

The freedom of Sociodrama: An overview and homage

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Abstract In this article of the Zeitschrift für Psychodrama und Soziometrie an overview of Sociodrama is provided—its origins, basic theory as well as global differences and similarities. Psychodrama is the more well-known form of Morenian methods that focuses on the individual’s story within therapeutic group work. Less has been written about Sociodrama. While this contributes to a lack of fixed definition about the form, it has allowed room for the method to grow and develop in response to cultural context and creative applications.

Keywords Sociodrama · Psychodrama · Spontaneity · Role Theory · Art · Global

1 The Theater of Spontaneity gives birth to Sociodrama

The year is 1921 and we are in a Vienna that is still reeling from World War I along with the rest of the world. A bold, young psychiatrist has a question...how can we solve the world’s problems?

“It came to Moreno that this was a time to test the potential for new ideological leadership. He secured a theater for one night and invited representatives from foreign countries in Vienna to this open house. The night of the performance, April 1, only an empty stage was visible, with an empty throne and a crown resting upon it. But there was neither cast nor play. There was only the stage director—himself. He addressed the audience and invited one after another of the illustrious participants to step upon the stage and address the audience, con-

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veying their own ideas of how the problems of the world could be solved. Many tried but none were elected. The world remained as leaderless as ever” (Moreno 1978, p. 353).

This was the birth of The Theatre of Spontaneity and what Dr Jacob Levy Moreno eventually called Sociodrama.

Sociodrama grew out of Dr Moreno’s experiences in WWI as a medical superintendent of a resettlement camp for Italian refugees in the Tyrol, as did psychodrama and sociometry a little later. Through his attentive observation he noticed

“how they adjusted to their new surroundings and to each other. He was interested in how the refugees aligned themselves—socially, emotionally and politically. He developed a plan for creating a community that was sensitive to people’s choices—unlike the refugee community where people were thrown together regardless of their wishes” (Sternberg and Garcia 2000, p. 9).

He was a lover of the theatre and Sociodrama was an art form at first before becoming therapeutic theatre and evolving into psychodrama as a “full-fledged approach to major mental illness” (Moreno 1978, p. 355).

2 An organic body of literature

As indicated by Moreno’s wife, Zerka, Sociodrama was the first invention. However, it was psychodrama that became the umbrella term for Morenian methods that include sociodrama, sociometry, sociatry and role training among others.

Though Moreno did not write a great deal about sociodrama, a body of literature from across the world is growing. This article does not intend to duplicate those efforts. Nor does it have the scope to fully explore the depths of cultural contexts to understand how they influenced the development of sociodrama in different parts of the globe—that would make a fine PhD thesis!

This is more of a harvesting and signposting of material that already exists which explains in far greater detail about this experiential form of group work and the impact it has in the hugely varied communities and organisations where it is deployed.

This article will reference the recently written book **Sociodrama: The Art and Science of Social Change** (Galgoczi et al. 2021). The book, a product of an Erasmus+ transnational project called PERFORMERS, is one of the most recently written compilations of sociodrama theory and practice, forming a bridge between pre-Covid 19 practice and how the profound impact of the virus led to an expansion of our worldwide community.

We will also return to **Sociodrama in a Changing World**, published in 2011, edited by Senior Sociodrama Trainers Ron Wiener and Diane Adderley and Senior

Psychodrama Trainer, Kate Kirk. Significantly the book has been compiled *on behalf of MPV/SAM*¹, *Sociodrama and Action Methods Training, UK*.

That training, sadly, no longer exists. What does the world look like now, in 2023? A few examples:

- Climate emergency, for one, as we now know that a previously thought warming planet is actually global burning veering towards utter catastrophe and a threat to all life, particularly the life of the global majority who do not contribute to the problem.
- The rise of populism as so many ‘strong man’ world leaders make decisions that favour the powerful and wealthy over the majority of the population.
- The wars being waged by these strong men causing death and destruction to innocent people in the name of justice.
- A global pandemic that expanded our community, challenged our creativity and extended access to sociodrama provided only that one had an internet connection.

What has *not* changed in the intervening years? The list is lengthy and here are just two.

- Social justice inequities that abound for black, brown and people of colour.
- There is no significant evidence of sociodrama on the African continent as indicated by the map on the cover of the book (Fig. 1).

What if there was a way we could understand our differences more clearly while not engaging in combat over them?

What if we could sometimes see the larger picture instead of our own small sphere of influence?

What might happen if we could find a way to work together to create and implement collaborative measures that balance inequities?

What might the world look like if we were inspired to **act**?

The tool already exists in the form of Sociodrama.

And it is needed now more than ever.

But what, exactly, is it?

3 What is Sociodrama?

There’s no precise answer, wherein lies the mystery and the magic. Because Moreno did not write extensively on the method, there is a freedom that allows multiple definitions and applications.

Moreno’s own words:

“Sociodrama has been defined as a deep action method dealing with inter-group relations and collective ideologies...The true subject of a sociodrama is the group...The concept underlying this approach is the recognition that man is

¹ MPV/SAM (Multi-Purpose Vehicle/Sociodrama and Action Methods) was the Sociodrama school founded by Francis Batten and Ron Wiener in 1998. When Francis died in 2006, Diane Adderley continued to run the school with Ron until it closed in 2012.

Fig. 1 Sociodrama in a Changing World

Edited by / Ron Wiener, Di Adderley & Kate Kirk

Sociodrama in a Changing World



a role player, that every individual is characterised by a certain range of roles which dominate his behaviour and that every culture is characterised by a certain set of roles which it imposes with a varying degree of success upon its membership” (Moreno [1953](#), p. 59–60).

UK-based Ron Wiener has written many books and articles which explain, demonstrate and progress the response to the question of what sociodrama is. Here’s another: “Sociodrama is a social learning activity based in a group setting” (Wiener [1997](#), p. 106).

Rollo Browne in Australia: “Sociodrama is a learning method that creates deep understanding of the social systems and forces that shape us individually and collectively” (Browne [2011](#), p. 12).

Is it a learning method, then?

Peter Kellermann (Israel) describes it as “an experiential group-as-a-whole procedure for social exploration and inter-group conflict transformation. As such, sociodrama can be regarded as an action-oriented and structured counterpart to group analysis with large groups” (Kellermann [1998](#), p. 182). As Kellermann also wrote

Sociodrama and Collective Trauma, he sees it as “the application of psychodrama techniques to social situations in the community.” (Kellermann 2007, p. 15).

That sounds more like group therapy and social healing.

A sociodrama does have the same phases of a psychodrama:

1. Warm-up
2. Enactment
3. Sharing—this is not universal due to differences in role naming which will be explained later

Techniques such as role reversal and doubling and most of the vocabulary are shared with psychodrama.

In sociodrama, we also have the opportunity for social learning following the sharing, where participants are given space to look at the system in as broad a perspective as possible.

Part of the integration phase in sociodrama, social learning considers the enactment from a bird’s eye view after what might have been an intimate encounter with players in the sociodrama.

The distance and perspective this view provides can help participants and groups see actions they can take forward or a greater understanding of what the system looks like from the point of view of other people, inviting compassion and empathy.

While not necessarily a solution-seeking method, sociodrama is a very effective approach towards development of a group’s shared problem, a team’s ongoing collaboration or the individual’s thinking within a group or team about what interventions they might make to improve relationships and a shared context or ecosystem.

And there is the broadest view of all. Marjut Partanen-Hertell, a sociodramatist and climate activist with an engineering background, identifies in her chapter, “Sociodrama in Finland—an environmental context”, the introduction of ‘societal sociodrama’ during a 1985 visit to Finland in which Marcia Karp and Ken Sprague² “expanded to include ethical and political themes” (Partanen-Hertell 2011, p. 249).

Perhaps this is why the backgrounds of sociodramatists worldwide are so varied; sociodrama invites people from every field to be curious about their work and how the form might be useful to see it in different ways, allowing for deeper exploration of worldwide issues than debate alone permits.

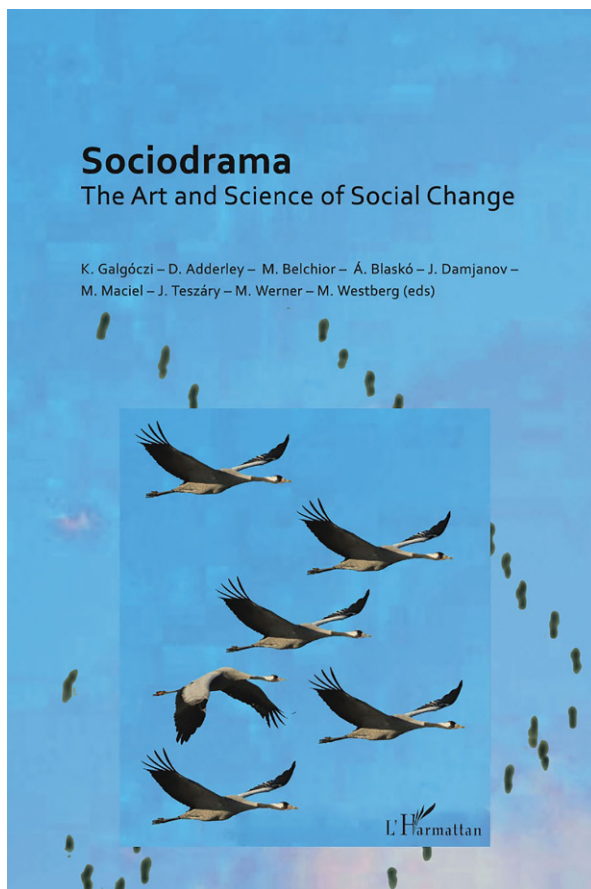
That sounds much more like the social change referred to in the title **Sociodrama: The Art and Science of Social Change**, the PERFORMERS book (Fig. 2).

4 An art and a science

This book is comprised of eighteen chapters as well as a preface and a glossary and is one of the outputs of a transnational project funded by the ESF’s (European

² Karp and Sprague opened The Holwell Psychodrama Centre in North Devon, UK in 1974, training many of the first generation of UK psychodramatists and trainers. Karp herself had been trained by the Morenos in the Hudson Valley.

Fig. 2 Sociodrama: The Art and Science...



Social Fund) Erasmus+ programme. In it you will find evidence that sociodrama is about trauma and healing, social change AND a whole heap of learning.

In other words, it indicates purpose and context that fulfils all of the definitions offered by senior practitioners throughout the parts of the world where sociodrama is practiced. Its examples and accounts are similar to those in the book: “Sociodrama in a Changing World” though the book: “The Art and Science of Social Change” has the unifying focus of work with vulnerable young people.

The project was driven by a team of Hungarian social workers, therapists, psychologists and academics who were wondering how they could use sociodrama with juvenile detention centre group workers. There was no discrete sociodrama training in Hungary and they set out to create one through Erasmus+.

It begins with the most powerful and personal stories involving sociodrama written by the members of the PERFORMERS network before moving onto the Foundations of Sociodrama through the perspectives of some of the most experienced teachers and facilitators of the methods. Here you find chapters by senior psycho- and sociodramatists who have progressed Morenian methods for decades.

The third and fourth sections offer examples of the work in social and organisational settings and in educational settings.

As the contributors hail from Hungary, Sweden, Portugal, the UK, Romania, Serbia, Greece and Norway it is a tour through Europe, highlighting the array and richness of choices available to sociodramatists.

For, as Ron Wiener says, “While psychodrama runs on train lines because it follows the protagonist’s life story, sociodrama is more like a motorway with roundabouts as it is group-centred with multiple options as to which way a story could develop. The director is guided by: their group contract, the logic of the story, the group’s energy and her/his own intuition” (personal communication).

So many choices, in other words!

5 Distinctions in practice

The UK’s involvement in the second phase of this project was important because there had been a discrete sociodrama training until 2012.

It was during facilitation of a week-long workshop that kicked off the second phase of the project when the distinctions between the approaches of the Portuguese—where sociodrama training has been offered since 2000—and the British practitioners emerged. Adderley’s chapter in the PERFORMERS book “How Can WE...?” covers this more substantially.

UK sociodramatists are influenced by AANZ (Australia/Aoteoroa New Zealand) practice as Australian Warren Parry trained the British social activist Ken Sprague who took the methods back to the UK and trained Ron Wiener. Francis Batten had been living in Australia and learned psychodrama from Max Clayton before emigrating back to England. As a result, when Wiener and Batten set up MPV/SAM in the UK, it was heavily influenced by our antipodean colleagues.

Adderley notes these three points of difference that were revealed during the PERFORMERS transnational project:

1. The Sociodramatic Question: “Essentially, this involves substituting ‘we’ for ‘I’ in the formulation of the agreed group contract”. An example of this might be—“A contract with a group of workers for a sociodramatic exploration of relationships at work, for example, might be phrased: ‘How can WE improve relationships between workers and their managers in this organisation?’”. This form of language focuses on the importance and impact of the wider social system. The exploration in a sociodrama will, therefore, focus on the stakeholders and their impact on the present-day dynamics, the here-and now”.
2. Protagonist-Centred Sociodrama—The Australian version³: “Some UK PD trainers were amazed in Browne’s Liverpool workshop (2008) and greatly encouraged by his permission-giving attitude to using personal situations as starters for SD explorations. We had imbibed the orthodoxy of the time (still alive and kicking

³ It needs to be noted that Ron Wiener had also been developing and teaching a form of person-centred sociodrama prior to Browne’s Liverpool workshop.

in many quarters) that all SD enactments must be based on hypothetical situations, that personal situations were taboo as, well, just TOO PERSONAL! My perception is that this permission, as we saw it enacted, released a lot of highly connected, warmed-up energy and enthusiasm in the UK PD community to begin to incorporate SD more into their experiential work”⁴.

3. Role Theory: [Max] “Clayton’s way of categorising and organising roles is perhaps easier to teach and use in action for the layman than the more complex psychological and analytical Morenian role theory” (Adderley 2021b, p. 70–73).

Jana Damjanov (from Serbia) in her chapter entitled Sociopsychodrama: Living Sociometry, Sociodrama and Psychodrama, examines the question, “What is role?” from its etymology through to the Morenian principles: “Moreno’s role theory covers behavioural, social and philosophical elements of human being and humanity, but it also attempts to address our relations to everything around us, even the cosmos itself” (Damjanov 2021, p. 79).

This is the role theory with which most of the PERFORMERS participants would be more familiar.

Role theory might be considered the confluence of psychodrama and sociodrama and the variances in how practitioners’ understanding and application of it can be keys to the differences in how Morenian methods are being deployed in the world today.

6 A split in the road

Psychodrama as a clinical treatment and therapy determined the pathway for the method in many places and it was at this point that sociodrama began to be subsumed into that capital P despite being the initiator of the modality.

Culturally, the evolution of the methods has been influenced greatly by a need to pursue a medicalised route in the USA and West and this may have had an impact on the development of sociodrama, sometimes sidelined as a non-clinical approach.

“...it appears that psychodrama’s popularity has greatly increased in continents that have a more collective and communal culture—especially in Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America. It also seems that the practice of psychodrama in the USA and Western Europe is more focused on psychotherapy while psychodrama practice in other countries encompasses psychotherapy and non-clinical contexts including public community sessions, social activism, and politics” (Giacomucci 2021, p. 4).

Certainly the British Psychodrama Association was created to support the development of psychodrama in the UK. This entailed being registered with the UKCP (United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy) as psychodrama psychotherapists.

⁴ Adderley makes a distinction between PCS and Sociopsychodrama as pioneered by Monica Zuretti which will be touched upon later in this article.

Adderley states, “This is not a criticism...but it did lead to a narrow focus on what Morenian methods can do” (Adderley 2021b, p. 65).

Compare this with the teaching structure in Australia and New Zealand:

“AANZ, Psychodrama with a capital ‘P’ is the over-arching umbrella name for the whole field, which delineates the other branches of Moreno’s thought as equally important approaches, of which psychodrama (with a small ‘p’) is only one. The Psychodrama Australia Trainee Handbook published by AANZPA, as the overview of training to be delivered by all Australian psychodrama institutes, is very clear that neither psychodrama, with that small ‘p’, nor psychotherapy, are the only direction of travel for the trainee: Psychodrama Australia is the training institute in Australia accredited by the Board of Examiners of the Australian and Aotearoa New Zealand Psychodrama Association (AANZPA): **To conduct training in role training, sociometry, sociodrama, psychodrama and group work**” (Adderley’s emphasis).

“Psychodrama (small ‘p’) is well down the list! Behind even sociodrama!” (Adderley 2021b, p. 65).

After a period of basic training, trainees select one of four pathways to follow: role training, sociometry, sociodrama or psychodrama. The choice is discussed with the trainee’s supervisor and is made after careful reflection and genuine interest.

The benefit of this, according to psychotherapist John Wenger (born in Scotland and trained in New Zealand), is that every psychodramatist can run a sociodrama and vice versa (personal communication).

“This, of course, places a completely different emphasis on sociodrama in relation to psychodrama, no longer very unequal siblings, but methodologies of equal value, practiced in different spheres and with appropriately different foci. This has led to a much greater proportion of practitioners working in non-clinical fields than in our neck of the woods” (Adderley 2021b, p. 65).

Elsewhere, other practitioners, such as Manuela Maciel from Portugal, noticed the lack of attention afforded to sociodrama. Maciel organised the first International Sociodrama conference in 2007 attended by 140 people from fourteen countries. Held in Lisbon with the intention “to go deeper on the methods of sociodrama, sociatry and sociometry which was a kind of a lack in the psychodrama world that was more concerned with the clinical applications of psychodrama”

(Interview About International Sociodrama Conference), sociodramatists now meet every other year or two, often on different continents.

Maciel recounts the highlight of that conference for her: a sociodrama facilitated by Peter Felix Kellermann about the Red Carnation Revolution which changed Portugal into a democratic state.

Subsequent gatherings followed suit with themes such as populism, sustainability, human rights and migration and took place on a boat between Stockholm, Sweden and Helsinki, Finland; watching whales in Patagonia, Argentina; in a school for children with disabilities in Iseo, Italy; on an island receiving thousands of refugees in Kos, Greece; on an unspoiled coast in Santa Catarina, Brazil contemplating the survival of the planet (Fig. 3 and 4).



Fig. 3 Volcanic Sociodrama in 2015

Covid-19 brought the 2020 conference, scheduled for a return to Portugal, online. Hungary will host the 8th International Sociodrama Conference in June 2024.

Maciel, also a contributor to the PERFORMERS project, defines the way they use sociodrama in Portugal as “the focus...on the group in its collective roles and not the individual or private roles” (Maciel 2011, p. 288).

The British team began to understand that our transnational partners were more influenced by American teaching on sociodrama which states:

“At no time in a sociodrama session would the group act out a specific member’s problem or real-life situation. Rather the group chooses a hypothetical situation to explore its shared underlying issues” (Sternberg and Garcia 2000, p. 6).

Scott Giacomucci, a social worker writing in his comprehensive book, **Social Work, Sociometry, and Psychodrama** concurs:

“In psychodrama one person is the protagonist; in sociodrama the whole group participates in the action learning. In sociodrama the group, organization, or community explores concerns, problems, situations, or issues relevant. Sociodrama is used in education, for professional development, and in clinical settings. The group is role-playing within a theme, exploring issues in an imagined setting” (Giacomucci 2021, p. 292).

A protagonist-centred sociodrama (PCS), therefore, was a revelation. Ron Wiener gives a brief description of a protagonist-centred sociodrama in the book: “**Socio-**



Fig. 4 Sheila Dallas-Katzman, Manuela Maciel and Irina Stefanescu at the Fifth International Sociodrama Conference in Greece, 2015

drama in a Changing World” and ends with the processing questions, one of which was

“What made this enactment a sociodrama as opposed to a psychodrama?”

He replied: “...the action, once it began, quickly became group-centred, rather than simply staying with the protagonist’s story” (Wiener 2011, p. 31).

In their seminal book: “**Sociodrama: Who’s in Your Shoes?**”, Nina Garcia and Patricia Sternberg clearly summarise their alternative view:

“Sociodrama helps people to *clarify values, problem solve, make decisions, gain greater understanding, learn to play roles in more satisfying ways, practice new roles, and become more spontaneous and playful*. Moreno devised two modalities to facilitate exploration of roles: sociodrama for collective components and psychodrama for private components. Sociodrama, then, concerns itself with collective role aspects and is primarily sociological and educational in nature” (Sternberg and Garcia 2000, p. 12).

Because of this difference in belief around the personal versus the collective, role naming was another variation between the British and Portuguese trainers with the British

“using nouns to describe (social) roles that can be played by anyone, those roles that we step in and out of in society frequently or even daily: mother, father, police officer, teacher, etc., with each role having public and private aspects. One way of bringing more vitality and depth to naming roles is to add active, descriptive words such as loving mother, caring father, authoritative police officer, caring teacher” (M & L Clayton, 2021, p. 349, Glossary in PERFORMERS).

Moreno’s writing allows for both:

“Every role is a fusion of private and collective elements. A role is composed of two parts—its collective denominator and its individual differential... Role-playing permits the individual some degree of freedom, and role creating which permits the individual a high degree of freedom...” (Moreno 1953, p. 75).

Another distinction within the British practice is the ability to hold multiple roles throughout the sociodrama depending on the warm-up of the person. A player can leave her/his role if a new one is emerging, usually marking the spot where the already created role had been before introducing (and being role interviewed) her/himself in the newly created role.

I can just hear Francis Batten saying: “Expand the System!”

It does allow for many more roles to be present than there are people in the room and this can be quite confusing—and liberating. It also impacts the sharing as people might share from any/all roles they held throughout the drama before moving on to sharing from self.

7 Elegant collaborations

Monica Zuretti in Argentina saw scope for combining both and invented Sociopsychodrama which she describes as

“the conjunction of the two major denominations of the psychodramatic method...Sometimes the resolution of a sociodramatic scene could not be reached until, in the same group or in another, a protagonist incarnated the problem, worked on it, and gave the social matrix the possibility of change. Also there was sometimes no possibility of understanding a personal situation, until it was related to the social environment” (Zuretti 2001, p. 111).

The examples that Zuretti offers in this article involve culture, history, geography, myth and multi-generational families melded into action that takes place over days in the first instance and then involves travelling to sacred places that lead to the birth of a movement:

“We are not only history and stones, we are also real existing families in need of recognition” (Zuretti 2001, p. 113).

Zuretti’s invention and all the incarnations in which sociodrama is being applied in the world are proof of life for the method. It grows and moves, unfettered by

a founder's overly specific designations, rules and formulas. Moreno gave us this gift and we intend to keep on cultivating it.

The connections to other forms of Applied Theatre are myriad. Adam Blatner felt strongly that "improvisation is the activity that engenders an attitude and readiness of mind with which to support the opportunity for spontaneity—which is the very heart of creativity—to emerge and offer its invaluable gifts" (Blatner 2017, p. 2).

Blatner's contributions to the methods are vast from the book: "Foundations of Psychodrama and Acting In" until his final book: "Action Explorations: Using Psychodramatic Methods in Non-Therapeutic Settings", he was a personification of the movement. As a psychiatrist and psychodrama trainer, Blatner might have stopped at the therapeutic and clinical setting.

It was his concern for the survival of the methods—some of which is rooted in the word 'psychodrama'—sent him searching for "What the World Needs Next" (a title in the foreword to the book) and led him to the term 'action explorations' as the most suitable for Morenian methods in the 21st century.

"...action explorations expect the participants to improvise the situation that is most relevant to them, is facilitated rather than directed, and includes a more fluid audience who may even generate supporting players for the subject of exploration" (Blatner 2017, p. 5–6).

Blatner believed that sociodrama and its capacity for play and improvisation would be the future for Morenian methods. Towards the last decade of his life, he investigated the applied improvisation network and other groups using theatre techniques to work with people. He believed that collaboration rather than competition would form a robust and widespread movement of creative, action-based initiatives that could give space for the thinking we will need to address world crises (personal communication).

8 Sociodrama goes viral

As group workers using a form that normally requires in-person participation, often necessitates travelling to other places and, sometimes, involves physical contact, the COVID-19 pandemic threatened to halt our careers for at least a year while the world figured out how to survive.

It did not.

Daniela Simmons was ready. She had invented Tele'Drama in 2017 and had been developing it since that time.

"As an innovative expansion of Moreno's methodologies of international psychodrama, sociometry, and sociatry, Tele'Drama supports his goal of the healing of societies. The uniqueness of Tele'Drama as a method lies in its ability to create and engage both global community and generate a transformative global culture. Tele'Drama nurtures a global community based on characteristics such as mutual respect, reciprocity, trustworthiness, and empathy" (Simmons et al. 2022, p. 60).

Daniela was able to respond quickly to the need for people to connect in our hour of crisis. At the time of writing this article, Tele'Drama has an international faculty of 26, a myriad of workshops offering programmes, training, coaching, supervision, team building and special events using psychodrama, sociodrama, sociometry and expressive arts.

An online weekly gathering from April 2020, the Sociodrama and Creative Action Network (SCAN), a group of sociodrama and action-based practitioners in the UK established in the wake of the MPV/SAM school's closure, became iSCAN, the international Sociodrama and Creative Action Network. Sociodramatists from Australia, China, Europe, India and the US take part regularly. The focus was on experimenting online with sociodrama specifically and finding ways to get people moving and working together during lockdown.

iSCAN has become a sustained mechanism of support and practice exchange. It is also a hothouse for ideas on deploying the methods in online, hybrid and in person workshops, many of which are focused on the climate emergency. Intractable problems such as the climate, migration, war and conflict—those which have no solution—are a specialty for this group.

The pandemic inspired other smaller scale events across the world before we began to open up and meet in person again. Diane Adderley's (2021a) article: **"A year (and more) of sociodrama online: the Covid era 2020/2021"**, outlines initiatives such as those offered by FEPTO (Federation of European Psychodrama Training Organisations) and The People's Scenes, a project started by Monica Zuretti in Argentina that welcomed the world to consider their support systems while unable to leave their homes. The International Sociodrama Conference which was held completely online in both 2020 and 2021 when we were meant to meet in Peniche, Portugal was a testament to the innovative and creative commitment to not only stay connected as a community but to flourish and grow.

The impact on the PERFORMERS 2 project was profound as the in-person meetings and trainings, so critical to transnational work, had to be held online. Two of the three years left us no option but to meet in virtual spaces. The book produced by PERFORMERS includes examples of how COVID's restrictions opened opportunities to think differently.

9 Shelter from the storm

When Ukraine was invaded by Russia in January 2022, we were barely entering the post-COVID era. However, we had the tools in place to support people in their greatest hour of need. Relationships that had already been forged were now being deepened through war. Ron Wiener writes of his and Diane Adderley's experience with an ongoing, three-hour group with Ukrainian psychodramatists:

"We were invited back at the end of 2022 to start an ongoing group for one of the Ukrainian psychodrama institutes. This invitation came because we had run a sociodrama workshop for this institute at a summer school in the previous year, before the February 2022 invasion took place. Initially, the invitation

was couched in the terms of ‘sociodrama training’ but it quickly became apparent that what was needed was a support group. Moments of ‘training’ have occurred, which we have been open to but the primary need remains connection and support.”

“What is unusual is that most such work happens after a conflict has finished and we are dealing with ameliorating post-traumatic stress while here we are reporting on work where the conflict is ongoing and where the therapists are having to manage the same stresses as their clients (author’s emphasis)” (Wiener and Adderley 2023, p. 1).

Although the participants are primarily psychodramatists, the work is about the stories that are live for them as a group. One participant sums it up this way:

“The group was a support and an opportunity for me to communicate with colleagues, as well as gave me a broader view and understanding of what is happening in the Ukrainian society and beyond. It showed me how polarised the opinions and positions in society are and made me think about what to do about it. It raised global questions that concern most people now: how to unite after the war is over?” (Wiener and Adderley 2023, p. 10).

In fact, it is a concise summation of the impact of sociodrama in general—a personal connection, broader perspective and understanding inspiring actions, either individual and/or group initiatives.

10 This sociodramatist’s view

Sociodrama is more than a methodology. It is a world view. Having found sociodrama as an actor, director and applied theatre practitioner taught to use ‘the arsenal of the Theatre of the Oppressed’ from the Brazilian director, Augusto Boal, I felt an immediate connection with the form. It felt familiar on one hand—Boal talks about the audience being ‘spect-actors’ ready to engage in the action at any moment. Moreno believed there were no spectators in the Theatre of Spontaneity. Everyone could be actors. As we know, however, we so often won’t step onto the stage.

Systemic perspective is hard to ignore once it is introduced. It becomes a lens through which one can feel and sense everything. It is then hard to ‘unsee’ the system with all its influences. Taking things personally does not make as much sense when you can see the other players and elements present in the system.

Sociodrama widened the frame for me with the inclusion of non-sentient beings and forces as well. I will never forget the central and very vocal role of the wedding cake during an enactment at an Introduction to Sociodrama for the BPA conference in 2005!

Sociodrama practitioners come from all walks of life. In my training in Sheffield and then Manchester, course participants worked as therapists, teachers, medical practitioners, and social scientists of every kind as might be expected. However, there were also police officers, probation officers, a trade union leader, a chemist,

a horse whisperer, a philosopher, and a poet among many others learning the methods and implementing them in their fields.

The applications are as varied as the people who use them. In my portfolio alone, I work with people who live in prison and those who work with them; financial executives; those who work with young people in schools, the community and through their voluntary agencies; women who have experienced abuse and those who want equal pay and better conditions; those with addictions; and those who want more environmental action, in the UK, the US, throughout Europe and beyond. The list grows every year for sociodrama and creative action methods practitioners in our community.

Sociodrama is a recipe for social justice and true equality that informs two of my roles within the BPA—I am one of the External Relations representatives and I chair the Equality and Diversity in Action committee as I believe these are the two most potent ways in which I can serve my community.

It is a blessing to be a part of the community that offers this frame to find meaning and relevance in that which is complex and sometimes frightening.

11 It's only the beginning

Sociodrama is needed now more than ever. It's worth repeating.

In a world that cannot tolerate difference, it offers a space to hear the other in a safe enough way, to see from a wider perspective, particularly those and that which is often unseen and unheard, to simulate change and act out alternative ways.

For the director, it can sometimes feel like facilitating a three-ring circus. Sociodrama can look chaotic and it is unpredictable. Like the lives and the world it reflects.

It can hold the possible, the experimental, the cathartic and the compassionate. It is not certain, it is almost never certain.

And this is the great gift to humankind. We know of only one certainty in life and that is its end. Everything else can change in a moment. Warming the world up to the potential of spontaneity, leveraging creativity as its chief power, prepares us for what we cannot see ahead while crafting a vision of what we would like to bring into being.

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