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FACULTY OF THEATRE AND FILM
DOCTORAL SCHOOL OF THEATRE AND FILM

DOCTORAL THESIS
THE EFFECTS OF THE USE OF PSYCHODRAMA
TECHNIQUES AND TOOLS IN THE ACTOR'S WORK
Summary

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SUMMARY

Keywords: acting methodologies; psychodrama techniques; spontaneity; creativity; role construction; stage presence; performance enhancement; emotional expression; theatrical performance; theatre process; Jacob Levy Moreno; "Uncle Vanya"; Tomi Janežič, monodrama, art-based research

I. Introduction

Throughout my studies and career as an actor, I have encountered numerous methodologies that have broadened my understanding of theatre and its creative processes from various perspectives. These experiences have contributed and continue to contribute to both my professional and personal development, shaping a lifelong journey of growth whether I remain in the field or not. My interest in theatre has always been driven by a quest for self-understanding and the exploration of artistic expressions. This led me to pursue acting, where I encountered multiple challenges. One of the primary reasons for my decision to engage in doctoral research within the realm of acting was born not only from my desire to understand myself but also to comprehend the challenges of acting as they relate to humanity, the psyche, the world, and arts, and the combination of all, which became a personal imperative and goal.

Currently, numerous acting techniques and methods have been developed worldwide, playing a crucial role in supporting and refining an actor's practice. In my doctoral research, I delved into some of the most significant ones, such as Stanislavski's method (1988), considered the foundation of modern theatre. One of Stanislavski's most talented student, Vsevolod Meyerhold, adopted a radically different approach to the essence of acting, developing the theory of biomechanics (Barba 2007). Drawing inspiration from the teachings of his masters (Stanislavski, Vahtangov, Meyerhold, Dullin), but taking a completely opposite direction, the Polish theatre expert Jerzy Grotowski (1991) developed a revolutionary method in European theatre. At the same time, another paradigm shift in theatrical aesthetics emerged through Bertolt Brecht's concept of alienation effect (1969). After analyzing the contributions of prominent figures in European theatre and acting, I shifted my research focus toward American

acting. I examined the works of American theatre pioneers, from Lee Strasberg's "method acting" (Horby 2007) to Uta Hagen (1991) and Sanford Meisner (Meisner and Longwell 1987), and finally, Ivana Chubbuck's technique (Chubbuck 2005). Lastly, I would like to mention one of the most fascinating theatre specialists of our time, the pioneer of theatre education and forum theatre, Augusto Boal (1995).

These precisely crafted methodologies, both theoretically and practically grounded, have the potential to significantly advance actor training and performance if even a fraction of their essence were to pass through Romanian theatre education and practice. It is important to note that none of these techniques can or should be regarded as a fixed recipe, as each theatrical project presents unique creative processes, inspirations, influences, and interactions, posing its own set of challenges.

These acting techniques were developed with the aim of revitalizing theatre studies, addressing the professional deficiencies and artistic demands of their respective eras. However, they predominantly focus on the analysis of an actor's stage presence and the process of acting. Consequently, mastering a technique often reduces an actor's effort to understanding its principles and executing instructions precisely, potentially diminishing spontaneity in favor of adherence to a method. While spontaneity is crucial for creativity in acting, the demands of mastering techniques may sometimes compromise it. Nonetheless, the spontaneity of an actor's performance is fundamentally rooted in their individual physical and mental state.

Thus, my research primarily examined the subjective, direct experiences of actors, particularly in relation to their spontaneous performance, which defines their creativity and artistic uniqueness. In exploring the nature and mechanisms of spontaneity and creativity, I turned to psychodrama, a group therapy method developed by Jacob Levy Moreno, a Romanian-born existentialist psychiatrist, therapist, and sociologist. Psychodrama, as defined by Moreno, is the science of uncovering truth through dramatic methods, a form of group psychotherapy that employs directed dramatic action to explore individual issues or questions, aiming to facilitate personal development and mental health recovery through increased spontaneity and catharsis.

In my PhD dissertation, I hypothesize, based on my professional experiences and interviews with actors from various Hungarian theatres in Transylvania, Romania, that certain factors significantly influence and reduce spontaneity and creativity in the creative process. These factors often compel actors to neglect or suppress their spontaneity, which in turn impacts

their creativity. The questionnaire was distributed to all Hungarian theatres in Transylvania; however, the number of responding actors was only 30. The average age of respondents ranges from 25 to 56 years, with an equal gender representation, and acting professional experience varying between 3 and 34 years. The diverse distribution of age and experience allows for the examination of different approaches to spontaneity and creativity, as well as the evaluation of their impact on various stages of an acting career. After analyzing the responses the identified factors which reduce the spontaneity and creativity of an actor are as follows:

- Physical environment: 10.3%
- Interaction with colleagues: 55.2%
- Director's guidance/cooperation with the director: 75.9%
- Personal mood and emotional state: 58.6%
- Physical health and well-being: 48.3%
- Availability of creative freedom: 51.7%
- Time constraints: 3.4%
- Audience feedback: 20.7%
- Other factors (e.g., stress during rehearsals, expectations, fear of being untalented): 21.5%

Upon delving deeper into the research on actors' spontaneity and creativity, one of the most striking conclusions I have drawn is that optimal levels of spontaneity and creativity are increasingly rare or minimally present, both during the creative process and in the final theatrical product. My international experiences in acting, psychodrama, and theatre education have afforded me the opportunity to collaborate with artists from diverse fields and backgrounds, all of whom face similar self and artistic difficulties in the creative process, particularly a lack of self-confidence in artistic authenticity.

Additionally, I have encountered numerous common issues that contribute to a monotonous performance, leading actors to rely on stereotypes or personal clichés when building a role. These problems cannot be solely attributed to the cultural peculiarities of a specific region, leading to the conclusion that this is not just a phenomenon among Hungarian actors in Transylvania, but a widespread occurrence. I have identified specific factors that we have collectively recognized as primary destructive elements that hinder the flow of spontaneity and creativity in actors, thereby affecting their freedom and enjoyment of stage performance:

- Objectification of the actor

- Misconceptions and prejudices
- Stereotypes and routine
- Adverse working conditions (e.g., overtime work)
- Self-esteem issues
- Cultural habits
- Theatrical expectations
- Hierarchy and power dynamics

The reason I found psychodrama to be a solution to these problems lies in its capacity to foster spontaneity, vitality, creative self-expression, and the joy of play. The personal emotional outbursts and expressions experienced during psychodrama group therapy were liberating, providing a cathartic experience and therapeutic effect from both a personal and acting standpoint. I realized that I sought a similar experience in theater, whether as a performer or a witness.

My aim is not to elaborate on the therapeutic nature of psychodrama for actors, but rather to consider and respect the fundamental functions of both fields. In this work, I exclusively examine the benefits of psychodrama from the perspective of actors and their craft. Specifically, I focus on leveraging the principles, tools, and techniques of psychodrama to enhance actor spontaneity and creativity, primarily through the creative application of psychodramatic techniques in acting.

Research Methodology

This study employs art-based research (ABR) and action research (AR), reflecting the dynamic interplay between art and science. Instead of traditional scientific surveys, I relied on practical experiences and case studies to substantiate my doctoral topic.

The doctoral dissertation is divided into two main sections: the first focuses on the theoretical framework and provides a detailed examination of the connections between the two fields, while the second addresses the practical aspect, following two distinct theatrical processes as case studies. These case studies explore the impact of psychodrama techniques and tools on various aspects of acting.

Psychodrama Training

I participated in extensive psychodrama training, including a 150-hour program at the Hungarian Psychodrama Association in Budapest under Dr. Eszter Daubner and Dr. Gergely Szabó. I completed psychodrama assistant/practitioner training, and now I am a trainee in advanced level, psychodrama director, at Societatea de Psihodrama J. L. Moreno in Romania with Dr. Kinga Bakk-Miklósi and Dr. Enikő Albert-Lőrincz, with supervision of Dr. Petrov Ljubomir. International insights were gained through workshops and festivals, including the Little Psychodrama Festival in Slovenia, International Spring Academy, FEPTO Conference, and sessions with notable therapists. I am a member of an international psychodrama working group in Budapest and will lead my own international regular psychodrama group starting autumn 2024.

Theatrical Research

My research encompassed two creative angles:

- **Observational Study:** I observed the creative process and professional development of actors using psychodrama techniques during rehearsals of A.P. Chekhov's "Uncle Vanya," directed by Tomi Janežič at the State Small Theatre of Vilnius.¹ This study was supported by an Erasmus+ research grant from the Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre. The process was documented in my rehearsal diary, portions of which were published in Lithuanian at *Teatro žurnalas* and Hungarian at *Játéktér Theatre Magazine*.
- **Performance Creation:** I developed and performed a 1.5-hour interactive monodrama integrating psychodrama and performing arts, which premiered in English at the Little Psychodrama Festival in Slovenia, later in Udine, Italy, and in Hungarian in Szeged, Hungary. This performance explored Moreno's role theory and incorporated my autobiographical experiences.

Both studies aimed to explore the development of spontaneity and creativity in actors using different psychodramatic techniques and tools, considering the differences across the

¹ <https://vmt.lt/spektakliai/dede-vania>

processes, each with distinct goals, qualities, and outcomes. The results were analyzed through the following structure:

- Description of the psychodrama technique
- Case study
- Application of the technique in acting
- Analysis

These methodologies provided a comprehensive understanding of how psychodrama techniques can enhance actor spontaneity and creativity.

1. The Relationship Between Psychodrama and Theatre

In this chapter I explore the deep interconnections between psychodrama and theatre, highlighting how Moreno developed psychodrama through his theatre experiences. Psychodrama integrates psychological and dramatic concepts, drawing from Greek roots meaning soul (psyché) and science (logía), and involves action (drama). It aims to treat psychological issues while simultaneously enhancing social interaction, mental flexibility, and self-reflection. The key techniques of psychodrama include role reversal, empty chair, role doubling, and monodrama. Psychodrama encourages experiential learning rather than rational, cognitive analysis, promoting creativity, imagination, and spontaneity. It aims to help individuals express emotions and engage in self-exploration within a group context. Psychodrama functions as a form of group therapy, addressing unresolved psychological conflicts through dramatizing personal experiences, even including dreams and fantasies. This therapeutic approach allows participants to express new behaviors and integrate them into their daily lives.

Moreno's theater theories influenced modern theatre and psychodrama techniques, particularly his critique of classical theatre's limitations in fostering spontaneity and creativity. He proposed a "Theatre of Spontaneity" (Moreno, 1983) that values audience interaction and improvisation. This theatre model challenges the rigid boundaries of traditional performances, aiming for a more dynamic, therapeutic experience for both actors and audiences.

Moreno's theatrical work led to the establishment of the "Stegreiftheater" (Theatre of Spontaneity), where improvisation was central. This theatre aimed to promote spontaneity, creativity, and interpersonal interaction among actors and audiences. Moreno's experimental

approaches to theatre, such as the "Living Newspaper" performances, used current news stories as a basis for improvisational acting, allowing the group to explore motivations behind real-world actions and responses. (Moreno, 1983)

Moreno's work, rooted in experiential learning and spontaneity, reshaped both psychodrama and theatre, offering new ways of integrating therapy, creativity, and social interaction. His theories also influenced the development of humanistic psychology and existential psychotherapy, emphasizing the importance of present experience, personal choice, and creative self-expression. The document provides insights into Moreno's philosophical views and methodologies, highlighting his unique contribution to both psychotherapy and theatre.

2. The Identical Elements of Psychodrama and Theatre

This chapter presents an in-depth comparison between psychodrama and theatre, focusing on their shared concepts and roles. It explores key theatrical terms and techniques that define both fields, emphasizing how they intersect, while also highlighting their differences in usage and purpose. The author examines these overlapping concepts through the lens of Moreno's psychodrama theory and influential theatre theorists.

Shared Concepts Between Psychodrama and Theatre

- **Drama – Action:** Both psychodrama and theatre use "drama" to denote action. Theatre drama is typically a literary genre representing a staged reality, whereas in psychodrama, "drama" refers to a live, spontaneous enactment of psychological processes in real-time, with the added dimension of "here and now" experience. The distinction is highlighted by Bécsy Tamás, who discusses the layered ontology of dramatic works and how different levels of reality are represented in both fields. (Bécsy, 1977)
- **Stage – Space:** The stage serves as a physical space where action occurs, a concept shared by both theatre and psychodrama. Psychodrama, however, uses space more fluidly, as the protagonist's personal reality shapes the spatial dynamics of the scene. This contrasts with the more fixed stage setup in traditional theatre. Peter Brook's (Brook, 1999) interpretation of "empty space" as the minimal requirement for theatre

aligns with psychodramatic practices, where the "stage" is determined by the protagonist's imagination.

- **Actor – Protagonist:** In psychodrama, the protagonist is similar to the actor in theatre, but with key differences. While the actor embodies a pre-written role in theatre, the psychodramatic protagonist plays out personal, emotional conflicts and psychological challenges. This element focuses on personal expression and emotional release, with the protagonist engaging in roles that represent their inner experiences. The role is not predetermined but unfolds spontaneously during the session.
- **Director – Conductor:** Both psychodrama and theatre involve guiding figures—directors in theatre and leaders in psychodrama—who facilitate the creative process. However, in psychodrama, the leader does not control the content as a director would; instead, they guide the protagonist's exploration of their inner world, encouraging spontaneity and emotional expression. This contrasts with the more structured, authoritative role of a theatre director.
- **Partner – Auxiliary Ego:** The concept of the "auxiliary ego" in psychodrama mirrors the role of supporting characters or partners in theatre. These auxiliary egos represent significant others or abstract concepts, enabling the protagonist to interact and explore different perspectives. This concept allows for the emotional interaction central to psychodramatic work.
- **Audience – Group:** The audience in theatre observes the action, whereas in psychodrama, the group participates in the process, providing emotional support, feedback, and collective insight. The role of the audience in psychodrama is more interactive and supportive, facilitating the protagonist's therapeutic process.

The Therapeutic and Dramatic Roles of Both Fields

Psychodrama uses theatre elements in a therapeutic setting, where the focus shifts from entertainment to emotional exploration. While both fields employ action to evoke emotional responses, psychodrama's goal is catharsis and psychological healing. As Moreno noted, psychodrama is not just about releasing tension, but about deepening emotional understanding and engagement.

Moreno's approach to spontaneous theatre (Stegreiftheater) was revolutionary because it emphasized the unpredictability and freedom of performance, rejecting scripted theatre in

favor of improvisation. This aligns with his belief that spontaneity and creativity are essential to both good theatre and psychodrama.

Hence, in this chapter I aim to highlight the profound connections between psychodrama and theatre, emphasizing their shared elements, clarifying how these shared concepts are employed differently in each field, with psychodrama focusing on therapeutic, emotional release and self-exploration, while theatre serves as a structured art form for audience engagement. The comparison underscores the therapeutic potential of both fields, with psychodrama offering a more fluid and emotionally charged space for personal and collective transformation.

3. The Similarities Between Psychodrama and Various Theatre Theories, Acting Techniques

The intersection of psychodrama and diverse theatrical approaches, drawing parallels between psychodramatic techniques and established acting methods. Considering this analysis I highlight the elements within theatre and psychodrama that foster spontaneity and creativity, though they each operate with distinct characteristics and effects.

Psychodrama and Theatrical Methodologies

The document identifies the following major theatrical figures and their techniques, which share significant similarities with psychodrama, even though these practitioners may not have been directly influenced by psychodrama itself:

- **Stanislavski and Psychotechnique:** Stanislavski's system (1988) has been foundational in actor training and is still used globally today. His psychotechnique focused not on resolving emotional tension but on awakening the actor's subconscious creative processes. The core of Stanislavski's method is the conscious awareness of inner psychological processes, which actors then translate into action. His focus was on the "unconscious" actions of the actor during performance. Moreno's critique of Stanislavski highlights the tension between structured method and spontaneous creativity, emphasizing how psychodrama allows actors to move beyond role clichés, unlocking a deeper level of personal creativity. (Moreno J. L., 2019)
- **Grotowski and the "Naked Actor":** Grotowski's concept of "Poor Theatre" (Grotowski, 1991) emphasized stripping away external distractions, focusing on the

actor's raw, unfiltered presence. His concept of the "naked actor," which advocates for full emotional exposure, aligns with Moreno's theory of role construction in psychodrama. Both emphasize the need for actors to expose their innermost selves, facilitating a deep connection between the performer and audience.

- **Brecht and the Alienation Effect:** Brecht's theory of the alienation effect (*Verfremdungseffekt*) (Brecht, 2014) aimed to create a critical distance between the audience and the action, preventing emotional identification. This contrasts with the cathartic, emotionally immersive techniques in psychodrama, but both share a focus on making the audience aware of the processes at play, whether emotional or intellectual. In psychodrama, similar techniques like role reversal or the mirror technique invite the participant to reflect critically on their actions.
- **Strasberg and Method Acting:** Strasberg's method acting (Horby, 2007), influenced by Stanislavski, emphasizes emotional recall and personal experience to create authentic performances. Strasberg's techniques align with psychodrama's focus on exploring personal emotions and conflicts as a path to self-discovery and emotional authenticity. The emotional memory exercises in method acting are akin to psychodramatic processes where actors relive past emotional experiences to channel their feelings into their roles.
- **The Meisner Technique:** Sanford Meisner's (Meisner & Longwell, 1987) approach emphasized reacting instinctively to external stimuli, much like psychodrama's emphasis on spontaneous interaction within the group. The Meisner technique encourages a focus on the partner and environment, fostering a reactionary and authentic performance. This approach is closely related to psychodrama's objective of encouraging the protagonist to engage deeply with their environment and emotional state.
- **Living Theatre and Free Theatre:** The Living Theatre, founded by Judith Malina and Julian Beck (1972), sought to dissolve the boundary between actor and audience. Its focus on improvisation and active audience participation bears resemblance to the interactive aspects of psychodrama, where the group and protagonist work together in a dynamic, improvisational process. Both approaches aim to break down conventional theatre structures and create a participatory experience.
- **Boal and Theatre of the Oppressed:** Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed (Boal, 2008) shares significant similarities with psychodrama, particularly in its use of participatory techniques. Boal's Forum Theatre transforms the audience into active

participants, much like how psychodrama engages the group in a therapeutic, role-exploring environment. Both methodologies are rooted in the concept of social change, using theatre as a tool for personal and collective liberation.

This chapter concludes by emphasizing the overlap between psychodrama and these theatrical techniques, particularly in their emphasis on spontaneity, creativity, and emotional authenticity. While each method has its unique theoretical and practical applications, they all share a common aim of facilitating personal expression, self-exploration, and a transformative experience for both performers and audiences. Moreno's psychodrama, with its therapeutic roots, draws on the core principles of theatre to foster emotional release and creative engagement, making it a powerful tool for both artistic and personal growth.

4. Spontaneity and Creativity in the Context of Psychodrama and Acting

This chapter examines the concepts of spontaneity and creativity, which serve as the foundation for both psychodrama and acting. These concepts are central to the practices in both fields, and their exploration is vital for understanding the creative processes involved.

Spontaneity and Creativity

Spontaneity and creativity are often seen as interconnected concepts, as one feeds into the other. According to Marcia Karp (Holmes, Karp, & Watson, 1995), this dynamic allows for a redefinition of the concept of "the present" as a more fluid, spontaneous-creative process, referred to as the "moment." Spontaneity, as distinct from impulsive or automatic reactions, involves a deeper, more meaningful engagement with the environment. Moreno argued that creativity without spontaneity is lifeless, emphasizing that spontaneity prepares an individual for free action and allows for the unrestricted flight of imagination.

Paul Holmes (1993) identifies anxiety as one of the primary factors that block spontaneity. High anxiety levels diminish spontaneity and the ability to find creative solutions. When anxiety is low, the levels of spontaneity and creativity tend to be higher, suggesting that reducing anxiety is essential for fostering creativity. Holmes' theory also applies to acting, where the actor becomes unable to respond spontaneously and authentically if overwhelmed by anxiety.

Larry Silverberg (1997), a master of the Meisner Technique, compares acting to everyday life, asserting that actors must function similarly to how they do in their personal lives.

He argues that the actor's spontaneity is blocked by fears of judgment, failure, or inadequacy. Silverberg emphasizes that, in order to achieve spontaneity, actors must let go of the desire for control, which hinders their natural responses. This view is consistent with Edward Slingerland's research (2015), which ties spontaneity to creativity, proposing that a relaxed state of mind, free from effort, is essential for creative expression.

While spontaneity is associated with creativity, they don't always coexist linearly. For example, someone may exhibit spontaneity without producing anything creative. True creative acts require effort, preparation, and sustained energy beyond spontaneous impulses.

Spontaneity in Psychodrama

In psychodrama, spontaneity is seen as a psychological energy that motivates the protagonist to respond to a new situation or offer a new response to an old one. Moreno's view of spontaneity in psychodrama is integral to therapeutic progress, as it allows the individual to break free from rigid societal or cultural norms, leading to a healthier, more adaptive response to life situations. Moreno developed a "Spontaneity Test" (Moreno J. L., 2019) to assess an individual's level of spontaneity based on their reactions to challenging situations. The test revealed that a person's spontaneity can fluctuate throughout the day depending on their emotional state, environment, and daily activities.

Scheiffele (1995) identified three key components of spontaneity:

- **Immediacy** – The instant, reflexive response to a situation, without thinking or planning.
- **Adequacy** – The appropriateness of the spontaneous response to the given context.
- **Novelty** – The originality of the spontaneous behavior, offering a new reaction to a familiar or unfamiliar situation.

Moreno's focus was on training individuals to develop their spontaneity, a concept that aligns with the training methods used in acting. Both fields require exercises that help individuals warm up to spontaneous responses, allowing them to break free from rigid thought patterns and engage in a more fluid, creative state.

Spontaneity in Acting

Spontaneity is a core element in acting, as it allows the actor to authentically respond to the surrounding environment and situation. According to Mihail Chekhov (2002) and

Sanford Meisner (Meisner & Longwell, 1987), actors should train themselves to act as they would in everyday life, focusing on external impulses rather than internal preconceptions. Chekhov's improvisation exercises and the physical training he introduced emphasize the importance of warming up both mentally and physically before performing a role. Meisner's approach also stresses reacting spontaneously to the environment, rather than rehearsing predetermined lines.

Keith Johnstone (1979), a prominent figure in improvisational theatre, emphasized the importance of spontaneity in performances. He argued that the actor should not plan or control their actions but instead accept whatever happens and respond in the moment. Johnstone's approach encourages the actor to embrace simplicity and authenticity, avoiding the over-exertion of effort that can undermine spontaneity.

Creativity in Psychodrama

Studies (e.g., Dr. George Land, 2011) reveal that creativity is inherent in young children (98% creativity rate in 3–5-year-olds), but diminishes significantly by adulthood (2% in adults). This decline is attributed to rigid educational systems that suppress imagination, emphasizing the need for creative education. Moreno integrated creativity into psychodrama, inspired by the free, imaginative play of children in Vienna's parks. His methods emphasize the healing power of imagination, aligning with the idea that creativity fosters psychological well-being and self-expression. In the frame of cultural and psychological aspects, creativity is viewed as a driver of personal and societal evolution. Through psychodrama, Moreno examined the "creativity blockages" linked to psychological disorders, introducing terms like "creativity neurosis" (Zeintlinger, 2005). Creativity is nurtured through symbolic representations, role-playing, and the exploration of one's inner desires and aspirations.

Creativity in Acting

Theatrical creativity involves a blend of imagination, spontaneity, and conscious practice. Techniques like Stanislavski's "magic if" and Michael Chekhov's focus on imaginative exercises underscore the role of creativity in building authentic performances. Actors must balance spontaneity with structured preparation, avoiding stagnation or repetitive patterns that hinder originality.

Scheiffele (2001) explores acting as an altered state of consciousness (ASC), where creativity thrives. Such states allow actors to transcend ordinary boundaries, accessing deeper

emotional and imaginative realms. In this process actors face unique challenges: balancing personal and performed realities, navigating public projections, and sustaining a creative mindset. These processes are central to artistic innovation and audience engagement. Theatre, as a platform for creativity could offer a safe space for exploring non-conventional identities, breaking societal norms, and embracing spontaneity and creativity at the highest levels. It serves as a laboratory for experimentation, where creativity flourishes beyond everyday constraints.

II. Psychodramatic Techniques and Tools in a Theatre Process

This analysis examines the actor's work from the perspective of the rehearsal process, which leads to a different state of being and creating compared to a completed performance. Both psychodrama and theater are deeply subjective, relying on individual emotional experiences combined with professional expertise, empathy, and intuitive understanding. Both practices exert a therapeutic effect on the audience and the creator. While psychodrama focuses on long-term psychological healing, theater provides a temporary emotional experience for both the actor and the audience.

5. The process of the rehearsal "Uncle Vanya" directed by Tomi Janežič at the State Small Theatre of Vilnius

The production of A.P. Chekhov's "Uncle Vanya" at the State Small Theatre of Vilnius (Valstybinis Vilniaus Mažasis teatras), directed by Tomi Janežič, exemplifies the application of psychodramatic techniques in theater. During the rehearsal process, the director employed various psychodramatic techniques to aid actors in understanding, approaching, and constructing their roles. The rehearsal diary written by me during the whole creation documented this procedure, highlighting the development of spontaneity and creativity and the elimination of habitual acting clichés or stereotypes.

It is important to emphasize that the director, Tomi Janežič, uses psychodrama techniques and tools for creative purposes, rather than with therapeutic intent. The selected techniques and tools are chosen for their effectiveness in enhancing spontaneity and creativity, not necessarily to create a performance through them. To demonstrate the pragmatic impact of all these on contemporary theater, it is first important to outline the theater philosophy and working method of director Tomi Janežič, closely associated with Morenian psychodrama

almost hand in hand. Janežič is known not only for his theatrical productions but also for significant work as a psychodrama psychotherapist.

6. Key Techniques and Their Applications

This list is not exhaustive, as the psychodrama toolkit is extensive and multifaceted. The chosen techniques were selected based on their utility in observed theatrical rehearsal processes and performances, aiming to inspire theater practitioners to apply these techniques creatively. In this chapter, I provide a summary of the creative application of the chosen techniques. The detailed application and specific processes are extensively covered in my dissertation.

- **Warm-up:** Emotional and creative exercises to initiate creativity and imagination. Actors created scenes from personal life situations analogous to the play's scenes.
- **Future projection:** Imagined scenarios where characters act differently or in future settings.
- **Soliloquy:** Articulating internal monologues to deepen emotional understanding.
- **Double:** Representing the inner voice of a character, spoken by others to enhance emotional depth.
- **Role reversal:** Exchanging roles to explore different perspectives.
- **Mirror technique:** Viewing the character and scene from a third-person perspective, exaggerating traits to break stereotypes.
- **Social atom:** Analyzing a character's main aspects to aid role construction.
- **Surplus reality:** Understanding the triggers of emotional states and reactions, including the personification of objects and symbols.
- **Sociometry:** Spatial placement of characters and assessment of their relationships in different situations from the play.
- **Sharing:** Sharing personal themes and stories to enhance group dynamics and collaborative creativity.

The rehearsal process of Tomi Janežič's production of "Uncle Vanya" at the State Small Theatre of Vilnius provides robust support for my hypotheses regarding the integration of psychodrama techniques in theatrical practice. The application of **warm-up** techniques and psychodramatic concepts within the theatrical context catalyzes the actors' spontaneity and

creativity. During the initial phase of rehearsals, actors are encouraged to freely stage their interpretations and personal narratives related to the play, generating a plethora of associative paths that foster a multitude of creative possibilities from a theatrical perspective. This approach, which involves daily presentations of various scenes, results in an increasingly nuanced, enriched, and profound interpretation of the play, further enhanced by the mutual inspiration among the cast members.

The **future projection** technique exemplifies this effect, casting roles and the entire narrative in a novel light, thereby expanding the creative imagination of the participants. This technique nurtures an environment where creativity flourishes, indirectly sustaining and nurturing the state of spontaneity.

Key psychodramatic techniques, including soliloquy, double, role reversal, the mirror technique, the social atom technique, and the concept of surplus reality, along with the use of symbols, significantly deepen the actor's approach to understanding and building their roles.

Soliloquy, an internal monologue, enables actors to articulate their characters' thoughts, vocalizing what lies between the lines of the text. Psychodramatically, actors may also address specific individuals pertinent to their character's perspective, thus expressing suppressed emotions and thoughts. **Doubling**, employed by observers such as partners, the director, the dramaturg, or even technical crew, allows these individuals to speak from behind the character, uncovering connections previously unrecognized by the actor or the role. **Role reversal** similarly facilitates self-reflection, enriching the performance by enabling actors to present their interpretations while reflecting on those of their peers. This shared actorly exchange heightens spontaneity, as actors focus on the play rather than self-presentation or artistic defensive mechanisms. The **mirror technique**, akin to doubling and role reversal, offers a reflective dimension, while the social atom technique is particularly effective in building a unique, three-dimensional character. It elucidates the character's interpersonal relationships, clarifying their actions and decisions and assisting in text deconstruction by specifying the intended audience and purpose of their lines. Moreno's concept of **surplus reality**, coupled with the use of symbols, affords stage freedom, allowing actors to experiment with experiences and scenarios beyond everyday constraints, thereby liberating their spontaneity and creativity and enriching their toolkit and role identification.

The intentional chronological ordering of these psychodramatic techniques reflects their interdependent nature, where each technique can support or complement the others.

Collectively, they form the foundation for a cathartic experience, potentially leading to actor realizations that liberate and elevate their connection to the role, enhancing their stage presence and elevating their performance to a more conscious level.

Sociometry clarifies the relational dynamics among characters, offering a strategic advantage in designing multi-character scenes from a spatial composition perspective, thus benefiting both actors and the director. The third phase of a psychodrama session is the integration phase, the closure, the **sharing**, in the mentioned theatre context promotes mutual empathy, generosity, and sincere expression, fostering professional and personal trust among the cast and creative crew. Achieving this during rehearsals ensures its persistence in performances, providing invaluable benefits to all involved.

Conclusion

This study highlights the flexible application of psychodrama techniques in theater, emphasizing their role in enhancing actor spontaneity and creativity. By examining the production of "Uncle Vanya," the study demonstrates the practical impact of these techniques on contemporary theater, reflecting director Tomi Janežič's integration of psychodrama and theater. This approach encourages innovative and playful application of psychodramatic tools in theatrical practice, providing insights for those interested in unique methods of actor training and performance development.

Psychodrama's emphasis on emotional expression and cathartic experiences parallels the intrinsic goals of theatrical performance, enhancing both the actor's personal and professional growth. The therapeutic aspects of psychodrama, while not the primary focus of this study, contribute to a holistic approach to actor training, integrating psychological well-being with artistic development.

The structured use of psychodramatic techniques, as demonstrated in this research, provides a comprehensive toolkit for theatre practitioners. By fostering a state of spontaneity and creativity, these methods enhance the overall quality of the theatrical performance and the actor's stage presence. The intentional sequencing of these techniques forms the basis for a cathartic and transformative experience, elevating the actor's engagement with their role to a more conscious and profound level.

In conclusion, the application of psychodramatic principles in theatre not only revitalizes actor training but also enriches the creative process, leading to more dynamic and authentic performances. The findings of this dissertation advocate for the integration of these techniques into theatre education and practice, proposing a paradigm shift that embraces the synergy between psychodrama and theatrical art.

7. *A theatrical performance: Simó Emese: EGO – solo performance*

In this chapter I describe the creation of my individual performance, which was first presented on 2021, as part of the Little Psychodrama Festival in Krusce Creative Center, Slovenia. This performance is categorized as a "lecture-performance," a relatively new theatrical genre that blends science and performance art. The central theme of the performance is Moreno's role theory (Zeintlinger, 2005), which is explored on three levels: scientifically through psychodramatic techniques, autobiographically, and within a theatrical context.

Performance Concept and Themes

The performance revolves around my personal and professional roles, starting from my birth and moving through my studies in drama and my theatrical roles. The performance incorporates humor, stand-up comedy, and significant interaction with the audience, addressing themes such as the dimensions of roles, challenges in social environments, creative processes, the workplace environment in theater, inspiration sources, professional burnout, and creative solitude.

Psychodramatic Techniques in Theater

I am experimenting with the application of psychodramatic techniques in my individual performance. The techniques used are similar to those applied in theater rehearsals, but their function and implementation differ since the performance is structured and repeatable, unlike the unique and unrepeatable nature of a rehearsal process. The psychodramatic techniques used in the performance include:

- **Warm-up:** involving physical exercises and meditation, the actor prepares mentally and physically while engaging with the audience.
- **Role Reversal:** used with the audience, this technique allows for a change in perspective and enables interaction between the performer and the spectator.

- **Mirror Technique:** helps the actor confront their performance and behavior by seeing themselves reflected through others.
- **Sociodrama:** enabling the actor and audience to engage in shared experiences and societal role dynamics.
- **Social Atom:** illustrating the impact of the actor's social relationships on their role development and performance.
- **Doubling and Sharing:** techniques used to help express and share personal themes with the audience.

The performance acts as a protagonist's game, similar to psychodrama, where the actor embodies different roles, using personal life moments as scenes. The audience is also incorporated into the performance, acting as "auxiliary egos" who take part in role exchanges and interactions.

In the creative process I aim to explore the use of psychodramatic tools to enhance spontaneity and creativity during the performance. Techniques such as **role reversal**, **doubling**, and **mirror work** allow for a deeper exploration of the self and the performance. In one notable section, I invite the audience to participate by switching roles with me, taking on roles from my life, like my mother or father, demonstrating the dynamic interplay between personal history and theater.

The performance also addresses the psychological aspects of identity, including the concept of parentification, where roles from childhood and family dynamics are explored. Through these techniques, I reflect on the ongoing evolution of the self and the flexibility of roles that one can take on in life and in theater.

Conclusion

The solo performance serves as an embodiment of my doctoral research, where I combine psychodramatic techniques and personal exploration to achieve a cathartic experience. By mixing humor, autobiographical elements, and psychodramatic tools, the performance not only explores role theory but also serves as a process of self-discovery and expression. The integration of psychodrama into my individual performance highlights the therapeutic potential of theater and offers insight into how psychodramatic principles can be creatively applied to enhance theatrical work.

The performance's success is measured not only by its creative execution but also by its ability to engage the audience, fostering a shared experience that transcends the traditional actor-spectator relationship.

8. *Research Results*

In this chapter I present the findings from my doctoral research that investigated the use of psychodramatic techniques and tools in acting, focusing on their integration into the rehearsal and performance processes of theater. The study aimed to explore not only the theoretical relationship between psychodrama and theater but also the practical application of psychodramatic tools to enhance actors' creativity and spontaneity.

The psychodramatic techniques mentioned above significantly enhance the actors' understanding of their roles, allowing for a more fluid, dynamic, and spontaneous performance. The integration of psychodramatic methods into the theatrical rehearsal process promotes creative exploration and deepens the emotional authenticity of the actors. The findings advocate for the integration of these techniques into theatrical education and practice, proposing a shift in the paradigm to embrace the synergy between psychodrama and theater, which offers a more dynamic and holistic approach to the creative process.

9. *Conclusions*

This chapter provides a synthesis and conclusion of the doctoral research, which investigates the intersection of psychodrama and theatre, focusing specifically on the influence of psychodramatic techniques on the spontaneity and creativity of actors.

The Interrelationship Between Psychodrama and Theatre

The research underscores that, despite initial skepticism surrounding the psychodramatic method—particularly due to its perceived lack of a detailed psychopathological approach—Moreno's work was profoundly shaped by theatre as a vehicle for creative self-expression. He integrated theatrical elements such as improvisation and spontaneity into the therapeutic process, positing that these techniques could exert a therapeutic effect on both individuals and groups. This study contends that psychodramatic techniques share significant similarities with methodologies found in various theatrical schools, including those of

Grotowski, Stanislavski, and Brecht, which all emphasize spontaneity in acting and the pursuit of authentic self-expression.

Psychodramatic Techniques and Theoretical Frameworks

My research is grounded in a thorough examination of various psychodramatic techniques and theories from both psychodrama and theatre, exploring the connections between Moreno's role theory and key theatrical concepts, such as Stanislavski's "magic if," Brecht's "alienation effect," and Strasberg's "method acting." The study reveals that while each of these approaches is distinct, they all share an emphasis on fostering spontaneity and creativity in actors. I argue that psychodrama, through its techniques, provides a powerful means of helping actors overcome emotional blocks and express themselves authentically on stage.

Spontaneity and Creativity in Acting

A central theme of the research is the impact of psychodrama on the spontaneity and creativity of actors. I assert that psychodramatic techniques applied during the rehearsal process enhance the flexibility of actors, enabling them to express their emotions and thoughts more freely. Techniques such as *warm-up*, *future projection*, *soliloquy*, *role reversal*, *mirror technique*, and *surplus reality* are identified as key methods through which actors can explore and express their roles in a more authentic and creative manner, facilitating both emotional depth and personal discovery in their performances.

The research demonstrates that these psychodramatic methods not only enhance individual performances but also contribute to group cohesion and facilitate a collaborative, creative dynamic. The entire process of rehearsal, informed by these techniques, is shown to yield a more nuanced, profound interpretation of the play, demonstrating the potential for psychodrama to enrich theatrical practice.

The research findings support the hypothesis that the integration of psychodramatic techniques in contemporary theatre significantly enhances actors' spontaneity and creativity. The study affirms that these techniques, although seemingly simple and unconventional, provide substantial benefits by enriching performances and creating an environment conducive to spontaneous expression. Furthermore, I argue that psychodramatic techniques applied within a theatrical context enable actors to engage with their roles more authentically and profoundly, which also enhances the audience's experience.

My doctoral thesis concludes that psychodrama and theatre are mutually reinforcing practices, capable of enriching one another. The findings advocate for the integration of psychodramatic techniques into actor training and performance development, proposing a paradigm shift that embraces the synergy between psychodrama and theatre. This integrated approach offers a more dynamic, holistic perspective on creative practice, positioning psychodrama as an invaluable tool for both the personal and professional growth of actors.

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