THE ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF PSYCHODRAMA AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO RADICAL THEATRE

DAVID KENT AND CATHY CARTER
Tallahassee, Florida

INTRODUCTION

Some contemporary theatre groups, particularly those identified with the radical theatre movement, bear a striking resemblance to a group therapeutic process called psychodrama. Although psychodrama is currently a modality in group therapy, many psychodramatic techniques and exercises are used by radical theatre groups, either as their presentational form or for the purpose of actor training. Because of my interest in radical theatre, I will investigate the history of psychodrama and compare the methods and goals of psychodramatists with the activities and purposes of certain radical theatre groups.

The history of psychodrama is essentially equivalent to the biography of its founder, Jacob Levy Moreno. Since a comprehensive description of Moreno's life would fill volumes, I will present only highlights of his career. I will further limit my discussion of psychodrama to a report of its development and current use rather than attempt a critical analysis of its use in therapy or theatre.

Radical theatre will refer to those non-commercial contemporary theatre groups which adhere to collective creation and purport to effect cultural change as well as entertain their audiences. These groups are called by such names as radical theatre, guerilla theatre, street theatre and people's theatre.

For their special contributions to this study, my appreciation is extended to Jim Enneis, Director of Psychodrama at St. Elizabeths Hospital; Dr. Robert Siroka, Director, Institute for Sociotherapy; and Dr. Leon Fine, University of Oregon.

INCEPTION

Psychodrama had its inception in the Theatre of Spontaneity originated by Moreno.[1] It had two distinct phases; (1) the spontaneity theatre for children which was begun in 1911, and (2) the Stegreiftheater, a spontaneity theatre for adults which was begun in 1922. Moreno, a student of philosophy at the University of Vienna (1910-1912), began staging written plays with children and adolescents in the Vienna Meadow Gardens in 1909.[2] His interest in creativity led him to encourage the children to act out spontaneously their

own problems. This developed into a children's theatre for spontaneity where the first recorded psychodramatic sessions were produced. Moreno reports being greatly influenced by the children from whom he learned to see life with a freshness free from fixed cultural notions. This ability to see life in a "primordial" manner remained a basic approach in all his work.

In the early 1920s, Moreno developed the Theater of Spontaneity (das stegreiftheater) for adults. He was motivated to begin a theatre because he felt theatre generally had moved away from its primordial form and had become highly distorted and rigid. He wanted to return theatre to its most basic form and provide man with a kind of dramatic religion.

The stage was designed to symbolize the spontaneously creative self, free to move in any given direction, so central staging with multi-levels was used. This permitted the actors freedom to move in and out or up and down without any barriers between the performers and the audience. The director played an important role in helping the actor remove the blocks which prevented his creativity. He prompted ideas, warmed up his actors to the ideas, and shared his enthusiasm with them. He sometimes arranged scenes but he never attempted to hide his activity from the audience. Masks were cut and painted, costumes were improvised from simple materials, and simple settings were prepared—all before the audience. The actors were chosen and the sequence of actions was discussed before the drama began. The production was created collectively; however, the skill of the director played an important part in the success of the production.

MORENO'S PHILOSOPHY

In order to appreciate fully Moreno's theatre, it is necessary to understand his concept of "self." The core of the self, according to Moreno, is spontaneity and its release can be compared to nuclear energy on the physical plane. Moreno's purpose is to reach the self in order to release all its creative energy. Moreno believes that on a social plane the self expands by "retrojection," which is a process of receiving ideas and feelings from other persons and identifying them with one's own, thereby adding strength to the self. He believes that when this process is highly developed the person becomes a genius. A man of genius understands the needs of the times because his highly developed social self sees what is happening. He is able to read between the lines, see behind the personal masks, and perceive the realities behind social illusions. Moreno's self-expansion theory led him to develop the role reversal techniques which allow one person to see from another's point of view.

Moreno believes that there is a relationship between the idea of the human self and the idea of the universal self or God. The self, described as a cluster of roles, reaches out beyond the skin of the organism to the interpersonal realm. Man must be helped to expand his self and develop his spontaneity so

that he can effectively use his intelligence and enlightened emotions to gain mastery of the universe. "But the expansion of the self from the plane of the individual organism to the cosmic plane of ruler of the universe cannot be imagined to be a process of cold engineering. It will be a realization process of, by and through the self, a movement from the lower plane to a superior plane, the time for each movement equaling that of a historical epoch."[3]

Moreno saw the creative spark in man which he wanted to fan into a light for man's life. He began by fanning his own creativity. He discovered that his spontaneity grew stale when he could not see its development. Secondly, he discovered that spontaneity can be learned. These principles formed a basis for later work in theatre and therapy. The need to become aware of one's own spontaneity resulted in mirroring techniques in which a person sees himself played by others. Other techniques were developed by Moreno to teach people how to become more spontaneous. The theatre became his laboratory and offered unlimited possibilities for spontaneity research on the experimental level.

CULTURAL INFLUENCES

Moreno fancied himself as a revolutionary, bringing salvation to the human robots of a materialistic age:

> My vision of the theatre was modelled after the idea of the spontaneously creative self. But the idea of a spontaneous and creative self was deeply discredited and thrown into oblivion at the time when the *idee fixé* urged me to fight its adversaries and bring the self back to the consciousness of mankind, using every ounce of persuasion and drama which I could evoke. The Vienna of 1910 was one of the display grounds of the three forms of materialism which has become since the undisputed world master of our age; the economic materialism of Marx, the psychological materialism of Freud, and the technological materialism, however contrary to each other, had tacitly one common denominator, a deep fear and disrespect, almost a hatred against the spontaneous, creative self (which should not be mixed up with individual genius, one of its many representations).[4]

Moreno's Theatre of Spontaneity faced enormous problems. Individuals in the audiences were unable to appreciate true spontaneity. They were conditioned to rely upon cultural patterns rather than trust their own spontaneity. "Therefore, when true spontaneity was presented to them in the Stregreiftheater either they suspected it to be well rehearsed and an attempt to fool them, or, if a scene was poorly played they considered that as a sign that spontaneity does not work."[5] Moreno felt that the survival of his theatre would require a cultural revolution.

Moreno was further discouraged when he saw his best actors falling into established patterns:

> The climax of the difficulty I encountered however, was when I saw my best pupils flirting with the cliché even when acting extemporaneously and finally turning away from the theatre of spontaneity and going to the legitimate stage or becoming movie actors. Faced with this dilemma I turned 'temporarily' to the therapeutic theatre, a strategic decision which probably saved the psychodramatic movement from oblivion. Hundred-percent spontaneity in a therapeutic theatre was easier to advocate; the esthetic imperfections and incongruities a mental patient might show on the stage were not only more easily tolerated but expected and often warmly welcomed. The actors were now turned into auxiliary egos and they too, in their therapeutic function, were accepted in the nudity of the natural talent without the borrowed perfectionism of the theatre.[6]

DEVELOPMENT OF GROUP PSYCHOTHERAPY AND SOCIOMETRY

Psychodrama grew out of the Theatre of Spontaneity which originally had nothing to do with therapy. Concurrent with the development of psychodrama, Moreno was laying the groundwork for group psychotherapy. He formulated a plan to help an alienated class of prostitutes in Vienna run self-help groups.[7] He did not try to reform them but focused on the dynamic factors within their groups as a means of helping them realize their personal goals. In 1916, Moreno began work in Mitterndorf with Italian peasants who had been forced to relocate. He proposed a form of group therapy to help the refugees adapt to their new environment. These two projects provided an opportunity for the development of sociometric group analysis techniques.

Moreno came to the United States in 1925, seeking a more fertile ground for his exploration. He began the Impromptu Theatre and further developed the application of sociometric analysis in his work with prisoners at Sing Sing Prison in New York and with disturbed children at the New York State Training School for Girls.

The value of work with groups was emphasized by Moreno, and in 1932 he coined the term group psychotherapy. His influence on American Psychiatry was phenomenal. Pierre Renouvier summarizes the situation as follows:

> In the years 1931 and 1932, Moreno coined the terms group therapy and group psychotherapy in connection with a specific set of operations which he described in a monograph, *Application of the Group Method to Classification.* It was published by the National Committee on Prisons and Prison Labor and distributed by them throughout the country, putting it into the hands of psychiatrists, psychologists, sociologists and social workers; this culminated in the famous Conference on Group Methods in Philadelphia. It was the first organized effort to bring group psychotherapy to the attention of the members of the American Psychiatric Association.[8]

In 1934 Moreno wrote *Who Shall Survive*, which created the scientific foundation of group psychotherapy. According to reviews of the first edition, it was without precedent at the time of its publication. "In 1936, the Moreno Sanitarium was established in Beacon, New York and became a school, a hospital, and the first real theater of psychodrama, as well as his home."[9] In 1937, he published the journal, *Sociometry*, and established the Sociometric Institute in New York. He organized the American Society of Group Psychotherapy and Psychodrama in the same year. In 1947 he edited the journal *Sociatry* which was later renamed *Group Psychotherapy*.

> Over the next several years he continued his work in many interdisciplinary fields: social psychology, psychotherapy, sociology and philosophy, among others. Many of those who would later become prominent in various fields were associated with Dr. Moreno in this early period—Kurt Lewin, Gardner Murphy, Ronald Lippitt, Leland Bradford, Kenneth Benne, Jack Gibb. (The last three were later to become founders of the 'T-Group'—The National Training Laboratories (N.T.L.)—which, in turn, was to become a cornerstone of the human potential movement.)[10]

As a consultant to the military services during the second world war, Moreno was influential in the growth of group psychotherapy as a treatment modality in military and veterans hospitals. He established a theater of psychodrama at St. Elizabeths Hospital in Washington, D.C. in 1941. The following year he established the Institute of Psychodrama in New York for the purpose of training and certifying psychodramatists. There are, at the present time, two Moreno institutes in operation which have produced a total of eighty fully certified psychodramatists.

TECHNIQUES OF PSYCHODRAMA

Psychodrama is an action modality in group therapy which involves the enactment of a person's conflict for the purpose of emotional problem solving.[11] The drama usually is concerned with deep emotional issues. Sociodrama is a form of psychodramatic enactment which aims at clarifying group concerns rather than focusing on the individual's problems. Sociodrama is helpful in exploring the problems inherent in relationships between parents and children, employers and employees, students and teachers, police and citizens and different races. Role-playing, which is a derivative of psychodrama, is aimed at working out alternative and more effective approaches to a general problem. It is considered to be more superficial than psychodrama or sociodrama in that expression of deep feelings is not involved. Role-playing is used by industry, schools, and professional training groups for human relationship training. Many other psychodramatic techniques, originated by Moreno and other psychodramatists, are used in a variety of

contexts. Action methods, encounter techniques, growth games and non-verbal exercises have become primary tools in the human potential movement. Guided fantasy, sensory awareness exercises, theatre games and improvisatory dramatics are frequently used for actor training or for theatrical presentation.

Through the use of psychodrama and psychodramatic techniques, the director helps the protagonist enact his experiences;—his everyday problems as well as his dreams, delusions, fears, and fantasies. In order to clarify feelings, the double, multiple selves, monodrama, and soliloquy are used. Amplification, asides and exaggerations of non-verbal communication are used to facilitate the expression of emotion. The director may help the protagonist become aware of his own behavior through the use of videotape playback, role reversal, behind-your-back, audience feedback, chorus and non-verbal interaction techniques. Support may be given to the protagonist by ego-building techniques, sharing, and physical contact experiences. For further explanation and discussion of these terms, see Blatner's book.

The typical psychodrama session begins with a warm-up, in which the director engages the group in discussion and directs exercises aimed at developing group cohesion and spontaneity. Reactions to the exercises usually lead to the emergence of an individual or group problem. One of the group members is then selected to be the protagonist who will act out his own or the group's problem. The conflict is then redefined in terms of an example which can be acted out. The protagonist then plays the scene with the help of auxiliary egos. A variety of psychodramatic techniques is used by the director to help the protagonist explore his feelings and develop new attitudinal and behavioral responses to his situation. The session usually is closed by having group members offer supportive feedback to the protagonist. The director may use a variety of supportive psychodramatic techniques and closing exercises during final stages of the session.

PSYCHODRAMA AND THE RADICAL THEATRE

Theatre, laboring at the task of identifying itself with man's search for a more meaningful existence, has spawned a number of experimental theatre groups. "Such groups are attempting to see theatre not as a sophisticated entertainment or an intellectual pursuit, but as an experience of life itself."[1 2] Certain of these avant-garde groups have identified themselves as radical theatre and are characterized by their attempt to effect cultural change through their attention to the spiritual needs of the actors and spectators. Like Moreno, the radical theatre hopes to help man become more creative so that he can understand his own condition more clearly and thereby control his own destiny. Some of the elements found in both psychodrama and radical theatre are (1) collective creation of dramas, (2) audience participation in the productions, (3) spontaneous self-disclosure of the actors, (4) concern

with removal of blocks to release creativity, and (5) facilitation of individual and cultural change.

COLLECTIVE CREATION

The most distinguishing characteristic of the radical theatre is the collective creation of theatre pieces. "Instead of the two-process method of the traditional theatre—a playwright writing a script in isolation and other artists staging it—the new theatre practices a one-process method, wherein the group itself develops the piece from initial conception to finished performance."[13]

Most radical theatre groups use improvisation as the principal technique for developing productions. However, groups differ in their means of discovering an inceptive idea for a piece. Sources include (1) exercises; (2) social, political or aesthetic problems; (3) a text or a painting; (4) an object or materials; or (5) a script written by someone within the group. Groups may emphasize discussion, research, or improvisation as a means of developing the piece. "And they are also distinguished by the circumstances of performance, which may be completely determined in rehearsal and set before performance, may be improvised within a scenario, and may involve spectators."[14]

AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION

"The strict separation between stage and audience is the marked characteristic of the legitimate theatre."[15] Some experimental theatre groups have virtually eliminated the distance between actors and audiences by participatory theatre experiences. Ann Halprin, with her Dancers' Workshop Company in San Francisco, has been experimenting with spontaneous unrehearsed sessions of up to fifty people.[16] Certain general conditions are initially suggested, thereafter, anyone is free to participate or observe. Halprin is interested in a theatre in which everything is experienced for the first time—where there is participation in events of supreme authenticity.

The Chrisitanshavnsgruppen in Copenhagen have developed innovative ways to involve audiences in their productions. "At the beginning of *Muddermanden* (*The Mud Man*), the audience is admitted to a room where there are many objects with which they can entertain themselves—finger paints, costumes to put on, food and wine. Only after the spectators have begun to use these objects do the performers enter the room and using only nonsense sounds, engage the spectators in a series of games, including blind-man's bluff, a group dance, and trust exercises."[17]

Audience participation is also essential to the psychodrama session. Auxiliary egos (actors) are selected from the group to assist the protagonist (one person only) in dramatizing his life situation. All audience members participate in providing feedback and support.

SELF DISCLOSURE

The Theatre for Spontaneity had as its mission: the immediate contact with the people:

> That which would never and nowhere have been spoken enters into community life. The new poet-dramatist is not left to his own self-isolated method of old, to choose ideas and dialogues which he alone composes, condenses, and finishes, but he synthesizes his inspirations in front of the people and the desire to reach them and to be in accord with them will push him, at least at times, to the production and presentation of ideas which he may have rejected if he would have carried on his work in the splendid isolation of his cell.[18]

One of the most dramatic illustrations of this kind of self-disclosure in radical theatre is the It's All Right to be Woman Theatre. This company has developed in the last five years as a means of helping women explore and express their potentialities and the nature of oppression. By dramatizing their problems, women in these groups are able to make other women feel good about being female and experience anger and outrage at the injustices in the relationship between the sexes. "The powerful effect the group has on its audience is due in part to the willingness of individual members to use their own lives as the basis for the material they perform. Each theatre piece is derived directly from the life of one of the members of the group."[19]

In psychodrama, "the fictitious character of the traditional theatre is replaced by the actual structure of the patient's world, real or imaginary. The spirit of the role is not in a book, as it is with the actor. It is not outside of him in space as with the painter or the sculptor, but a part of himself."[20] The actor in radical theatre is not unlike the actor in therapeutic theatre. Jerzy Grotowski, a prominent figure in the radical theatre movement, believes "the actor is a human being who has dis/covered and un/covered himself so much that he re/veals something of man."[21]

CREATIVITY AND INDIVIDUAL BLOCKS

Moreno attempted to remove blocks or resistances of the body to help individuals become more creative. He believed that removing personal and interpersonal blocks was equivalent to releasing an individual's creative energy. According to Halprin, "we are still in need of exorcising those individual blocks that interfere with the celebration and spirituality of the life force."[22] She has attempted to do this by using a number of "break-through movements" to help individuals get past self-imposed limits in order to break through preconceived modes of body behavior.

> We used the techniques of pounding the mattress until we manufactured rage; we kicked our legs frantically and energetically, evoking hysteria and

tantrums. We hollered and screamed our long buried frightened hurts and hates. We put our bodies into positions of stress so we shook and trembled and released tension blocks. Then we went on from there and made up our own exercises to link movement with feelings that broke through our controls."[23]

The exaggerations of non-verbal communications are frequently used in psychodrama sessions to heighten and facilitate the expression of emotion. Such devices are designed to help a person get past self-imposed limits and get in touch with his source of creativity. Moreno devoted his life to exploring and releasing man's creative potential. Halprin's description of her personal search is not unlike Moreno's.

In the long run, I found that what I had really been working toward, what I really wanted to explore, was nothing less than the creative process—what energizes it—how it functions—and how its universal aspects can have implications for all our fields.[24]

THE IMPOSSIBLE DREAM

Although radical theatre groups vary somewhat in emphasis or methodology, they all have a common dream—the realization of a humanistic society. Performances are aimed at moving people away from destructive patterns and toward creative living. The process frequently involves confrontation, self-analysis, liberation from cultural lies and illusions, and increased spontaneity. The theatre created by Moreno more than fifty years ago also was committed to the same goal. "The theatre for spontaneity was the unchaining of illusion. But this illusion acted out by the people who have lived through it in reality, is the unchaining of life."[25] Moreno's quest for a more spiritual and humanistic society is continued by such groups as the Laboratory Theatre in Poland, Stage Two in England, the Dancer's Workshop, the Bread and Puppet Theatre, the Open Theatre and the Living Theatre in the United States.

Theatre pieces ranging from psychodrama sessions to contemporary commedia del'arte presentations are delivered in the spirit of Don Quixote de La Mancha. In pursuit of the impossible dream, actors of the radical theatre disclose themselves to remind us of our own humanity and make us aware that "we have become over-intellectualized, divorced from our bodies, from real feeling."[26] The words of Judith Malina express the hope of radical theatre groups throughout the world—"If we could once again become feeling-ful people and not shut ourselves off from one another, then we would not tolerate the injustices in the world."[27]

Both psychodrama and radical theatre are deeply committed to providing an experience which will change the lives of people—and ultimately, the world. The way this is accomplished is beautifully described by Peter Brook.

A true image of necessary theatre-going I know is a psychodrama session. . . . There is an event, something unusual, something to look forward to, a session of drama. . . . In the circle, soon, everyone will have his role—but this does not mean that everyone will be performing. Some will naturally step forward as protagonists, while others will prefer to sit and watch, either identifying with the protagonist, or following his actions, detached and critical.

A conflict will develop: This is true drama because the people on their feet will be speaking about true issues shared by all present in the only manner that can make these issues really come to life. They may laugh. They may cry. They may not react at all. But behind all that goes on . . . lurks a very simple, very sane basis. They all share a wish to be helped to emerge from their anguish, even if they don't know what this help may be, or what form it could take. . . . Two hours after any session begins all the relations between the people present are slightly modified, because of the experience in which they have been plunged together. As a result, something is more animated, something flows more freely, some embryonic contacts are being made between previously sealed-off souls. When they leave the room, they are not quite the same as when they entered. If what has happened has been shatteringly uncomfortable, they are invigorated to the same degree as if there have been great outbursts of laughter. Neither pessimism nor optimism apply: simple, some participants are temporarily, slightly, more alive. If, as they go out of the door, this all evaporates, it does not matter either. Having had this taste, they will wish to come back for more. The drama session will seem an oasis in their lives.[28]

CONCLUSION

Drama was used by the ancient Greeks as a vehicle to express the dilemmas of the human condition. The drama evoked a group catharsis and enabled man to understand better the facets of his personality. Moreno hoped to return theatre to a form similar to the dramatic rituals of the ancient Greeks. He was thwarted in his efforts by a culture unable to understand and really appreciate his ideas. Consequently, he focused on the use of drama as a therapeutic tool. He developed psychodrama, sociometry, and group psychotherapy, and published many books, articles, and monographs related to his innovations. The extent of Moreno's influence is staggering. The literature abounds with evidence of his impact on psychiatry, sociology, philosophy, education, and psychology. Conspicuously absent are references to his influence on theatre.

Although Moreno's name is not linked with contemporary theatre, many of the radical theatre groups seem to be replicating the theatre he created many years ago in Vienna. It is as though the seed of his dream lay dormant for fifty years, then emerged in response to a people struggling in their revolution

against a complex and dehumanizing world. There was a trend away from technology and a new concern with human need which was reflected in theatre by a decline of the establishment theatre and an increase in the number of experimental groups. Theatre was brought to the people—in streets, parks, church halls, schools, and crowded rooms—to facilitate their search for a more meaningful existence.

Undoubtedly, contemporary theatre has been influenced greatly by Moreno. His innovations, as well as the techniques and exercises produced by the human potential movement (to which he gave impetus), have found their way into training sessions and performances of many theatre groups. But his most significant contribution to theatre was his concept of the self—and the collective creation of dramas based on the spontaneous expression of the self. This concept seems to be at the core of the radical theatre movement. Participants in the radical theatre continuously experiment with new ways to unleash creativity and move us closer to a more humanistic world.

NOTES

1. Jacob L. Moreno, *The Theatre of Spontaneity* (New York: Beacon House, Inc., 1947), p. 99. All subsequent material referring to history, methods and philosophy of the Theatre of Spontaneity are taken from this source.
2. Jacob L. Moreno, *Group Psychotherapy: Symposium* (New York: Beacon House, Inc., 1945), p. 503.
3. Moreno, *The Theatre of Spontaneity*, p. 10.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 5.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
6. *Ibid.*
7. Howard A. Blatner, *Acting-In* (New York: Spinger Publishing Company, Inc., 1973), p. 141. All subsequent material related to the development and techniques of psychodrama were taken from this source.
8. As quoted in Jacob L. Moreno, *Who Shall Survive?* (New York: Beacon House, Inc., 1953), p. ivi.
9. Blatner, *Acting-In*, p. 141.
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Ibid.*, p. 9.
12. James Roose-Evans, *Experimental Theatre* (New York: Avon Books, 1970), p. 17.
13. Theodore Shank, "Collective Creation," *The Drama Review*, 16 (No. 2 [T-54], 1972), p. 3-32. All subsequent material relating to collective creation was taken from this source.
14. *Ibid.*
15. Moreno, *The Theatre of Spontaneity*, p. 31.
16. Roose-Evans, *Experimental Theatre*, p. 139.
17. Shank, "Collective Creation," *The Drama Review*, 16 (No. 2 [T-54], 1972), p. 5.
18. Moreno, *The Theatre of Spontaneity*, p. 80.
19. Charlotte Rea, "Women's Theatre Groups," *The Drama Review*, 16, (No. 2 [T-54], 1972), p. 79-89.
20. Moreno, *The Theatre of Spontaneity*, p. 38.
21. As quoted in Richard Schechner, "Aspects of Training at the Performance Group," in *Actor Training*, 1, ed. by Richard Brown (New York: Drama Book Specialists, 1972), p. 8.
22. Ann Halprin, "Community Art as Life Process," *The Drama Review*, 17, (No. 3

[T-59], 1973), p. 64-80. All subsequent information referring to Ann Halprin was taken from this source.

23. *Ibid.*
24. *Ibid.*
25. Moreno, *The Theatre of Spontaneity*, p. 92.
26. Roose-Evans, p. 141.
27. *Ibid.*
28. Peter Brook, *The Empty Space* (New York: Avon Books, 1968), p. 121.