

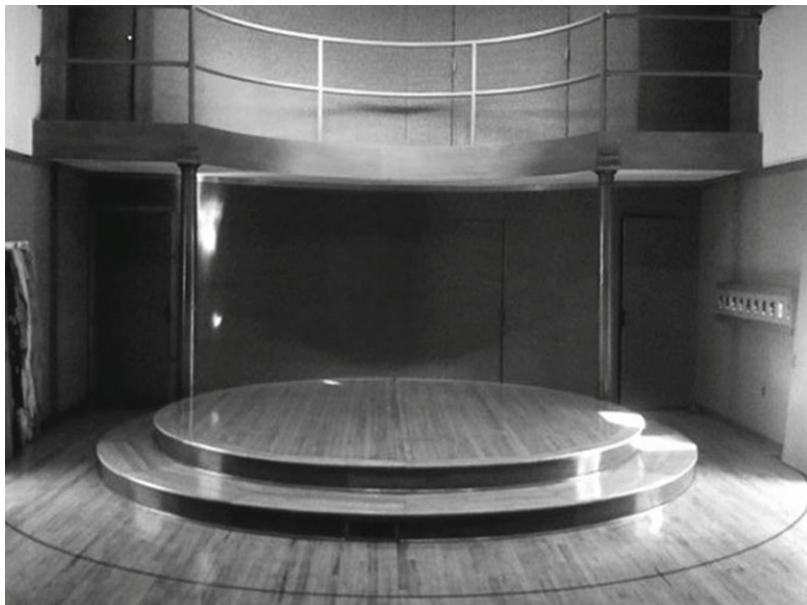
THE STAGE IN PSYCHODRAMA

Psychodrama, an experiential form of therapy, allows those in treatment to explore issues through action methods (dramatic actions). This approach incorporates role playing and group dynamics to help people gain greater perspective on emotional concerns, conflicts, or other areas of difficulty in a safe, trusted environment.

Jacob Moreno, a 20th century psychiatrist, developed psychodrama in the early 1900s, holding the first session in 1921. The approach was born out of his recognition of the importance of the group approach to therapy and his combined interests in philosophy, theater, and mysticism. In the late 1930s, he founded the Beacon Hospital, which featured a therapeutic theater where psychodrama could be practiced as part of therapy, and in 1942, he established the American Society of Group Psychotherapy and Psychodrama. After his death in 1974, his wife, Zerka, continued to travel, teaching and training others in the approach.

Moreno described psychodrama as the "scientific exploration of truth through dramatic method." The approach, which is grounded in principles of creativity, spontaneity, combines sociometry, group dynamics, and role theory in order to evoke cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses in those in treatment and help them achieve new perspective through better understanding of their roles in life, the ways they interact with others, and things that may be creating challenges or restricting change in their lives.

Through psychodrama, people in treatment are often able to develop their use of language and perspective as they use action methods to explore past, present, or future occurrences. Because psychodrama can help people see themselves and their situations from an outside perspective, the psychodrama session often becomes a safe place for people to explore new solutions to difficulties or challenges, whether they are rooted in outside causes or past situations.



The first psychodramatic stage was built at Jacob Levy Moreno's Institute in Beacon, New York, around 1936. In the 1980s, Moreno's Institute in Beacon, New York, was sold and the theatre taken down. Much of the original stage, however, was moved over to a nearby institute hosted by the psychodrama director, Claire Danielsson, in Broughton Place.

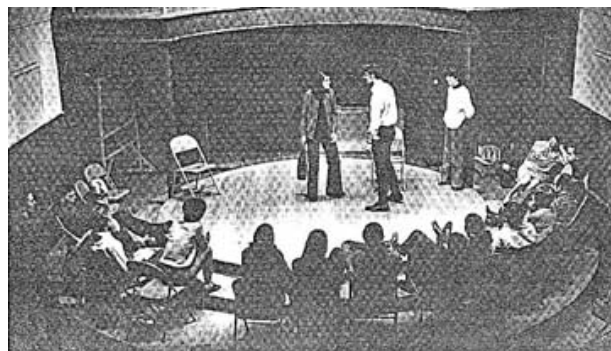
Moreno speaks of a „Surplus-Reality“ which evolves on the stage. There it is possible to take on roles which are unattainable in normal everyday life. It gives us the chance to experiment with new behaviours, experience different roles or even train them to see how we feel about them and to gain new possibilities. Though challenging, it is very fruitful at the same time. There it is possible to be a queen, or a crocodile. I can meet the dead on the stage, see my future or confront my weaker inner self... All this makes the stage an incalculably valuable analytical instrument and a space without boundaries for discovering good solutions.

Nevertheless, psychodrama is not a theatre, there is no actor, or a fixed scenario, there are only protagonists, leaders and the group trying to find and explore different options that appear spontaneously in their minds. Moreno believes that even a small step makes a change, so how far or deep they go depends on them, there is no goal, no force.

Even though psychodrama can be used with individuals, the group forms the heart of psychodramatic work. Perhaps the most brilliant idea of Moreno's was to understand that groups are stronger than individuals and that consequently it is in the group where reality can be addressed. The dynamics of the group are used in psychodrama to specifically and systematically confront existing problems and questions, to set in motion the processes of change and to discover and test solutions. In Moreno's eyes, mutual help is the ideal way to improve a situation.

The psychodramatical process of the group is dependent on the experiences which the individual group members bring with them. Again, and again the process focuses on a point where individual life-experiences become the centre of attention. A group member then becomes the protagonist and shows on stage what happened to him.

(Sources: "Psychodrama": <https://www.goodtherapy.org/learn-about-therapy/types/psychodrama> and "Psychodrama by Jacob Levy Moreno" – <https://psychodrama-for-europe.eu/psychodrama-2/>)





Images:

1. Stage at Jacob Levy Moreno's Institute in Beacon, New York, around 1936.
2. Sharing sessions for those in training at Moreno's Institute in Beacon, NY, around 1971.
3. Training session, ca. 1970.
4. Psychodrama Stage at Moreno's Institute in New York City--Probably one of the open sessions, circa 1948.
5. Session at St. Elizabeth's Hospital, Washington DC, ca. 1970.
6. At session at St. Louis (Missouri) State Hospital, around 1962.

TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

STAGE: Here used to designate any area where a psychodrama takes place.

Nevertheless, in psychodrama there is also another meaning: A specially constructed psychodrama stage. Yet it must be acknowledged that most psychodramas being conducted today happen in areas in which no formal psychodrama stage is available. The point to be emphasized is that role playing not occur in the ordinary context of a group or family setting, but if possible an area be designated apart from the locus of ordinary discussion, an area in which enactment can be staged and it is understood that this is a place for experimentation and a measure of playfulness.

Also, it should be noted that the traditional theatrical stage is not amenable to psychodrama—it's too high and relatively inaccessible to easy ascending and descending of protagonist and auxiliaries.

A few psychodramatists have been able to actually construct a special stage designed for psychodrama. In general, this term refers merely to the area in a group room where the main action occurs. In general, the kinds of stages used in theatres or auditoriums is not useful for psychodramas, because people in the audience need ready access, a matter of only a step or two away, rather than the imposing height of the stage in most regular theatres.

SURPLUS REALITY: The world that takes place on the psychodramatic stage where anything can take place—time travel, fantasy, enacted metaphor—and still be seen in the present and in real dimensions.

The experience of simulated “reality” made available through dramatic enactment. Thus, that which might be considered not real, such as an encounter with a relative who died before one could say goodbye, a past scene in which the other person behaves more helpfully rather than destructively (i.e., the “reformed auxiliary ego technique”), and so forth, all can be experienced by the protagonist in the service of healing. Moreno called psychodrama “the theatre of truth” not because what gets enacted there is true in any factual sense, but rather that it represents the protagonist’s phenomenological “truth,” the outward expression of the inner drama. It reflects a slight variation of the insight of cognitive therapy (i.e., that thoughts often determine behavior)—i.e., that imagery, fantasy, a shift in perspective or metaphor—these also affect behavior, and such influences are even more powerful when physically enacted, which adds the sense of kinesthetic cues and embodied experience. (See *Act Hunger*).

Surplus Reality: That realm of dramatic action in which the ideas of the mind can find expression. Thus, events of science fiction, fantasy, and the emotional happenings that we fear or yearn for can have an opportunity to be vividly experienced because conceptualizing this realm creates a space for its manifestation. Surplus reality is a “psychologically real” dimension of existence in which mental events can be expressed verbally or physically. Drama often uses surplus reality to reveal those events which haven’t happened in actuality, but they are yearned for or feared, playfully entertained or fantasized. Most psychodramatic techniques call upon the human capacity to intuitively understand that potential in order to concretely explore the dynamics of the protagonist’s imagination. In a way, this term refers to the mind’s capacity to pretend or play, not in its childish or frivolous sense, but in its deepest capacity to serve as an instrument of self-awareness, healing and transcendence. Portraying an encounter with God or St. Peter after death, a reconciliation with an aborted child, a re-living of a deprived childhood, or an empowered response to a traumatizing event, all would call upon our capacity for using surplus reality. There needs to be a psychological and even philosophical recognition of the usefulness of this concept.

(Source: <https://www.blatner.com/adam/pdntbk/glossrypdtterms.html>)