious truths that lie behind the patient's gut-wrenching confession. Nothing is what it seems. No text without a subtext.

Nor does this mean that we can't write powerful dialogue in which desperate people try to tell the truth. It simply means that the most passionate moments must conceal an even deeper level.

CHINATOWN: Evelyn Mulwray cries out: "She's my sister and my daughter. My father and I . . ." But what she doesn't say is: "Please help me." Her anguished confession is in fact a plea for help. Subtext: "I didn't kill my husband; my father did . . . to possess my child. If you arrest me, he'll take her. Please help me." In the next beat Gittes says, "We'll have to get you out of town." An illogical reply that makes perfect sense. Subtext: "I've understood everything you've told me. I now know your father did it. I love you and I'm going to risk my life to save you and your child. Then I'm going after the bastard." All this is underneath the scene, giving us truthful behavior without phony "on the nose" dialogue, and what's more, without robbing the audience of the pleasure of insight.

STAR WARS: When Darth Vader offers Luke the chance to join him in running the universe, bringing "order to things," Luke's reaction is to attempt suicide. Again not a logical reaction, but one that makes perfect sense, for both Luke and the audience read Darth Vader's subtext: Behind "bring order to things" is the unspoken implication ". . . and enslave billions." When Luke attempts to kill himself, we read a heroic subtext: "I'll die before I'd join your evil enterprise."

Characters may say and do anything you can imagine. But because it's impossible for any human being to tell or act the complete truth, because at the very least there's always an unconscious dimension, the writer must layer in a subtext. And when the audience senses that subtext, the scene plays.

This principle also extends to the first-person novel, theatrical soliloquy, and direct-to-camera or voice-over narration. For if characters talk privately to us, that doesn't mean for a moment that they know the truth or are capable of telling it.

ANNIE HALL: When Alvy Singer (Woody Allen) speaks directly to the audience "confessing" his fears and inadequacies, he also lies, dissembles, cajoles, exaggerates, and rationalizes, all in a

self-deceived effort to win us over and convince himself his heart's in the right place.

Subtext is present even when a character is alone. For if no one else is watching us, we are. We wear masks to hide our true selves from ourselves.

Not only do individuals wear masks, but institutions do as well and hire public relations experts to keep them in place. Paddy Chayefsky's satire HOSPITAL cuts to the core of that truth. Hospital staffs all wear white and act as if professional, caring, and scientific. But if you've ever worked inside a medical institution, you know that greed and ego and a touch of madness are invisibly there. If you want to die, go to a hospital.

The constant duality of life is true even for the inanimate. In Robert Rossen's adaptation of Melville's BILLY BUDD a man-o-war rests in tropical waters at night. Uncountable stars gleam above, all magnificently reflected in a black, calm sea. A low, full moon trails its light from the horizon to the ship's prow. The limp sails tremble in the warm breezes. The cruel master-at-arms, Claggart (Robert Ryan) is holding watch. Billy (Terence Stamp) can't sleep, so he comes out on deck, stands at the gunnels with Claggart, and remarks on what a beautiful evening it is. Claggart answers, "Yes, Billy, yes, but remember, beneath that glittering surface is a universe of gliding monsters." Even Mother Nature wears her masks.

THE TECHNIQUE OF SCENE ANALYSIS

To analyze a scene you must slice into its pattern of behaviors at the levels of both text and subtext. Once properly examined, its flaws become vividly clear. Below is a five-step process designed to make a scene give up its secrets.

Step One: Define Conflict

First ask, who drives the scene, motivates it, and makes it happen? Any character or force might drive a scene, even an inanimate object or act of nature. Then look into both the text and subtext of this char-

acter or force, and ask: What does he (or it) want? Desire is always the key. Phrase this desire (or in the actor's idiom: scene objective) as an infinitive: such as, "to do this . . ." or "to get that . . ."

Next, look across the scene and ask: What forces of antagonism block this desire? Again, these forces may come from any level or combination. After identifying the source of antagonism, ask: What do the forces of antagonism want? This too is best expressed as an infinitive: "Not to do that . . ." or "To get this instead . . ." If the scene is well written, when you compare the set of phrases expressing the desires from each side, you'll see that they're in direct conflict—not tangential.

Step Two: Note Opening Value

Identify the value at stake in the scene and note its charge, positive or negative, at the opening of the scene. Such as: "Freedom. The protagonist is at the negative, a prisoner of his own obsessive ambition." Or: "Faith. The protagonist is at the positive, he trusts in God to get him out of this situation."

Step Three: Break the Scene into Beats

A beat is an exchange of action/reaction in character behavior. Look carefully at the scene's first action on two levels: outwardly, in terms of what the character seems to be doing, and, more important, look beneath the surface to what he is actually doing. Name this *subtextual action* with an active gerund phrase, such as "Begging." Try to find phrases that not only indicate action but touch the feelings of the character. "Pleading" for example, suggests a character acting with a sense of formality, whereas "Groveling at her feet" conveys a desperate servility.

The phrases that express the action in the subtext do not describe character activity in literal terms; they go deeper to name the character's essential action with emotive connotations.

Now look across the scene to see what reaction that action brought, and describe that reaction with an active gerund phrase. For example, "Ignoring the plea."

This exchange of action and reaction is a beat. As long as it continues, Character A is "Groveling at her feet" but Character B is "Ignoring the plea," it's one beat. Even if their exchange repeats a number of times, it's still one and the same beat. A new beat doesn't occur until behavior clearly changes.

If, for example, Character A's groveling changed to "Threatening to leave her" and in reaction Character B's ignoring changed to "Laughing at the threat," then the scene's second beat is "Threatening/Laughing" until A and B's behavior changes for a third time. The analysis then continues through the scene, parsing it into its beats.

Step Four: Note Closing Value and Compare with Opening Value

At the end of the scene, examine the value-charged condition of the character's situation and describe it in positive/negative terms. Compare this note to the one made in Step Two. If the two notations are the same, the activity between them is a nonevent. Nothing has changed, therefore nothing has happened. Exposition may have been passed to the audience, but the scene is flat. If, on the other hand, the value has undergone change, then the scene has turned.

Step Five: Survey Beats and Locate Turning Point

Start from the opening beat and review the gerund phrases describing the actions of the characters. As you trace action/reaction to the end of the scene, a shape or pattern should emerge. In a well-designed scene, even behaviors that seem helter-skelter will have an arc and a purpose. In fact, in such scenes, it's their careful design that makes the beats feel random. Within the arc locate the moment when the major gap opens between expectation and result, turning the scene to its changed end values. This precise moment is the Turning Point.

An analysis of the design of the following two scenes illustrates this technique.